

(Belgian Proposal)

19th January, 1967

3-102B

168-624

1-1003 (67)

To: ASG(PA)

From: W.M. Newton

Subject: Reasons and Circumstances Leading to the Signature of the North Atlantic Treaty

In the attached draft* I have tried to present the picture as seen at the time. Hence I have used as a basis the first edition of the NATO Handbook, the speeches made at the signing of the Treaty in 1949, and some of the material in Ismay's book.

The interesting point that emerges is that even at that time there was a clear and widespread understanding that the Treaty was something more than a response to a particular situation or set of circumstances. I have accordingly tried to bring this out, as it seems to me important in any analysis or perspective regarding the purposes and aims of the Alliance.

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* 2 copies attached.

REASONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE SIGNATURE
OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

Among those who contend that NATO is no longer necessary there is a strong tendency to assume that the Treaty was merely a response to the particular circumstances of 1948-49 and to go on to argue that since these circumstances no longer obtain, that the whole arrangement is obsolete. But as the first edition of the NATO Handbook already emphasized: "It would be a mistake to think of the Treaty as an agreement entirely born of the force of immediate circumstances. To some extent it was part of a natural evolution,..."

This is an important point which can be corroborated by, inter alia, the speeches made at the time the Treaty was signed. Mr. Acheson, for example, said: "The reality of the Treaty is the unity of belief, of spirit, of interest, of the community of nations represented here. It is the product of many centuries of common thought and of the blood of many simple and brave men...It lies in the affirmation of moral and spiritual values which govern the kind of life they propose to lead and which they propose to defend, by all possible means, should that necessity be thrust upon them..."

The signers of the North Atlantic Treaty represented nations nurtured in common traditions and with common respect of the rule of law. Moreover, their community of interest had become clear through the experience of two world wars which demonstrated that an attack against one of these nations threatened the security of the whole North Atlantic area in that sooner or later the others were drawn into the conflict. At the signing this was emphasized by Mr. Spaak, who said: "Twice within less than 25 years the democracies of Western Europe, the United States of America, and Canada have faced terrible dangers... It would be unpardonable to ignore the repeated lessons of history."

Among other broader motivations involved in the formation of NATO was the impulse to advance beyond a purely national outlook and the recognition of the vital importance of "an Atlantic bridge", and again here the speeches of the signatories are indicative. Mr. Robert Schuman said: "Nations are more and more convinced that their fates are closely bound together, that their salvation and their welfare can no longer be based upon an egotistical and aggressive nationalism, but must rest upon the progressive application of human solidarity." Similarly, Mr. Bevin declared: "At last democracy is no longer a series of isolated units. It has become a cohesive organization, determined to fulfil its great purpose." As to the theme of the North Atlantic, Mr. Stikker said: "We rejoice at the thought at last the truth prevails that the North Atlantic is a highway that unites, not a barrier that divides." This theme was also touched on by Mr. Lange, while Mr. Lester Pearson said: "The North Atlantic Community is part of the world community and as we grow stronger to preserve the peace, all free men grow stronger with us."

It would be a mistake, therefore, to minimise the broader and longer term factors which led up to the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. Nevertheless, the timing of the Treaty was undoubtedly largely determined by specific circumstances which lay beyond the control of the signatory nations, who, to this extent, can be represented as forming NATO in response to a challenge or threat. It was Mr. Pearson who most clearly expressed the dual origin of the Treaty when he said, at its signing: "This Treaty, though born of fear and frustration, must, however, lead to positive social, economic and political achievements if it is to live."

An accumulation of specific circumstances leading up to the signing of the Treaty can be given in highly summarised form as follows:

- 1) The defeat of Nazi Germany and of Japan created a power vacuum to the West and to the East of the USSR.
- 2) This power vacuum was made all the more dangerous by the rapid reduction of forces put in hand by the West because of popular pressures on governments, in contrast with the Soviet retention of 4½ million men under arms, equipped with the latest weapons.
- 3) Soviet expansion, which had started during the war, had taken over large tracts of territory and almost 25 million people. It had further led to Soviet domination of the countries of Eastern Europe who were soon firmly bound to Moscow and to each other by a network of political, economic and military agreements (23 such treaties were signed between 1943 and 1949).
- 4) ~~The~~ Soviet vetoes and policies had frustrated the hopes and the assumptions upon which the UN was set up to organize world peace.
- 5) To the generous Marshall Plan offer, which was open to all European countries, the Soviets responded by the formation of COMINFORM to counter the Marshall Plan as "an instrument of American imperialism".
- 6) The failure of talks on disarmament as well as on the question of peace treaties for Germany and Austria.
- 7) Successive Soviet pressure on Persia, and later on, Turkey and Greece (which was under Communist attack). This led up to the Truman doctrine, enunciated 12th March, 1947.

- 8) The Prague coup d'état of 22nd February, 1949, which shook the whole of Europe.
- 9) The Soviet blockade of West Berlin which lasted 323 days and which began just after the signature of the Treaty of Brussels in March 1948.
- 10) The significant Soviet offer of a non-aggression pact to Norway. Mr. Bevin had warned Washington of this possibility as early as March 1948 and the offer was pressed on Mr. Lange shortly before he left Oslo for Washington.