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Lawrence S. Kaplan

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# ORIGINS OF NATO: 1948-1949

*Lawrence S. Kaplan\**

## OVERVIEW

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) originated in the trauma of World War II. The human cost of that war at last motivated Europe to remove the barriers to economic integration that had promoted warfare among the nation-states since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.<sup>1</sup> The devastation of western Europe also inspired the United States as the major victor in that war to abandon its traditional isolation from European political and military affairs.<sup>2</sup> Accelerating these fundamental changes was the awareness on both sides of the Atlantic of the threat Soviet-led Communism posed to the future of Western democracy.<sup>3</sup>

However, recognizing the necessity did not equate with effective immediate action to cope with these two challenges in the post-war world. Too many obstacles had to be overcome. For Europeans to rebuild, Europe required a defeated Germany in the New Order, an almost impossible task considering the behavior of its Nazi past. For Americans, the tradition of non-entanglement in the affairs of the Old World after the termination of the Franco-American Alliance of 1778 was not yet breached.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the frequent charges that NATO was a product of America's imperial reach after World War II, it was Europe's initiative—not that of the United States—which opened the way to NATO. Led by Britain's Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, and France's counterpart, Georges Bidault, Western Europeans feared that their efforts to collaborate in a future defense organization could not succeed without American involvement.<sup>5</sup> Their economies could not be rebuilt without massive American support, and their defense capabilities

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\* Director, Lyman L. Lemnitzer Center for NATO Studies, 1979–1993.

<sup>1</sup> See Pierre Beaudry, *The Economic Policy that Made the Peace of Westphalia*, 30 EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE REV. 18 (2000); Nikolaus Wolf, *European Economic Integration: Undoing 1914–1945*, VOX: CEPR POLICY PORTAL (May 29, 2008), <https://voxeu.org/article/european-economic-integration-undoing-1914-1945>.

<sup>2</sup> LAWRENCE S. KAPLAN, NATO 1948: THE BIRTH OF THE TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE 2–5 (2007).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at ix.

<sup>5</sup> See *id.* at 13–14.

could not cope with the aggressive Soviet Union without an American commitment to counterbalance the Communist adversary.

What the Europeans wanted from the United States was clear: join a new western alliance that would deter the Soviets from further military pressure. This was not a solution the Truman Administration could accept; the U.S. public was too suspicious of European intentions.<sup>6</sup> Yet there was a way to link America to Europe: the Marshall Plan of 1947.<sup>7</sup> The Plan recognized that only an infusion of American aid could revive the economies of Western Europe and make them prosperous consumers of American manufactures. This aid was not a loan as in World War I, but an investment that would benefit the American economy.<sup>8</sup> A further potential advantage for the West was that European revival could make the beneficiaries of U.S. aid partners in the containment of Soviet-led Communism.<sup>9</sup>

The escalation of Soviet threats to the West had already accelerated U.S. movement toward military entanglement with Europe. The key concept was embodied in the term *containment*.<sup>10</sup> “This change did not signify acceptance of binding agreements with European nations. It did mean that the United States was prepared to recognize that the survival of Western democracies threatened by Communist external aggression or internal subversion was vital to the security of the United States itself.”<sup>11</sup> The Truman [A]dministration drew on the advice of George F. Kennan, a Soviet specialist in Moscow, whose seminal ‘long telegram’ in 1946 outlined a way to manage the menace in order to give direction to this policy.<sup>12</sup> “As a scholarly and perceptive student of Communism, Kennan propounded the thesis that only firm containment could control the dynamic ideology of the Soviet system. Conventional diplomacy was irrelevant to the relationship between the two nations. So was the U.N.”<sup>13</sup>

“Hostility was inherent in the nature of the two societies.”<sup>14</sup> Aside from conventional warfare, “[t]he only way to cope with this challenge was by patient

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<sup>6</sup> See LAWRENCE S. KAPLAN, UNITED STATES AND NATO: THE FORMATIVE YEARS 58 (1984).

<sup>7</sup> See KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* See Vojtech Mastny, *NATO in the Beholder's Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949–56* 1, 4 (Woodrow Wilson Int'l Ctr. for Scholars' Cold War Int'l History Project, Working Paper No. 35, 2002).

containment of Soviet expansionism, anticipating the day when its economic failures and lack of internal cohesion would lead to its demise.”<sup>15</sup> My take on implications of Kennan’s likening Communism to a religion, like Christianity and Islam, would lead to schisms that would weaken its authority.<sup>16</sup> In 1947, Kennan won an appointment as head of the State Department’s policy planning staff because of his containment recommendations.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet neither Congress nor the nation at large seemed to share Kennan’s views.<sup>18</sup> The Truman Administration’s policymakers used Greece’s civil war to force the U.S. to come to grips with Britain’s inability to afford continuous support of the Greek government against Communist armed forces.<sup>19</sup> This “became the occasion to assume the British burden in the Mediterranean.”<sup>20</sup> The Truman Doctrine was announced in March of 1947, “promising economic and military support to the beleaguered countries of Greece and Turkey, who at that time were combatting Soviet pressures on their borders.”<sup>21</sup> The Truman doctrine posed a bigger promise, “to support as well [as to] ‘free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.’”<sup>22</sup>

“Although Kennan recognized that the [D]octrine was more sweeping than anything he had envisioned, the Truman [A]dministration understood the need for jarring the U.S. public out of its complacency.”<sup>23</sup> However, the administration’s leaders knew that military aid alone would not be sufficient to assure Europeans.<sup>24</sup> Europe needed massive economic aid to promote both its recovery and ability to resist the intimidation of Communism.<sup>25</sup>

The Marshall Plan emerged from Secretary of State George C. Marshall’s commencement speech on June 5, 1947, at Harvard University.<sup>26</sup> Undersecretaries of State Dean Acheson and William L. Clayton formed it “to

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<sup>15</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 5 (alteration in original).

<sup>16</sup> *See id.* at 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original) (quoting Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine, 1 PUB. PAPERS 176, 178–79 (Mar. 12, 1947)).

<sup>23</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*; *see* Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 4.

<sup>26</sup> *See* George C. Marshall, U.S. Sec’y of State, Commencement Address at Harvard University (June 5, 1947), <https://www.oecd.org/general/themarshallplanspeechatharvarduniversity5june1947.htm>.

be an extension of the Truman Doctrine.”<sup>27</sup> For the United States to provide effective support of the military efforts of embattled nations, “as it rallied to the defense of Greece and Turkey, it was necessary that the economic base of the beneficiaries had to be strong enough to take advantage of military assistance.”<sup>28</sup> In order to not replicate the chaos that was occurring in Greece and Turkey, in France or Italy—where large Communist parties were flourishing—“the United States must help Europeans create economic conditions that would permit them to cope with the promises of Communism.”<sup>29</sup> The Marshall Plan—or European Recovery Program—“promised massive economic aid to countries that . . . demonstrate[d] a willingness to help themselves and to break down barriers with other beneficiaries of U.S. support.”<sup>30</sup>

In one sense, the Marshall Plan was an unparalleled success. The twelve billion dollars not only nurtured the recovery of Europe, but also advanced the movement toward European integration.<sup>31</sup> In the mind of President Truman, “the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were ‘two halves of the same walnut.’”<sup>32</sup>

However, the complimentary nature of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan was not apparent to all observers.<sup>33</sup> Walter Lippmann, an influential observer, initially found irreconcilable differences between the two initiatives.<sup>34</sup> To Lippmann, the suddenness of the Truman message to Congress suggested “a hasty reflex action driven by the exigencies of the moment rather a carefully worked out plan within the larger frame of foreign policy.”<sup>35</sup> While, “military aid to Greece and Turkey was primarily a stopgap military exercise, plugging leaks in a corner of Europe.”<sup>36</sup> In this context, the Truman Doctrine “was just a major strike in the burgeoning Cold War.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*; *see* Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 4.

<sup>29</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 7; *see* Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 4.

<sup>30</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 7 (alteration in original).

<sup>31</sup> *Marshall Plan, 1948*, OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/marshall-plan> (last updated Apr. 8, 2018); *see* CURT TARNOFF, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., R45079, *THE MARSHALL PLAN: DESIGN, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND SIGNIFICANCE* 16–19 (2018).

<sup>32</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 7 (alteration in original) (citing JOSEPH M. JONES, *THE FIFTEEN WEEKS* 233 (1955)).

<sup>33</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 8 (internal footnote omitted).

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

According to Lippmann, the Marshall Plan, “was a more mature expression of the assistance the United States gave Europe after World War I without the stigma associated with unpaid loans.”<sup>38</sup> The Truman Administration recognized that its own prosperity rested on the economic recovery of Europe.<sup>39</sup> The Truman Administration required “European beneficiaries to give evidence of their own efforts toward recovery” in order to ensure success in Congress.<sup>40</sup> This could be done by showing “progress by reducing trade barriers that had prevailed before World War II and moving toward economic integration of the continent or at least that part of Europe outside Soviet control.”<sup>41</sup>

If any doubts existed “about the conjunction between the Marshall Plan and the U.N., the endorsement of leaders of the American Association for the United Nations (AAUN) should have resolved them.”<sup>42</sup> The Marshall Plan, with its emphasis on European self-help and mutual aid, satisfied many Americans, including Lippmann, who had been worried about the Truman Doctrine’s excessive dependence on arms to counter Soviet expansionism.<sup>43</sup>

Approval from Congress came as well, “but only after agonizing debates about spending so much money on possibly unreliable and ungrateful beneficiaries.”<sup>44</sup> Skeptics “wondered about the lasting effectiveness of foreign aid as well as the potential impact on the domestic economy.”<sup>45</sup> Republican Robert Taft of Ohio, who had led the isolationist wing of the Republican Party before and during World War II, “managed to cut the proposed three-year program to a single year, with proportionate reduction in funds” for this period.<sup>46</sup> Congress came to terms with the interim aid bill on December 15, 1947 following the “impending breakdown” of the four-powers Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in London.<sup>47</sup> The bill became Public Law 389 of the Foreign Aid Act of 1947 two days later.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>43</sup> TARNOFF, *supra* note 31, at 5; KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 8.

<sup>44</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

<sup>47</sup> *Id.* The “four powers” at the December 1947 Council of Foreign Ministers’ London meeting were the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and France. *Council of Foreign Ministers*, ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Council-of-Foreign-Ministers>.

<sup>48</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 9.

Flying back to Washington immediately after the adjournment of the London conference, [Secretary] Marshall lent his weight to the [A]ct in a radio report on [December 19]. He made it clear to the U.S. public that the East-West conflict would be fought out over the [European Recovery Program] rather than over the a [sic] doomed peace conference on the future of Germany. This modest success was a signal for the full aid program to proceed in full force.<sup>49</sup>

Generally, Europeans recognized the opportunity that had been offered by the Marshall Plan and proceeded to meet it. With British and French foreign ministers leading the way, Europeans sought to demonstrate that they could overcome the economic barriers that had “bedeviled interstate relations in the past” and to show that they had the ability to utilize the massive aid envisioned in the European Recovery Program “to serve the unity as well as the recovery of Europe. Sixteen nations from the East, as well as from the West, met in Paris in July 1947 and established the Committee of European Economic Cooperation (CEEC) ... to implement themes laid out in Secretary Marshall’s [June 1947 commencement] address.”<sup>50</sup>

But before any funds were authorized, it became evident that the Marshall Plan deepened the East-West split.<sup>51</sup> The Soviets had been invited to join the program, but after sending delegates to Paris they recognized the dangers it posed to their control of Eastern Europe.<sup>52</sup> They withdrew from discussions about how to utilize American aid and forced Ukraine and Belorussia to do the same, fearing accurately that the CEEC would undermine their control of Eastern Europe.<sup>53</sup> Their reaction, in fact, was a relief to the State Department.<sup>54</sup> Had the Soviets become partners, it was unlikely that Congress would have passed the interim aid bill.<sup>55</sup>

Assuredly, the “vehement Soviet reaction to the Marshall Plan accelerated the Cold War, even if it did not ignite it.”<sup>56</sup> Foreign Ministers Bevin and Bidault had always understood “that there had to be a military as well as a political and economic dimension to U.S. support.”<sup>57</sup> Not long before the collapse of the

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<sup>49</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 9–10 (alteration in original) (internal footnotes omitted).

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 10 (alteration in original).

<sup>51</sup> *Id.* at 10, 35.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at 10; Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 5.

<sup>53</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 10; Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 5.

<sup>54</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 10.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at 13.

London Council of Foreign Ministers in December 1947, “Bidault asked [Secretary] Marshall . . . about a U.S. contribution to European security. He received no satisfactory answer.”<sup>58</sup> There was silence on the question of “the United States joining any Western European defense program, but the Europeans felt a path was opening.”<sup>59</sup>

On December 12, 1947, during Secretary Marshall’s speech to the Pilgrim Society in London that path expanded when two foreign ministers detected favorable implications in his speech.<sup>60</sup> In the speech there was no mention of U.S. interest in participating in a European military organization. However, Secretary Marshall “emphasized the beneficial effects that the ERP would have on the regeneration of Europe.”<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, “this was sufficient encouragement for the allies to agree that Franco-British staff talks should be held, with the hope of including the United States in the future.”<sup>62</sup> On December 23, 1948, when U.S. officials seemed to be receptive, the allies were ready to present a blueprint of a western European military alliance.<sup>63</sup> Sensitive to American anxieties, Bevin spoke to a Marshall aide about security arrangements—a smaller one encompassing treaties with France and the Benelux countries and a larger, looser treaty with other European countries.<sup>64</sup> Both would have treaty commitments from the United States and Canada.

In the fall of 1947, “the concept of a Western association, if not alliance, was in the air...outside the confines of Anglo-French conversations.”<sup>65</sup> Canadian statesmen, “were at the forefront of concerns about Atlantic links in which their country would occupy a key role mediating between the United States and Europe.”<sup>66</sup> On September 18, 1947, Canadian Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, while addressing the U.N. General Assembly is credited with first proposing “‘an association of peace-loving states’ that would pursue the goals of the [U.N. C]harter.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 14 (alteration in original) (internal footnote omitted).

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 16. “Benelux is the abbreviation used to describe the [economic] union of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.” Howard J. Hilton, Jr., *Benelux—A Case Study in Economic Union*, 23 DEP’T ST. BULL. 181, 181 (1950).

<sup>65</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 16.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

U.S. reactions to a potential new relationship with Europe were generally favorable, ranging from enthusiastic on the part of key diplomats to cautious from the Secretary of State Marshall and Undersecretary of State Robert A. Lovett.<sup>68</sup> An influential senior State Department official—John D. Hickerson, director of the State Department’s Office of European Affairs—saw no alternative to bonding with Bevin and Bidault.<sup>69</sup> The Europeans valued this backing even though Hickerson and his colleagues were not at the level of authority they would have preferred.

After the breakdown of the foreign ministers meeting, Hickerson shared with a shipmate, John Foster Dulles, “putative [S]ecretary of [S]tate (should the Republicans win the White House in 1948) that [Secretary] Marshall’s response [to Europe’s initiative] was not good enough.”<sup>70</sup> Hickerson was among the leading U.S. statesmen to declare “that only U.S. acceptance of a military alliance could create sufficient confidence” for Europe to benefit both from the Marshall Plan and military assistance.<sup>71</sup> Recognizing the opposition they faced from a hesitant Congress, Hickerson and his team were to become the engine that would break the long tradition of U.S. non-entanglement in the military and political affairs of Europe.

Buoyed as he was by the perception of impending change in U.S. foreign policy, Bevin shrewdly took incremental steps that he hoped would result in a full-fledged alliance.<sup>72</sup> However, “[t]he signals announcing the impending union of Western Europe were...mixed.”<sup>73</sup> When Bevin spoke of a spiritual federation of the West, “Britain and the United States held different assumptions about the meaning of federation, and neither gave much credence to the spiritual character of federation.”<sup>74</sup> From the perspective of the U.S., the first priority of the Administration was “*not* providing military aid, let alone joining a Western federation, but securing congressional approval for the Marshall Plan.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See *id.* at 17.

<sup>69</sup> See SYDNEY SNYDER, FINGERPRINTS ON HISTORY: THE NATO MEMOIRS OF THEODORE C. ACHILLES 19 (Sydney Snyder & Lawrence S. Kaplan eds. 1992) (Ted Achilles, Hickerson’s deputy, made this point clear).

<sup>70</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 17 (alteration in original).

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> *Id.* at 24.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.* at 23 (alteration in original).

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

At the State Department and the Pentagon, there was no consensus about the role of the U.S. role in Europe's defense.<sup>76</sup> France's position was "even less promising."<sup>77</sup> Its "preoccupation was still centered on the dangers of a German revival, even as Georges Bidault worked to redirect the nation's attention to the Soviet danger. Ernest Bevin's unified Europe offered no solutions to [France's] concerns."<sup>78</sup> Military leaders in Britain were not yet convinced that "France was a reliable military partner and continued to resist commit[ting] British troops to Europe in the event of war."<sup>79</sup>

To circumvent most of these obstacles, Bevin had to assure Americans that the nationalism that had plagued Europe for centuries was a relic of the past. Britain's pact with France at Dunkirk in 1947 unveiled a new Anglo-French solidarity.<sup>80</sup> But this action was not enough to lure the United States into a similar arrangement. Bevin knew that any U.S. membership in a European military organization would have to consider its relationship to the United Nations Charter.<sup>81</sup> More importantly, it would have to be a product of a European initiative.

Given these caveats, Bevin surprised the West with a moving address to the House of Commons on January 22, 1948.<sup>82</sup> The "speech had been in the making since the breakdown of the [Council] of Foreign Ministers in London five weeks before."<sup>83</sup> The details had been kept secret before it was ultimately unveiled, as Bevin intended it to be a high water-mark in British history.<sup>84</sup> It was.<sup>85</sup> It contained generalities reflecting his hope for a new order of relations in the West.<sup>86</sup> It also contained specifics—his intention to negotiate a pact with the Benelux countries.<sup>87</sup> Joining them would be other members of western Europe, embracing those nations that were outside Soviet control: Norway, Denmark, Italy, and ultimately, even a reformed Germany.<sup>88</sup> References to the United

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<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

<sup>78</sup> *Id.* at 23–24 (alteration in original).

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* at 12.

<sup>81</sup> NICHOLAS HENDERSON, *THE BIRTH OF NATO* 3 (1983).

<sup>82</sup> *See* KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 28; HENDERSON, *supra* note 81, at 6; Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 6.

<sup>83</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 28 (alteration in original).

<sup>84</sup> *Id.*

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

<sup>86</sup> *See id.* at 28.

<sup>87</sup> *Id.*; *see* Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 6.

<sup>88</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 28.

States, while Delphic, were prophetic: America's power and resources would be needed if the new allies were to create a stable world order.<sup>89</sup>

Because the United States was the principal target of Bevin's speech, he was justified in believing he had succeeded.<sup>90</sup> The State Department issued a statement "heartily endorsing his proposals as reinforcing the efforts of the two nations for peace. Equally if not more important than the [A]dministration's imprimatur was the boost [the speech] gave to the passage of the" European Recovery Program (ERP), which, according to John Foster Dulles, "was 'more than ever imperative' in light of Britain's plans for Western unity."<sup>91</sup>

Bevin seized the opportunity to raise the issue of a defense agreement with the United States that would "give Europeans an incentive to commit themselves to a defense system."<sup>92</sup> But Marshall and Lovett balked. Any agreement involving the use of armed force "would have to respect 'certain procedures within the executive branches as well as the appropriate congressional committees.'"<sup>93</sup> Thus, Europe must take the first steps before engaging with the United States. However, only after Americans knew exactly what the Europeans were prepared to do for themselves would the Administration take action.<sup>94</sup> This was the position not only of the cautious secretaries, but also of such influential figures as State Department Counselor, Charles E. Bohlen, and Policy Planning Staff Head, George Kennan.<sup>95</sup>

In this circumstance, the surge toward a transatlantic commitment might have been stopped in its tracks. The Benelux countries felt marginalized by the Anglo-French condominium, while France remained skittish over the possibility of the new allies appeasing Germany.<sup>96</sup> It is hardly surprising that the American converts to an alliance, such as Hickerson and his associates in the State Department, were dismayed at these developments.<sup>97</sup> The movement toward America's entanglement with Europe was restored less by diplomacy than by a series of repressive acts on the part of the Soviet Union.<sup>98</sup> Not least among the

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<sup>89</sup> *Id.* at 28–29.

<sup>90</sup> *Id.* at 30.

<sup>91</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

<sup>92</sup> *Id.*

<sup>93</sup> *Id.* at 30–31.

<sup>94</sup> *Id.* at 31 (alteration in original).

<sup>95</sup> *Id.*

<sup>96</sup> *Id.* at 20, 36.

<sup>97</sup> *Id.* at 20.

<sup>98</sup> *Id.* at 42–43.

West's perceptions of Soviet provocations was the Berlin Blockade, denying the Western allies' access to Berlin airports.<sup>99</sup> It was the Soviets' response to a German currency reform that the three Western partners put together initially as *bizonia* in January 1947 and, ultimately, as *trizonia* in June 1947 when France linked its zone to its allies'.<sup>100</sup> But this challenge was met successfully by an airlift that preserved the Western presence in West Berlin.<sup>101</sup>

An even more ominous indication of Soviet intention to consolidate a Communist bloc in the East was the shocking Prague coup in February 1948 that not only ousted the democratic leadership in Czechoslovakia, but also was responsible for the suicide—or, more likely, perhaps, the murder—of its foreign minister, Jan Masaryk.<sup>102</sup> This coup was all the more disturbing in light of former President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's and 1947 Prime Minister Eduard Beneš's roles in establishing the Democratic Republic of Czechoslovakia in Pittsburgh during World War I.<sup>103</sup>

The coup in [Prague] coincided with a series of events that appeared to be a prelude to a Communist takeover of Western Europe. In February, Italian Communists, having failed to overthrow the government of Alcide de Gasperi in December 1947, were poised to win power at the polls in the April [1948] elections. [At the same time, t]he Soviet Union was pressuring Norway[, which shared a border with the Soviet Union,] to sign a nonaggression pact that could force that country into the Soviet orbit.<sup>104</sup>

The Communist presence in the “Mediterranean and at the approaches to the Atlantic was a sobering prospect for the United States, arguably more than for Europe[.]”<sup>105</sup> Each of these worries itself “might have been sufficient to push the United States into a new relationship with western Europe,” but it was the fate of Czechoslovakia that ultimately traumatized the U.S. to the extent of involving the Administration in an entangling alliance of the sort John Hickerson and Theodore Achilles had been urging since December 1947.<sup>106</sup> A more

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<sup>99</sup> *Id.* at 107–08.

<sup>100</sup> *Id.* at 36, 42–43. The *bizonia* and *trizonia* were the British and French occupation zones in Germany. SCMP Reporter, *Division of Germany after WWII*, SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST (Feb. 24, 1993; 12:00 PM), <https://www.scmp.com/article/19696/division-germany-after-wwii>.

<sup>101</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 107–08; *see* Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 6.

<sup>102</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 43, 49.

<sup>103</sup> *Id.* at 43, 49–50.

<sup>104</sup> *Id.* at 49 (alteration in original); *see id.* at 55; Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 7–8.

<sup>105</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 49 (alteration in original).

<sup>106</sup> *Id.*

immediate impact of the coup was the ironing out of differences within members of the Brussels Pact—especially France’s continuing fear of Germany.<sup>107</sup> The formal creation of the Western Union by the Brussels Pact powers was on March 17, 1948.<sup>108</sup> They were rewarded by another major U.S. step toward an alliance with Europe—President Truman’s address to Congress on March 17, 1948, in which he congratulated Europeans on the conclusion of the Brussels Pact and pledged U.S. support of their efforts to protect themselves.<sup>109</sup>

But the question remained exactly what role the United States would play in the uniting of European nations. American proponents of a military alliance had won, but the victory was shrouded in secret conversations in the Pentagon with the British and Canadians.<sup>110</sup> The French were excluded because of concerns about Communist influence in the French Cabinet.<sup>111</sup> Concessions had to be made to American sensitivities. The proposed U.S. participation in a regional defense organization was based on Articles 51 and 52 of the U.N. Charter.<sup>112</sup> Care was taken to have the proposal conform to the Charter, allowing individual and regional defense without invoking a Soviet veto. This measure was vital to the success of the negotiations. To ensure congressional approval, they included a requirement that western European members pool their military resources to underscore their contribution to their defense efforts.<sup>113</sup> Because Italy and Scandinavia—two areas under Soviet threat—would be included, the result would be essentially an enlarged Western Union.<sup>114</sup> These secret meetings were held in the last week of March 1948.<sup>115</sup> It seemed, after all, that Bevin and Bidault had succeeded in drawing the U.S. into the Western Union.<sup>116</sup>

Nevertheless, there were a course of obstacles that postponed completion of a transatlantic treaty. First, was the “discomfort of leading members of the State Department.”<sup>117</sup> Lovett, the Acting Secretary of State, reluctantly approved the

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<sup>107</sup> *Id.* at 59–60; see Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 7.

<sup>108</sup> The Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence, Mar. 17, 1948, 19 U.N.T.S. 51 [hereinafter Brussels Pact]. The parties to the Brussels Pact, or the Treaty of Brussels, were Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. *Id.*

<sup>109</sup> 94 CONG. REC. 2986, 2996–97 (1948).

<sup>110</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 67.

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> *Id.*

<sup>113</sup> *Id.* at 67–68.

<sup>114</sup> *Id.* at 68.

<sup>115</sup> *Id.* at 67.

<sup>116</sup> *Id.* at 69.

<sup>117</sup> *Id.*

alliance on the assumption that the Europeans would fulfill their promises.<sup>118</sup> Second, was the secrecy surrounding the negotiations that would have repercussions in light of France’s exclusion.<sup>119</sup> Third, was “the judgment of the Senate” whose enthusiasm for aid to Europe did not yet include American membership in an alliance.<sup>120</sup>

If there was any one figure responsible for an American commitment to Europe, it was Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg (R-MI) Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>121</sup> A former leader of the isolationists in the Republican Party, Senator Vandenberg was a convert to internationalism in World War II and proved to be a powerful voice in bringing his party into a European alliance.<sup>122</sup> But his support was conditional upon accepting the preeminence of the U.N. as indispensable to the new relationship.<sup>123</sup> Committed as he was to European security, he demanded assurance that this relationship would not replicate the balance-of-power politics of pre-war Europe.<sup>124</sup> He insisted as well any negotiation for an alliance would require Senate involvement.<sup>125</sup>

The “end product of long discussions in April 1948 was the Vandenberg Resolution,” affirming that the U.S. association with regional arrangements for individual and collective defense would not bypass Congress or the U.N. if war broke out in Europe.<sup>126</sup> “There was no call for an alliance, but a loose construction of the [R]esolution opened the way for just such a result....”<sup>127</sup> The Resolution passed the United States Senate by a vote of 64 to 4 on June 11, 1948.<sup>128</sup> This action was not quite acceptance of an alliance, but it might as well have made this announcement, as it was followed by an agreement from the United States, Britain, and Canada to enter into exploratory talks with the Brussels Pact countries.<sup>129</sup> The Vandenberg Resolution loosened the brakes that

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<sup>118</sup> *Id.*

<sup>119</sup> *Id.*

<sup>120</sup> *Id.*

<sup>121</sup> *See id.*

<sup>122</sup> *Id.* at 69, 93, 196.

<sup>123</sup> *See id.* at 69, 95–96, 217.

<sup>124</sup> *See id.* at 69.

<sup>125</sup> *See id.*

<sup>126</sup> *Id.* at 96–97; *see* Vandenberg Resolution, S. Res. 239, 80th Cong. (1948).

<sup>127</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 96 (alteration in original).

<sup>128</sup> ESCOTT REID, TIME OF FEAR AND HOPE: THE MAKING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY, 1947–1949, 90 (1977).

<sup>129</sup> *See* Mastny, *supra* note 14, at 8.

the State Department wanted to retain on the movement toward an entangling alliance.<sup>130</sup>

The future allies met in Washington, D.C. from July to September 1948.<sup>131</sup> NATO grew out of these exploratory talks that followed America's acceptance of a military alliance with the Brussels Pact powers. Inevitably, these were contentious sessions. They all agreed on the necessity of American leadership in the new organization.<sup>132</sup> They also agreed on the ongoing development of European integration, on opposition to Soviet expansion, and on France's insistence on a cautious approach to the revival of Germany.<sup>133</sup> Their disagreements centered on the priority of recipients of U.S. military assistance; France was intent upon being at the head of the line.<sup>134</sup> They wrangled over the number of members; the Western Union powers would limit membership to the Brussels Pact.<sup>135</sup> They were particularly agitated over potential American evasion of the commitment through the ambiguous language of Article 5 of the proposed treaty.<sup>136</sup>

The Brussels partners would have preferred the Article to conform with Article 4 of the Brussels Pact, which clearly stated that an attack on one member would require the other members to provide "all the military and other aid and assistance in their power" in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 in the U.N. Charter.<sup>137</sup> The United States refused to accept this clarity.<sup>138</sup> Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty agreed that an attack against one "shall be considered an attack against them all."<sup>139</sup> But further response was evasive: each of the parties "will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."<sup>140</sup> The Brussels Pact allies managed to insert "the use of armed force" into the article, but that was all they could do to ensure the

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<sup>130</sup> *See id.*

<sup>131</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 110.

<sup>132</sup> *Id.* at 132.

<sup>133</sup> *Id.* at 105–09.

<sup>134</sup> *Id.* at 124–25.

<sup>135</sup> *Id.* at 122–23.

<sup>136</sup> *Id.* at 123–24.

<sup>137</sup> Brussels Pact, *supra* note 108, art. 4; *see* U.N. Charter art. 51.

<sup>138</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 123–24.

<sup>139</sup> North Atlantic Treaty art. 5, Apr. 4, 1949, 63 Stat. 2241, 34 U.N.T.S. 243.

<sup>140</sup> *Id.*

response they wanted.<sup>141</sup> If the allies could have had their way, the alliance, like the Brussels Pact, would last 50 years.<sup>142</sup> Instead, they had to settle for an evaluation of the treaty after 10 years and an ability to withdraw from the treaty after 20 years.<sup>143</sup>

There was no expectation that the Washington talks would be definitive at any point in time. The adjective *exploratory* revealed its limits.<sup>144</sup> “No one was under any illusion that a treaty could be completed before the U.S. presidential election in November [1948].”<sup>145</sup> At that time the Europeans—and the U.S. press—were convinced that the Republicans under their candidate, Thomas E. Dewey, would defeat Truman and sign the treaty.<sup>146</sup> The drafting committee “did produce a paper ready to be submitted to the home governments of the participating nations. After all the wrangling over issues dear to individual countries or to the Western Union bloc as a whole, the players all agreed that they had come up with a workable [plan].”<sup>147</sup> The drafting committee included reference to collaboration in economic, social, and cultural fields (Article 3); continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid (Article 4); and provision for mutual assistance in meeting an armed attack (Article 5).<sup>148</sup> The language of the fifth article never satisfied the allies, but it was the best they could get.<sup>149</sup>

It “did not matter that the scope of the alliance was not settled, that membership was far from complete, or that the critical Article 5 was given multiple interpretations.”<sup>150</sup> What mattered “was the message tucked into a one-sentence paragraph in the memorandum. . . . ‘No alternative to a treaty appears to meet the essential requirements.’ And the most essential requirement was the incorporation of the United States into a transatlantic security system.”<sup>151</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty would not become a reality for another six months, but its substance was in place by September of 1948.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> See HENDERSON, *supra* note 81, at 93.

<sup>142</sup> *Id.* at 82.

<sup>143</sup> *Id.* at 99–100.

<sup>144</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 131.

<sup>145</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original).

<sup>146</sup> *Id.* at 165–66.

<sup>147</sup> *Id.* at 131–32 (alteration in original).

<sup>148</sup> *Id.* at 132 (alteration in original).

<sup>149</sup> *Id.* at 206.

<sup>150</sup> *Id.* at 132.

<sup>151</sup> *Id.* (alteration in original) (internal footnote omitted).

<sup>152</sup> *Id.*

While the essence of the alliance was evident in September 1948, it took more than half a year before the new allies agreed to enlarge the alliance by including Italy, Portugal, and Scandinavian nations.<sup>153</sup> The combination of an American presence and a Soviet adversary guaranteed approval, despite the adherence of authoritarian Portugal and Mediterranean Italy in an alliance based on democratic and “Atlantic” values.<sup>154</sup> The result was a patchwork composed of practical compromises that admitted Portugal, despite its ambivalent relations with Nazi Germany.<sup>155</sup> Its neutrality in World War II and its longstanding links to Britain neutralized its undemocratic character.<sup>156</sup> And while Italy’s geographic position was distant from the Atlantic, its successful resistance to Communism, along with France’s partnership and American patronage, were sufficient credentials to make it a charter member of NATO.<sup>157</sup>

The North Atlantic Treaty was signed on April 4, 1949.<sup>158</sup> The Organization has lasted seventy years with no withdrawals, having grown from 12 to 29 members in that period.<sup>159</sup> After seventy years, NATO remains a vital link between North America and Western Europe. It may be credited with the accession of West Germany in 1955, ending 300 years of Franco-German wars.<sup>160</sup> It may also be credited with advancing European political integration through its support of the European Union.<sup>161</sup>

Still the challenges are daunting, if not at the level of 1949. The democratic framework that sustained NATO over the years has been frayed by the resurgence of nationalism within Alliance member states that could conceivably destroy the Alliance.<sup>162</sup> The wars in the Middle East have strained the social fabric of many of the Allies, and the Russian threat to the Baltic nations has revived fears of the Soviet years.<sup>163</sup>

How many of the changes that took place since 1949 could the framers have anticipated? The advance of European integration might have exceeded

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<sup>153</sup> *Id.* at 211–12.

<sup>154</sup> *Id.* at 175, 178–79, 209–13.

<sup>155</sup> *See id.* at 175–76, 211–13.

<sup>156</sup> *Id.* at 176, 210–11.

<sup>157</sup> *Id.* at 211–13.

<sup>158</sup> North Atlantic Treaty, *supra* note 139.

<sup>159</sup> *Member Countries*, NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORG. (May 14, 2019, 15:53), [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_52044.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52044.htm).

<sup>160</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 241.

<sup>161</sup> *Id.* at 238.

<sup>162</sup> *See id.* at 237–38.

<sup>163</sup> *See id.* at 239–40.

expectations. The evolution of the European Union from economic links between France and Germany in 1951 to a potentially united Europe in 2019 was an aspiration few Europeans or Americans would have believed possible.<sup>164</sup> Nor was the dissolution of the Soviet Empire a credible possibility, outside the imagination of George Kennan.<sup>165</sup> On the negative side, the decline of the three major European allies—Britain, France, and Germany—would not have been assumed.<sup>166</sup> While the undoing of the Yalta Agreement dividing Europe was a reasonable hope, the rapid extension of NATO into the Baltics and Balkans in the 21st century would have found many skeptics among the Organization’s founding fathers.<sup>167</sup> Arguably, the familiar presence of a hostile Russia was a constant worry even without the specter of Communist domination.<sup>168</sup>

Considering the range of malaises currently afflicting NATO, what kind of future can the Alliance anticipate? There could be a movement toward dissolution, as Allies drift away or lose confidence in U.S. leadership. NATO then might survive on paper but be as irrelevant as the League of Nations was after World War II. But if it should dissolve, what would be the consequences for the United States and its allies?

Termination of the Alliance would mean the end of the intimate links between the United States and Europe that have benefited both sides since the Alliance’s inception. NATO has never been just a military organization. It is an intricate mix of political and military connections that kept fissures from splitting its membership. Without NATO, the United States would lose its status as a European power, consequently losing its historic post-World War II role in bolstering the confidence of European nations. NATO’s disappearance would have an immediate effect on a Europe unprepared to assume NATO’s burden.<sup>169</sup> The European Union lacks the will as well as the financial resources to become the “United States of Europe.”<sup>170</sup> Its 28 members have too many divergent priorities that would prevent it from taking effective collective action.<sup>171</sup>

The beneficiaries of the withdrawal of NATO’s presence in Europe would be an ambitious Russia already active in sowing dissension in western Europe,

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<sup>164</sup> *The History of the European Union*, EUROPEAN UNION, [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history_en).

<sup>165</sup> KAPLAN, *supra* note 2, at 235.

<sup>166</sup> *See id.* at 237–38.

<sup>167</sup> *Id.* at 236

<sup>168</sup> *See id.* 238–41.

<sup>169</sup> *See id.* at 238–39.

<sup>170</sup> *See id.* 238–42.

<sup>171</sup> *Id.*

and China, a world power eager to replace the United States as the global leader. Divorced from Europe, the United States would feel the loss not just of its position in Europe, but also of the stability that the transatlantic connection has nourished over seventy years. The rise of nationalism, expressed as isolationism in the American form, would cement the divisions and weaken all the former members of NATO. Despite all these challenges, NATO has survived intact; none of its members have elected to leave the Organization.

At this time, dramatic termination of the Alliance is unlikely. There are sufficient countervailing centripetal forces to keep it viable—from reversal of current U.S. actions damaging to NATO to activity on the part of its European members in response to much of the criticism that the Trump Administration has leveled against them.<sup>172</sup> There has never been a year since the Alliance was formed that critics have not predicted its impending end.<sup>173</sup> NATO has survived the predictions. Given the state of the world seventy years later, its life is worth preserving.

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<sup>172</sup> See Charles Kupchan, *NATO is Thriving in Spite of Trump*, FOREIGN AFFAIRS (Mar. 20, 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-03-20/nato-thriving-spite-trump>.

<sup>173</sup> See Jonathan Masters, *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (Apr. 2, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/background/north-atlantic-treaty-organization-nato>.