CHAPTER 17

On April 4, 1949, I stood by Secretary of State Dean Acheson as he signed his name, on behalf of the United States, to a treaty which was the first peacetime military alliance concluded by the United States since the adoption of the Constitution. Earlier in our history (before the Constitution was written), the colonies had signed a military alliance with France. The document Acheson signed was the North Atlantic Treaty, and the occasion was the closing ceremonial event of a historic meeting, held in the auditorium of the Department of Labor in Washington, D.C.

The North Atlantic Treaty was one more step in the evolution of our foreign policy, along with the United Nations Charter, the Greek-Turkish Aid Program, and the Marshall Plan. Because of the Marshall Plan, the economy of western Europe began, within a short time, to show evidence of recovery. But the problems of Europe were not only economic. There was fear of aggression and, therefore, lack of confidence in the future. A large volume of European capital had been transferred abroad before and during World War II, and this was now needed in western Europe to rebuild its cities and its industries. Capital, however, was not likely to flow to countries threatened by Communist conquest.

In 1947 and 1948 the Communists were pushing hard in Europe. Even as the Marshall Plan was being launched, they captured the government of Hungary. This was the first seizure of a government by Communists which was openly supported by Russia since the fighting had stopped in Europe. The following month the Kremlin ordered Czechoslovakia and Poland to call off their participation in the Marshall Plan.

In early 1948 still another series of events jarred the free world. In Czechoslovakia, which had so long been the stronghold of democracy in central Europe, a ruthless Communist leadership, backed by the Russian Army at the border, demanded the full powers of government. President Eduard Beneš, the able successor to the great Masaryk, held out for four days before yielding to the pressure. On February 25, 1948, however, democratic Czechoslovakia, for the second time in less than nine years, fell under the heel of totalitarianism. Two weeks later, Jan Masaryk, son of the founder of the Czech republic and a close friend and associate of many statesmen in the countries of western Europe, died in Prague under mysterious circumstances that suggested foul play. His death was a dramatic symbol of the tragic end of freedom in his nation.

In Poland, where Russian armies had set up a Communist government at the end of the war, the Russians now dropped all pretext of Polish sovereignty. A Russian Red Army marshal was sent to take over the Polish Army. At about the same time, Stalin "invited" little Finland to sign a "pact of friendship" with the Soviet Union. There were threats of what would happen if the "invitation" was not accepted. To the people in Europe, who were just beginning to take courage from the Marshall Plan, these Communist moves looked like the beginning of a Russian "big push."

I had planned to deliver an address on the menace of Communism on March 17, 1948, at a St. Patrick's Day observance in New York. The grave events in Europe were moving so swiftly, however, that I felt it necessary to report to the nation first through Congress. Therefore, I asked Speaker Joseph W. Martin to arrange for me to address a joint session of the Congress, suggesting March 17 as the date.

"Almost three years have elapsed," I told the Congress, "since the end of the greatest of all wars, but peace and stability have not returned to the world. We were well aware that the end of the fighting would not automatically settle the problems arising out of the war. The establishment of peace after the fighting is over has always been a difficult task. And even if all the Allies of World War II were united in their desire to establish a just and honorable peace, there would still be great difficulties in the way of achieving that peace.

"But the situation in the world today is not primarily the result of natural difficulties which follow a great war. It is chiefly due to the fact that one nation has not only refused to cooperate in the establishment of a just and honorable peace, but—even worse—has actively sought to prevent it. . . .

"One nation . . . has persistently obstructed the work of the United Nations by constant abuse of the veto. . . .

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"But that is not all. Since the close of the hostilities, the Soviet Union and its agents have destroyed the independence and democratic character of a whole series of nations in Eastern and Central Europe.

"It is this ruthless course of action, and the design to extend it to the remaining free nations of Europe, that have brought about the critical situation in Europe today.

"The tragic death of the Republic of Czechoslovakia has sent a shock throughout the civilized world. Now pressure is being brought to bear on Finland, to the hazard of the entire Scandinavian peninsula. Greece is under direct military attack from rebels actively supported by her Communist dominated neighbors. In Italy, a determined and aggressive effort is being made by a Communist minority to take control of that country. The methods vary, but the pattern is all too clear.

"Faced with this growing menace, there have been encouraging signs that the free nations of Europe are drawing closer together for their economic well-being and for the common defense of their liberties. . . .

"At the very moment I am addressing you, five nations of the European community, in Brussels, are signing a 50-year agreement for economic cooperation and common defense against aggression.

"This action has great significance, for this agreement was not imposed by the decree of a powerful neighbor. It was the free choice of independent governments representing the will of their people, and acting within the terms of the Charter of the United Nations.

"Its significance goes far beyond the actual terms of the agreement itself. It is a notable step in the direction of unity in Europe for protection and preservation of its civilization. This development deserves our full support. I am confident that the United States will, by appropriate means, extend to the free nations the support which the situation requires. I am sure that the determination of the free countries of Europe to protect themselves will be matched by an equal determination on our part to help them to protect themselves."

I then urged the Congress to complete legislative action on the European Recovery Program and to provide for a strengthening of national defense through universal military training and the restoration of Selective Service.

That evening my speech to the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in New York struck the same note:

"Free men in every land are asking: 'Where is this leading? When will it end?'

"I can bring you tonight no simple or easy answer.

"But I can express my firm conviction that, at this moment in history, the faith and strength of the United States are mighty forces for the prevention of war and the establishment of peace.

"Our faith and our strength must be made unmistakably clear to the world."

Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, had informed Secretary of State Marshall as early as January 13, 1948, that England was planning to approach France and the so-called Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) with a proposal for a series of bilateral defense agreements. The pattern he had in mind was that of the Dunkirk Treaty, a postwar agreement by which Great Britain and France had agreed to come to each other's defense in case of renewed German aggression.

General Marshall brought Bevin's message to me. I thought it was a good beginning—a step in the right direction. If the countries of western Europe were ready to organize for their joint defense, that would be an important contribution to the peace of the world.

Bevin in his message had asked what our attitude would be toward this new alliance. I authorized Marshall to inform the British Foreign Secretary that we agreed with them on the urgent need for concerted measures by the nations of western Europe. As in the case of the European Recovery Program, we welcomed European initiative and would give their undertaking our wholehearted sympathy; the United States would do anything it properly could to assist the European nations to bring this or a similar project to fulfillment.

With this backing from the United States, Bevin approached the French and the Benelux countries. It was from the three small nations that a counterproposal came for one regional arrangement rather than a series of two-party treaties. M. Spaak, the Belgian Foreign Minister, was largely responsible for this change, and it was in this form that the treaty was made. I think to Spaak goes the credit for lining up the Europeans for the treaty.

But even as the Brussels Pact was signed, it was clear that it would take a far more important political act to dispel the fears and to restore full confidence among the western European nations. The State Department had already made some extensive studies and drawn up lists of possible courses of action. In my own mind there was no doubt that much more would have to be done in order to bolster Europe's will to resist—and to recover.

But I always kept in mind the lesson of Wilson's failure in 1920. I meant to have legislative co-operation. Our European friends apparently remembered the League of Nations too; they were most anxious
to have not only a presidential declaration of policy but also a congressional expression confirming it.

Under Secretary of State Lovett and the Republican foreign policy spokesman, Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, went to work on a congressional declaration of policy which put the Senate on record as favoring regional arrangements “based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid.”

This was Senate Resolution 239, which Senator Vandenberg skillfully steered through the Senate to overwhelming approval by that body. On the final roll call, on June 11, 1948, only four senators voted against it. Even counting pairs and announced positions of senators absent from the floor, there were seventy-nine for and only six against the resolution.

Senator Vandenberg was thoroughly familiar with the workings of the Senate and knew how to get results. He could take ideas conceived by others—many in this case came from the State Department—and then include an element or two that would add his legislative trademark without changing anything basic. From then on he would fight for the ideas without letting up. When Vandenberg died, nobody in the Republican ranks was able to step into his shoes.

Meanwhile, the State Department was working out the details for our support of Western Union, which was the name given to the Brussels Pact arrangements. The plan was sent to the National Security Council for further study, and at the Council meeting on April 22, 1948, Lovett announced that the plan was being rewritten in order more closely to approach the language used in the Senate resolution that he and Vandenberg were then preparing.

On April 23 Lovett came to see me with a top-secret telegram from the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, in which were outlined the possible risks involved in a formal treaty association by the nations of the North Atlantic area. He said that he had discussed these risks in the greatest secrecy with Prime Minister Attlee and a few of his closest colleagues, and they had agreed that the summoning of a conference by the United States Government to discuss defense arrangements for the North Atlantic area would be the best guarantee of peace at the present moment. I instructed the State Department to circulate this message to the members of the National Security Council for their immediate information.

The principal risk involved, Bevin said, was that the Russians might be so provoked by the formation of a defense organization that they would resort to rash measures and plunge the world into war. In this, our experts agreed with the British. On the other hand, if a collective security system could be built up effectively, it was more than likely that the Russians might restudy the situation and become more co-operative.

The British Foreign Secretary also pointed out that an Atlantic security system was probably the only way in which the French could be brought to agree to a rebuilding of Germany. Such a system would give all the free nations of Europe the sense of confidence they needed to build peace and prosperity in the world.

Bevin thought that to be effective the security arrangements must carry real assurance for the nations of free Europe. He reminded us that in 1940 the British government knew that the American Chief Executive held strong sympathies for them, but they had to fight on without knowing positively what help, if any, America would give. He then expressed the opinion that it would be very difficult for the British, or other free nations, to stand up to new acts of aggression unless there was a definitely worked-out arrangement, which included the United States, for collective resistance against aggression.

At the meeting of the National Security Council on May 20, 1948, Under Secretary Lovett explained that the Vandenberg Resolution, if passed by the Senate, would put us in a stronger position to discuss with the countries of western Europe measures to strengthen our national security as well as theirs. He pointed out that there were two basic factors in our planning: First, we wanted to get away from the one-way arrangements in which we did something for foreign countries without receiving anything in return; second, we did not want any automatic, unlimited engagements under our constitutional system. We could not agree upon anything amounting to a guarantee. But we had to give assurances sufficient enough to inspire the confidence and bolster the faith of the countries of Europe who felt themselves under constant and heavy Soviet pressure.

Secretary of State Marshall then informed the NSC that he had that morning received a message from Bevin declaring that evidence was needed that the United States was willing to assume certain obligations, and that Bevin also felt that negotiations should be initiated from Washington.

The military point of view was represented by Secretary of the Army Royall, who reported that the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt we should not commit ourselves to any defense arrangement until we knew what they were. For that reason we should send observers only to the military talks which the Western Union nations were planning to hold in London in July. Royall suggested that any arrangement made should be sufficiently flexible so that Spain, Germany, and Austria could later be added.

Secretary of Defense Forrestal pointed out that the French seemed
to think that the first item on any regional security program should be the re-equipping of twenty-five French divisions. Our Chiefs of Staff, however, were of the opinion that our own strength should be bolstered first. They admitted, however, that if that course were followed it would be some time before the French could get what they wanted.

Mr. Lovett observed that it was virtually impossible to get Congress to approve substantial shipments of military equipment to other powers except for an emergency. If Congress believed that we were thinking of a revival of Lend-Lease, he added, there would be drastic cuts in domestic military appropriations.

The National Security Council then recommended to me that the line of action proposed by the State Department should generally be followed, though with proper weight given both to the comments of the Joint Chief of Staff and to any changes that might be made in the Vandenberg Resolution during Senate debate.

On July 2 I approved a policy statement which said that the Vandenberg Resolution should be implemented to the fullest extent possible and that the Department of State should now go ahead with the preliminary conversations which the Brussels Pact powers had suggested.

It was decided also that U.S. military representatives should go to London to take part in the five-power military discussions there, although on a non-membership basis, and that Congress be requested to consider the possibility of military talks at once, even though the U.S. commitment was not to be made formal until later. Furthermore, the Department of State was to explore the possibility of including Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, and perhaps Portugal and Sweden in the proposed arrangement and suggest for later adherence of Spain, Germany, and Austria, or the western zones of the last two countries. If Canada was willing to participate, the Department of State was to arrange for Canadian attendance at the London military talks.

If, as a result of the diplomatic talks with the Brussels Pact nations, we became convinced that some further political commitment from us was necessary at this time in order to bolster public morale and confidence in western Europe, then we should undertake to discuss such an association with those countries. This was the cornerstone of the defense program, but no U.S. commitment should be entered into without the fullest bi-partisan clearance here.

At the same time, the National Security Council proposed certain recommendations which I approved and which later became the Mutual Defense Assistance Program.

The two proposals—Mutual Defense Assistance Program and association with the Brussels Pact powers—supplemented each other, and yet they were independent of one another. The Congress had on several occasions authorized the giving of aid in the nature of military supplies and technical advice to certain nations. MDAP was intended to replace this piecemeal approach by a comprehensive program which would permit us to aid in the defense of those countries whose strategic location made them most important to the security of the United States in such amounts and at such times as a broad military and political view of the situation might demand.

The program was a long-range proposition and not a stopgap measure. It should not jeopardize the minimum needs of our armed forces, as determined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It should be tied in with the European Recovery Program in such a way that the total of the two programs would not endanger the stability of our domestic economy. The countries participating in the program should be encouraged to eliminate overlapping production by standardizing weapons and matériel.

This was the summer of 1948. Berlin was blockaded, and it was not yet at all certain that the airlift would succeed. Free men in Europe and in Asia, eager to resist aggression, could not wait for the future delivery of arms, which might come too late. Indeed, the main purpose of this aid proposal was to make sure that we did not have another tragic instance of "too little and too late"—the kind of thing that had helped Hitler subjugate Europe.

The State Department wasted little time getting the talks with the Brussels Pact powers under way. The first session of these talks was held on July 6, with Under Secretary Lovett heading the American delegation, and the ambassadors in Washington of Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Canada representing their respective countries (the Belgian also attended on behalf of Luxembourg).

These conversations were held in the utmost secrecy. A special security system was applied so that only a bare minimum of documentary material was distributed. Special couriers handled all papers. Telephone discussion of matters covered in the conference was absolutely ruled out, and telegraphic communication was held to a minimum. Only a very restricted number of persons were allowed to handle any of the documents involved.

This system was the same that the Brussels Pact powers had established for their own use in negotiations and was intended to prevent leaks to Soviet agents.

Because of the crucial importance of these meetings I wanted to make sure that I had all the information. Under Secretary of State Lovett called on me regularly, bringing the minutes of each meeting with him. The sessions were marked by a completely frank exchange of views,
sometimes to the point of bluntness. Rarely has a group of diplomats, representing six different nations, sat around one table and spoken with such complete frankness.

Next to Lovett, Dr. Van Kleffens, the Netherlands Ambassador, was the outstanding member of the group. He seemed to have a remarkable grasp of the thing that mattered and was always able to supply the right word at the right time. It was he who first expressed the hope that the association which the Vandenberg Resolution had envisaged would take the form of a "North Atlantic Pact."

At last, after numerous sessions of working committees, an agreed statement was prepared, to be submitted to the respective governments. Here are the most important points of that statement:

The first section discussed the situation in Europe as it affected security. Here it was clearly recognized that the Soviet advance was a direct result of the war, which had created a vacuum in central and eastern Europe where German power had once prevailed. The Soviets' actions were described as part of an avowed drive for maximum extension of power and influence. At this stage the Soviet Union was capable of extending her domination over the continent of Europe by force.

The conference noted that while there was no evidence that the Soviets had a timetable for armed aggression there was a constant danger of incidents developing from the international tension, and it was part of Soviet technique to apply pressure wherever an advantage might be gained. Furthermore, the extension of a minor incident could easily result in war and in the Soviet conquest of the continent of Europe.

This was the key point:

The Marshall Plan had brought some relief, but the constant threat of unpredictable Soviet moves resulted in an atmosphere of insecurity and fear among the peoples of western Europe. Something more needed to be done to counteract the fear of the peoples of Europe that their countries would be overrun by the Soviet Army before effective help could arrive. Only an inclusive security system could dispel these fears.

The next question was what countries should be associated in such a system. It was pointed out that enemy occupation of the territories of Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, and Portugal (with their dependent territories in the Atlantic area, such as Greenland and the Azores) would represent a threat to the security of western Europe. The conference took note of the fact that all of these nations might not be willing or prepared to assume the commitments of such an association.

It was suggested, therefore, that there might be different classes of association, with varying degrees of obligation.

It was agreed that there might be countries which, while not "Atlantic"
cilities. Making policy means making decisions. We must look forward with faith and confidence.

In working out the North Atlantic Treaty we had made a truly momentous decision. As I described it to the National Security Council, it could be called "an offensive-defensive alliance to maintain the peace in the North Atlantic area but without automatic provision for war."

With the North Atlantic Treaty and the corresponding Western Hemisphere arrangement concluded at Rio de Janeiro, we gave proof of our determination to stand by the free countries to resist armed aggression from any quarter. I considered this so basic to our position in the world that I included the North Atlantic Treaty, along with adherence to the U.N., the Marshall Plan, and the Point Four program, among the foundations of our foreign policy in my inaugural address on January 20, 1949.

By that time the diplomats had nearly completed their work on the treaty text. Dean Acheson, who was now Secretary of State, spent considerable time with key members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in order to familiarize them with the document and the issues behind it.

The formal signing of the treaty took place in Washington on April 4, 1949, and in my remarks on that occasion I said that this treaty was indeed an act of neighborliness, and compared the twelve nations to a group of householders who decide that they have so much in common that it would be to their mutual advantage to associate themselves more formally.

The treaty itself, I observed, was simple and straightforward. We hoped that it would serve to prevent World War III. Surely, if something like it had existed in 1914 and in 1939, the acts of aggression that had pushed the world into two disastrous wars would not have happened.

The treaty was a reaffirmation of our dedication to the cause of peace, to the ideal of peaceful settlement of disputes that was represented by the organization of the United Nations. The pact was a shield against aggression and against the fear of aggression—a bulwark that would permit us to get on with the real business of government and society, the task of achieving a fuller and happier life for all our citizens.

On April 12 I sent the treaty to the Senate with a message asking for its ratification. It was, I told the senators, a long step on the road to peace. We would need to work continuously in the advancement of peace by taking those practical and necessary steps that events would call for. But no better foundation could be found for the future of peace in the world than the step which we had taken by allying ourselves with the nations of the North Atlantic area for our mutual defense.

The Senate gave the North Atlantic Treaty as thorough an examination as only that great deliberative body can give. The critics had the fullest opportunity to be heard, and every conceivable objection was discussed and answered. The debate ended on July 21, when eighty-two senators voted to ratify the treaty, far more than were needed under the constitutional requirements for a two-thirds vote for the ratification of treaties. One senator was not voting; thirteen answered "Nay" when their names were called. Eleven of these thirteen were Republicans.

On July 25 I affixed my signature to the treaty ratification and thus completed American accession to the pact. On August 24, 1949, a sufficient number of ratifications had been deposited to bring the treaty into effect. This, officially, is the day on which NATO became a reality.

We realized, of course, that much still remained to be done if the new arrangement was to prove effective. As soon as the treaty had been ratified, I asked the Congress to provide approximately $1,400,000,000 for a military assistance program, both for the NATO countries and others, such as Greece, Turkey, and the Philippines. There were three different types of assistance planned under this program. First, we wanted to help the nations that were friendly with us to increase their own military production. Second, we would transfer to them some essential items of military equipment. And third, we would send some of our experts abroad to help train and equip their military forces.

I explained the purpose of the military assistance program to the 50th Annual Encampment of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in these terms:

"The purpose of the military assistance program is to prevent aggression. Our European partners in the North Atlantic Treaty are not strong enough today to defend themselves effectively. Since the end of the war they have been concentrating on rebuilding their war-torn economies. We can strengthen them, and ourselves, by transferring some military means to them, and joining with them in a common defense plan. The military assistance program is based on the same principle of self-help and mutual aid that is the cornerstone of the European recovery program and the North Atlantic Treaty.

"We are not arming ourselves and our friends to start a fight with anybody. We are building defenses so that we won't have to fight. "Our aid will be limited to the material necessary to equip mobile defense forces. These forces will constitute no threat to the independence of other nations. The democratic nations have no desire for aggression; they only want to be able to defend their homes..."

"The cost of such a program is considerable, but it represents an investment in security that will be worth many times its cost. It is part
of the price of peace. Which is better, to make expenditures to save the peace, or to risk all our resources and assets in another war?"

Administrative machinery under the treaty organization was set up without delay. A North Atlantic Council was formed on September 17, 1949, with the Foreign Ministers of the participating nations as members. The Cabinet officers in charge of defense in the several member nations formed a Defense Committee and under that body a Military Committee of top-ranking generals and admirals from all twelve nations went to work at once.

The first major task was to reach an agreement on how to work out the defense of the NATO area. Up to this time each country had its own defense plans, but now it became necessary to think of the area as one. This did not involve specific national defense positions but, instead, the over-all strategic approach. This plan was worked out without delay, and the NATO Council gave its approval on January 6, 1950.

Secretary Acheson brought the plan to me and I examined it at length, with the assistance of my diplomatic, military, and economic advisers. I thought it was a good plan and one that would serve the interest of the United States well. On January 27, 1950, I formally approved this proposal for the strategy that would control a major part of our defenses and occupy a major share of our defense efforts.

The NATO defense was based on the idea of a "balanced force" — that is, on the use of a NATO defense force to which each country would contribute its share. This was one of the problems. The Dutch, for instance, with their long tradition of seafaring and exploration, did not want to restrict their Navy, yet the plan called for them to concentrate on certain types of ground forces. Almost all the member nations indicated their understanding of the basic principles involved; namely, that by avoiding duplication of effort more could be accomplished. However, there was also the thought present, and sometimes expressed, that they wanted to have a balanced defense of their own in case NATO did not succeed. In other words, it was again a question of confidence, a question of overcoming uncertainty and doubt.

In Congress there were demands for proof that the Europeans would carry an appropriate share of the burden of common defense. In Europe, just as understandably, there was reluctance to extend risks and expenses until America's participation was clearly evident.

In addition, there were Europe's internal tensions that complicated the job. France was unwilling to give up any part of its preoccupation with the defense against Germany. The Benelux countries wanted to make sure that Britain as well as France shared in the actual defense arrangements in their part of Europe. The Scandinavians felt they were out on a flank and dangerously exposed on their end of the strategic arc. England tried to preserve her strength for the preservation of the remnants of her empire. And this is just the beginning of the list.

Through a series of conferences, Secretary Acheson worked with great patience and skill to drive home the point that NATO would have no meaning at all unless a really joint effort was made at common defense and mutual aid, and his arguments won the day. There would have been no NATO without Dean Acheson.

The major problem in these discussions soon proved to be the question of German participation in the defense of Europe. The German people, divided between East and West, were still under occupation following the defeat and destruction of Hitler. But the land they inhabit is the very core of Europe, and the people who live in it have proved over the centuries that they have the will and the ability to defend it. Without Germany, the defense of Europe was a rear-guard action on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. With Germany, there could be a defense in depth, powerful enough to offer effective resistance to aggression from the East.

The logic behind this situation is very plain. Any map will show it, and a little arithmetic will prove what the addition of German manpower means to the strength of the joint defense of Europe.

To bring the Germans into the defense arrangements of Europe and to spur the Europeans on to great efforts themselves were the two main efforts required in making NATO work. The Germans wanted restoration of their full sovereignty before they assumed their place in the scheme of defense, but the French kept insisting that Germany had to be kept under controls. In conference after conference it seemed impossible to break this deadlock.

When Dean Acheson went to these conferences, he would send me a daily cable with a full summary of the day's events. This was not the same as the report which the delegation secretary would compile for the use of the State Department. It was an entirely personal account, dictated by the Secretary himself and intended for me alone. In this manner I would know from day to day what was going on behind the closed doors of the conference. Acheson always kept me fully informed about every move he intended to make.

One of the most important of this series of NATO conferences was the one held in New York in September 1950.

I had been reviewing the difficulties that had been encountered in Europe and realized we had to take into account the anxiety of our European allies in the face of the developments in the Far East. Many of them were fearful that we would now turn most of our attention to
Korea and that the European defense would become subordinate. It was therefore decided, as evidence of our concern about the defense of Europe, to send over additional United States troops. These American forces would be part of a balanced European defense force which would include the Germans. This force eventually would have a supreme commander.

Acheson took this plan with him when he went to New York to meet French Foreign Minister Schuman and British Foreign Secretary Bevin for preliminary talks on September 12. Both statesmen realized at once that we had moved a very considerable distance to encourage European action, but Schuman’s instructions from his government were to oppose any arrangement that would bring about the creation of a German army or of anything that could serve as the framework for such an army. Bevin was immediately taken with the idea of a supreme commander.

He thought the appointment of a supreme commander, especially an American, would spur the Europeans to action more than anything else. Our thought on this was to do what had been done in World War II in the molding of the invasion forces: set up a joint staff to work on preliminaries and appoint a supreme commander when there is something for him to command.

Acheson described the situation to me:

September 15, 12:15 A.M.

PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM ACHESON

After two days of conferences which had persistently failed in coming to grips with the central problem of the defense of Europe, I asked for and obtained a private conference attended only by me, Bevin, Schuman and our three High Commissioners for Germany. The purpose of this talk was to get away from minor difficulties of language and really reach the essence of the problem. This purpose was achieved; and, while the results were immediately discouraging, I think that we may be getting somewhere.

I pointed out that you had been able to bring about a complete revolution in American foreign policy, based upon the realities of the international situation. We were prepared to take steps which were absolutely unprecedented in our history, to place substantial forces in Europe, to put these forces into an integrated force for the defense of Europe, to agree to a command structure, to agree to a supreme commander, to join in a program for integrating European production, to take far reaching steps in the financial field, but all based upon the expectation that others would do their part, and that the entire scheme would result in the creation of such power that chances of peace would be immeasurably improved; and, if contrary to our hopes and beliefs war should come, we had a first class chance to win it. I went on to say that this involved a defense in Europe as far as the east as possible, and that such a defense was not possible without facing squarely and deciding wisely the question of German participation. I pointed out that in our discussions the British and French had been prepared to accept what we offered, had been reticent about their own contributions; and had flatly refused to face in any way the question of German participation. I, therefore, wanted to talk about this question with the gloves off and see exactly where we stood.

The ensuing discussion brought out very clearly two fundamental facts. The first was that Bevin who really agreed with me, had been put under wraps by his government and was not permitted to say anything. This grows out of the current debate in the House of Commons on this very subject, in which the Labor Government has a pathological fear of Churchill and does not dare say anything for fear that it will leak to the American press and be used by Churchill in the debate. I hope that this situation is not permanent and may clear up in the near future.

On the part of Schuman the difficulty was deeper. His attitude was that he was not able or willing, as the spokesman of his government, to take any decision even on principle in regard to German participation until the forces of the Allies had been so strengthened in Europe that the French Government could face the psychological reaction to the creation of German armed force.

When it became clear that neither man had any discretion and that therefore argument could not result in any immediate change of position, I suggested that we examine the positions taken by each of them solely for the purpose of clarifying our minds so that when they had some flexibility returned to them, we would understand how each of us thought about the various points.

I think it is fair to say that the discussion was useful. It completely blew out of the water the practicality of leaving the beginning of the formation of German military units until the Allied forces were completely supplied with equipment. I think it destroyed any logical basis to their fear that the bringing of Germans into the creation of Allied strength in the west increased the possibility of preventive war by the Russians as against the mere creation of Allied strength. I think we showed that it was quite possible to deal with the German Government on the issue, not as supplicants, but merely as agreeing to proposals already made by Adenauer to contribute units to European forces and to force him to accept conditions to our acceptance of his proposal.

This was useful, but the discussion ended with one situation quite clear: That they were prepared to accept what we offered but they were not prepared to accept what we asked. In this situation I am now taking the attitude, not that we are imposing specific conditions, but that we are unable to proceed with the discussion until their attitude is made more clear. The result is that no agreed papers on the matters on which they are ready to agree will issue from our delegation. We have ended the first part of our tripartite meeting with communiqué which cannot announce decisions and, therefore, says merely that we are continuing our discussions in the Council and will resume them next week.

In the Council meetings I intend to argue the issues all over again and have already been assured of vigorous support from the smaller European countries. It seems highly unlikely that we can reach satisfactory conclusions by Saturday night, but I feel sure that the British and French will become increasingly uncomfortable on their seats. It may be that we shall have to have further meetings. It may be that I shall have to come back to you for further instructions before the matter goes too far. For the present there is no
need for you to worry, although I think you must face the strong possibility of leaks to the press and stories that all is not going well. I feel reasonably sure that we can work this out; that it may be a question of whose nerve lasts longer, but that it just must come out in the right way.

I am dictating this wire to you myself so that you may know my mind fully and instruct me at any point where you think I may be wrong or give me any guidance which you want me to have. I shall keep you fully and intimately informed.

Bevin was instructed by his government to join Acheson in working for a united defense force with German participation. As a result of Acheson’s efforts, all member countries except France accepted the idea of a united force, though the countries on the outer rim of the alliance, such as Norway and Portugal, were not as enthusiastic about it as the Benelux countries. But in principle, only French objections remained in the path of erecting an effective defense for western Europe.

The talks with the French and British were continued while the Atlantic Council was recessed. The Defense Ministers of the three countries joined the Foreign Ministers at the conference table. France sent Jules Moch. From London came Emanuel Shinwell. And I sent General George C. Marshall, whom I had just persuaded to return from his well-deserved retirement, to take over the serious job of running the Defense Department in this period of crisis.

In the candid talks to these men it became very plain that the French knew just as well as we or the British that they would need German manpower if Europe was to be successfully defended. They were convinced that the French parliament would never agree to any proposal that would permit Germans to be armed before there was a European defense force actually in being. The French Defense Minister, M. Moch, said quite frankly that he would need the answer to three questions before he could make up his mind about German participation in the united force that was planned:

1. How many German divisions are contemplated?
2. How many U.S. divisions will be sent to Europe?
3. When can the U.S. send them?

I was glad to learn that General Marshall and Mr. Shinwell were able to persuade the French minister that it was possible to agree in principle without having specific answers to these questions. Marshall drew up a list of ten items that could be done by the NATO powers without further delay and without prejudicing a later decision on the questions Moch wanted answered. What was more important, Marshall urged, was to draw up an understanding in principle. The United States, for instance, could state that it would send additional troops to Europe as soon as possible, but, with fighting under way in Korea, it could not specify a date. In the same way, the French could agree that a united force should be built up for the defense of Europe and that German manpower should be included, even though it was not possible at this stage to say how large or how small a part the Germans should play. I thought that this typical, clear-headed approach by Marshall made a lot of sense.

In a later separate meeting, Acheson and Marshall assured Schuman and Moch that we would be willing to discuss with the French the problem of helping them with the financing of their military program. With this assurance, the French were now willing to agree to the general principles of the proposal that Acheson had originally placed before Bevin and Schuman. On September 26 a communiqué from New York announced that the North Atlantic Council had agreed on the establishment of a unified force for the defense of Europe. This left a great many things still to be agreed on. M. Pleven, the French Premier, came out with a plan that would let the Germans participate in the European defense force but only as additions to existing regimental combat teams. This was at least something to work on, even if it did not satisfy everybody.

The main thing, we all thought, was to get the project of a unified force started. It had been understood by all concerned that the supreme commander to be designated would be an American. As a matter of fact, in our planning of the program I had always had General Eisenhower in mind as the logical man for this unique job. As the Allied commander in Europe during World War II, General Eisenhower had shown remarkable ability in leadership in heading up a combined headquarters for the forces of several nations. He was very popular in Europe, and at the head of a European defense headquarters would demonstrate our determination and our desire to make the joint effort a success.

On October 19 I added this handwritten postscript to a letter to Eisenhower: “First time you are in town, I wish you’d come in and see me. If I send for you, we’ll start the ‘speculators’ to work.”

General Eisenhower called on me at the White House on October 28. I told him what I had in mind for him to do. He heard me out in silence and then said he would accept the assignment. Eisenhower told me that he would take it because he was a soldier and this was a call to duty. But it was the kind of duty, he told me, that he accepted gladly because it was a job that very badly needed to be done. He believed firmly, he said, in the importance of bringing the nations of Europe together and doing it speedily.

Two days later I received the Defense Ministers and defense chiefs of the NATO countries and was able to tell them in confidence that a top-
ranking general would be available for the NATO High Command and that I had already conferred with him about it.

The appointment itself was not made until December 18. The procedure was for the North Atlantic Council to pass a resolution in which they asked me to designate an American officer as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Europe. At the same time, Dean Acheson sent me a message from the Council meeting in Brussels in which he reported that the Council members had unanimously expressed the hope that I would appoint General Eisenhower. I replied at once that General Eisenhower had been so designated.

The new Supreme Commander left for Europe in January 1951 for a quick survey of the situation. He returned then to Washington and made a full report to me, and I suggested that he also report on the European situation to the Congress, and by radio to the nation. I think these reports were effective because they were made with utmost candor and sincerity.

Eisenhower reported to me, and later at a Cabinet meeting, that while he had found general agreement on the principles of a unified defense for Europe, and general agreement also that such a defense could be successfully organized, he found it much tougher trying to reach an understanding with each country as to its contribution. He said that at each stop on his recent survey trip he would ask, "What are you going to do? You have to tell me exactly what you are going to do so that I can report back to the United States Government."

The answers to this question, Eisenhower said, all tripped over one hard, tough fact. This fact was the poverty of western Europe. General Eisenhower said he had found that this poverty meant that no one yardstick could be used to measure the contributions of the various countries. We could not, for example, expect the western Europeans to spend the same percentage of their budget on defense that we were going to spend. We could not, for example, expect the western Europeans to spend any more than they were already doing.

They were so desperately poor that some of them could not spend any more than they were already doing.

The main thing, Eisenhower said when he spoke at the Cabinet meeting, was for us to get this "combined spiral of strength going up." "These people," he said, "believe in the cause. Now, they have got to believe in themselves. They have got to have confidence that they can do the job. The way we can give them that confidence is by sending equipment and by sending American units over there to help morale."

General Eisenhower was fully in accord with my policy in Europe. He worked for it diligently and devotedly from the day of his appointment as Supreme Commander until he returned to the United States in 1952 to enter the political arena. Throughout his stay in Europe he frequently wrote to me directly or through Averell Harriman, and he was always assured of my full support in everything he was doing in Europe.

Near the end of his first year in Europe, in early January 1952, Eisenhower wrote me a long, detailed letter reporting on the first year's work. He reviewed the progress that had been made in the direction of a European army and discussed some of the major things that still remained to be done. He took the position that those countries of the alliance on the continent of Europe would have to work toward economic and political consolidation. Britain could not easily be fitted into such a picture, and he agreed with the British that they should be associated with the proposed European Defense Community but not directly take part in it. But there was some hope, in Eisenhower's opinion, that the return of Winston Churchill to the government in England would mean more emphasis on political union. Eisenhower urged me to persuade Churchill, in his forthcoming visit to Washington, to make "a ringing statement that would minimize British non-participation and emphasize British moral, political, and military support for the European Army."

Churchill's visit was a welcome reunion with an old friend, and I was looking forward to it. Though he had been out of the government for six years, we had remained in frequent personal contact. To greet him once again as head of His Majesty's Government was a distinct pleasure for me, even though I knew we would have to resolve many difficult problems between the two of us and our staffs.

During the three days of discussion with Churchill, we covered a great range of topics, and among them was NATO. Churchill commented that he realized very well the great burden that the United States was carrying in the common cause, and said that the United Kingdom would bear all it could. However, he pointed out that they had drawn very heavily on the life and energy of the fifty million people in their island in recent years, and added that great overseas investments had been lost to them. England, he said, had a great many problems that could be traced to the past. The point now was that there was no use in the United Kingdom's pretending that it could bear burdens that it could not bear.

I replied to the Prime Minister that, in the fifty years before World War I, the British and the French and the Germans had invested many billions of dollars in our country. Some of this had been used up, in World War I and World War II, as the British and the French paid for their war supplies. The German investment, of course, had been taken over as enemy property. "Your reserves," I said, "are now in
effect a financial surplus here, which we hope to get reinvested abroad under Point Four and in other ways. The rehabilitation of the free world is one of the most important things we have to do. We want to keep the free world a going concern."

I reminded the Prime Minister that we had sent abroad some sixty billion dollars since the end of the war but that it was important to bear in mind that this was an election year and that Congress was rarely inclined to increase foreign spending while an election was in the offing.

Churchill said he certainly understood what effect an election had on a country's position in the world. England had gone through a general election during the past year, and it certainly made it difficult for His Majesty's Government to act with vigor while its political life was at stake. But he thought that they were through now with electioneering in England, "for a few years at any rate."

The approach of the 1952 presidential election caused a great deal of anxiety in friendly capitals. Everywhere the same doubts and fears began to spring up again that had been so dominant before the treaty was signed and General Eisenhower sent over to organize the defense. We found that statesmen of other nations were holding back because they wanted to be sure that the commitments they might make would not be made to an American who voted for an isolationist administration.

They were relieved, therefore, so our diplomats reported, to know that the nominees of both parties were men who believed in the basic need for NATO and European defense. But it is one of the facts of American foreign policy, and one that those in responsibility must bear in mind, that an impending change in administration in Washington makes our friends abroad anxious and our enemies hopeful. They all remember what happened when Harding replaced Wilson, and what calamity it meant for the world.

When the time came for me to turn over the reins of the government to General Eisenhower, NATO was one of the projects that I could pass on to him in the full knowledge that he would understand my motives and share them. He had, after all, played a most important part in it.

The treaties with Germany and the European Defense Community Treaty still awaited completion. We had hoped that these treaties would be ratified toward the end of 1952, but both in France and, to a lesser degree, in Germany resistance to the proposed arrangements had flared up sharply in November, and further delay was likely, though this was delay over matters of timing and emphasis, not over principles.

The structure of western European defense had been built—built largely because we were ready to break with tradition and enter into a

peacetime military alliance; because we had been ready to assume not only our share but the leadership in the forging of joint forces; because we had recognized that the peace of the world would best be served by a Europe that was strong and united, and that therefore European unity and European strength were the best guarantees for the prevention of another major war.