

## On Joining NATO

As the Soviet threat loomed in the aftermath of World War II, the international community sought ways to ensure world peace and stability. In the United States, debates raged over whether U.S. membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would deter Soviet aggression or intensify competition between the two superpowers.

*As you read the passages, try to identify the different consequences that were predicted to result from U.S. membership in NATO.*

*Charles E. Bohlen, Witness to History, 1929–1969*

NATO was simply a necessity. The developing situation with the Soviet Union demanded the participation of the United States in the defense of Western Europe. Any other solution would have opened the area to Soviet domination. . . . NATO . . . was . . . regarded as a traditional military alliance of like-minded countries. It was not regarded as a panacea for the problems besetting Europe, but only as an elementary precaution against Communist aggression.

It is difficult now to recapture the mood of the late 1940s. The Soviet Union was on the move, not only in carrying out the traditional objectives of Russian foreign policy but also in utilizing to the full the existence of Communist parties subservient to it the world over. Had the United States not inaugurated the Marshall Plan . . . and [not] agreed to join NATO, the Communists might easily have assumed power in most of Western Europe.

*Walter Lippmann, political journalist, from a letter to Thomas Finletter, April 18, 1949*

Here there doesn't seem to be any doubt that the Senate will eventually ratify the Atlantic Pact, but on the question of money for arming Europe there is going to be a great big fight. . . . If the budget has to be increased after the Pact, it will be very hard to answer the feeling that it doesn't inaugurate a still more intense phase of the race of armaments—and that rather knocks into a cocked hat the argument that the Pact works for security. I myself am convinced that if the

Russians ever intended to start an overt war, they will not start it when it is certain that they cannot win the war unless they defeat the United States. Therefore, the security of all Europe is greater than it was once the Pact has been ratified. . . .

*Senator Tom Connally (D-Texas), Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, in an address before the United States Senate, 1949*

It is obvious that the United States gains much by declaring now, in this written pact, the course of action we would follow even if the treaty did not exist. Without a treaty, we were drawn into two world wars to preserve the security of the North Atlantic community. Can anyone doubt that we would become involved in a third world conflict if it should ever come? . . .

From now on, no one will misread our motives or underestimate our determination to stand in defense of our freedom. By letting the world know exactly where we stand, we erect a fundamental policy that outlasts the daily fluctuations of diplomacy, and the twists and turns of psychological warfare which the Soviet Union has chosen to wage against us. This public preview of our intentions has a steadying effect upon the course of human events both at home, where our people want no more Normandy beachheads, and abroad, where men must work and live in the sinister shadow of aggression. . . .

The greatest obstacle that stands in the way of complete [European] recovery is the pervading and paralyzing sense of insecurity. The treaty is a powerful antidote to this poison. It will go far in dispelling the fear that has plagued Europe since the war.

**COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES** (continued)

*Senator Robert A. Taft (R-Ohio), in an address before the United States Senate, 1949*

So, Mr. President, I am opposing the treaty. . . . This whole program in my opinion is not a peace program; it is a war program. . . . We are committing ourselves to a policy of war, not a policy of peace. We are building up armaments. We are undertaking to arm half the world against the other half. We are inevitably starting an armament race. The more the pact signatories arm, the more the Russians are going to arm. It is said they are armed too much already. Perhaps that is true. But that makes no difference. The more we arm, the more they will arm, the more they will devote their whole attention to the building up of arms. The general history of armament races in the world is that they have led to war, not to peace.

*George F. Kennan, American diplomat, Memoirs, 1925–1950*

The suggestion, constantly heard from the European side, that an alliance was needed to assure the participation of the United States in the cause of Western Europe's defense, in the event of

an attack against it, only filled me with impatience. What in the world did they think we had been doing in Europe these last four or five years? Did they suppose we had labored to free Europe from the clutches of Hitler merely in order to abandon it to those of Stalin? What did they suppose the Marshall Plan was all about? . . .

The danger that the European NATO partners faced in the political field—the danger, that is, of a spread of communism to new areas of the continent by political means—was still greater, I wrote, than any military danger that confronted them. . . .

This preoccupation with military affairs was already widespread, I noted. It was regrettable. It addressed itself to what was not the main danger. . . . But it behooved us to bear in mind that the need for alliances and rearmament in Western Europe was primarily a subjective one, arising from the failure of the Western Europeans to understand correctly their own position. Their best bet was still the struggle for economic recovery and internal political stability. Intensive rearmament represented an uneconomical and regrettable diversion of their effort—a diversion that not only threatened to proceed at the cost of economic recovery but also encouraged the impression that war was inevitable.

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**QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS**

1. According to Connally, how would NATO aid the European economic recovery?
2. Explain why some commentators feared that the U.S. commitment to NATO would accelerate the arms race.
3. Why did Connally and Lippmann think that U.S. membership in NATO would deter Soviet aggression in Europe?
4. Why was George Kennan opposed to NATO?
5. **Predicting Consequences** Both Robert Taft and Tom Connally were partially correct—there was an arms race, but it did not result in war between the superpowers or a takeover of Western Europe. Explain the logic used by each senator to predict what he believed would be the consequences of NATO.