2nd November, 1948.

CABINET

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY AND WESTERN UNION

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

My colleagues will want to be informed of and to consider the proceedings of the Consultative Council last week in Paris. In addition to the transaction of much current business with which I need not trouble the Cabinet, two important problems were discussed: the proposed North Atlantic Treaty and the future development of Western Union.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

2. As the result of a British initiative the United States and Canadian Governments agreed that this project should be explored on an official level by representatives of the United States, Canada and the Brussels Powers. After negotiations in Washington, a document laying down the lines of a North Atlantic Treaty was produced on 10th September and was submitted to each of the Governments concerned. This paper, under cover of a memorandum from myself (D.O.(48) 64), was considered and generally approved by the Defence Committee on 7th October (D.O.(48) 17th Meeting, Minute 1). The Canadian Government signified their approval of the project on 17th October.

3. When the matter came before the Consultative Council on 25th October, the Council was invited to consider three main questions:

(a) Whether the Brussels Treaty Powers are in principle prepared to conclude an Atlantic Pact;

(b) If so, which countries should be invited to attend a conference;

(c) Which country should issue the invitations to such a conference.

4. I explained that I favoured some form of regional pact covering the Atlantic, and that an American assurance of support for the Brussels Treaty was not enough. What was required was some form of treaty arrangement with the United States and with Canada, who had already signified that they were willing to meet the Western Powers for the purpose of concluding a treaty. The whole question of a treaty was a delicate matter, since it would not necessarily be easy to reconcile the views of the Western Powers with those of the United States and Canada. I felt that the problem should be approached in the same spirit as the Marshall Plan had been, in other words, on a basis of self-help by the Brussels Treaty
The idea should be to create some coherent defence system so that the five Powers would not only stand on their own feet militarily, but would maintain their independence and prestige. In addition, as far as we ourselves were concerned, it would be, of course, necessary for us to maintain existing obligations towards the Commonwealth. The objective should be to mobilise the wealth and productive capacity of the North American Continent for the defence of Western Europe. The Americans had already passed the Selective Service Act and the Senate had approved the Vandenberg Resolution. It had been suggested that a Presidential Declaration in support of Western Europe might meet the needs of Western European defence. I did not think that this was so, for the reason that such a declaration was not constitutionally binding and was only valid for the President’s period of office. In any case nothing could be expected until the American elections had been held. In the meantime the Brussels Powers must progress resolutely in building up the regional defence arrangement as a deterrent against possible aggression.

If it were agreed that a treaty were necessary, the Consultative Council need not go into details at once, but before negotiations started experts of each of the Western European countries concerned should consider the Annex to the Washington document and decide how it should be interpreted, and what modifications, excisions or additions were desirable. Our objectives must be clearly defined before conversations with the United States could start. In this connection, it should be borne in mind that, although the European Powers must necessarily hold the front in case of aggression, it was not possible for Great Britain to repeat the role that she had played in 1914 and 1940. In 1914 she had, together with her Allies, helped to hold the front, and in 1940 she had stood alone. But with modern air forces and weapons there was a strong possibility that Great Britain might be immobilised by air and projectile attack. For these reasons it was essential that everybody should be brought into the war at the same moment. The security of Western Europe required a regional pact which committed the trans-Atlantic as well as the continental Powers. Everybody must act as one and resist together. If this were known, potential aggressors might be given pause and the necessary basis for discussions for the maintenance of peace might be created.

Hitherto, the Powers of Western Europe had been disunited, not so much in spirit but in their economic and defence arrangements. This had led Soviet Russia to assume that her potential adversaries could be dealt with one at a time. The basis of effective defence of Western civilisation was for the resources of all the defenders to be put in the pool, economically as well as militarily.

So far as the Commonwealth was concerned, the position had been discussed during the recent conference in London; the Commonwealth countries, except Canada, were not directly committed or involved, but they understood the necessity of the Western European Powers drawing closer together. There had been indeed a great feeling of unanimity and a general acknowledgment of the real menace which threatened us in the east and west. It was therefore necessary for Great Britain to keep all the Commonwealth countries informed of what arrangements they were making for the integration and defence of Western Europe. In general it could be said that the Commonwealth supported the idea of a North Atlantic Pact.
8. The Foreign Ministers of France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg agreed that a treaty with the United States and Canada was necessary. The French and Belgian Foreign Ministers had had certain hesitations earlier, as they feared internal reactions in their own countries to such a treaty, but now the position had changed radically. The United States and Canada had made it plain that they really wanted a treaty, and it would be a terrible responsibility for anybody to discourage the conclusion of such a treaty now with all its advantages.

9. As regards the question who should be invited to a conference for the framing of such a treaty, I felt that in the light of the difficulties that would arise if the question were debated there and then, it would be better to settle the main question and to leave these subsidiary problems to be decided later. For instance, if Italy were invited the question of the provision for the security of Greece and Turkey would inevitably arise; if the Scandinavians were invited, there might be delay, since they had indicated that they wanted more time to consider Scandinavian defence arrangements first. For strategic reasons the United States Government desire to include Iceland, Portugal and Eire in the proposed Atlantic Pact. As regards the latter it seems possible that if invited to join, the Irish might raise the partition question. I should perhaps at this point add that the Danish, Norwegian and Portuguese Governments have been apprised in confidence of the result of the Washington conversations so that an invitation to participate would not take them by surprise. The Portuguese reaction was cautious but not unfavourable; the Danish and Norwegian Governments, however, expressed a desire for delay on the grounds mentioned above.

10. It was important, however, to remember that the United States and Canadian requirements would differ in some respects from those of the Brussels Treaty Powers. The French Government, for example, are anxious to restrict the number of participants so as to avoid dissipating the available resources, whereas the United States Government favour the inclusion of all North Atlantic Powers and attach particular importance to the participation of Norway and Denmark (because of the strategic importance of the Norwegian airfields and of Greenland respectively).

11. It was agreed that it was important that no time should be wasted and that in the circumstances the possible differences amongst the Brussels Treaty Powers themselves and between them and the United States and Canada on the question of participation should be dealt with later.

12. The Consultative Council accordingly agreed unanimously:

(1) that the United States and Canadian Governments should be informed forthwith that the Brussels Treaty Powers were now prepared to enter into a Treaty with the United States and Canadian Governments on North Atlantic defence;

(2) that each Government should within ten days of the date of the formal communication referred to in (1) above send instructions to its representative on the Permanent Commission concerning the attitude to be adopted in respect of the detailed proposals laid down in the Annex to the Report of the Washington Talks;
(3) that, in view of the foregoing agreement, the question who should issue the invitations lapsed for the time being.

13. The representatives of the five Powers in Washington and Ottawa have been instructed to make a concerted approach to the United States and Canadian Governments on these lines. His Majesty's Government have therefore to consider now what instructions to impart to the United Kingdom representative on the Permanent Commission.

Recommendations

14. The Cabinet are recommended to approve the action taken hitherto and the instructions on the following lines to the United Kingdom representative on the Permanent Commission.

(a) The United Kingdom representative should approve the conclusion of a treaty on the general lines of the Annex to the Report of the Washington Talks.

(b) He should, however, express the view that the treaty should not cover economic, social and cultural aims, but only those relating to defence. If necessary he might agree to a general reference to the common heritage of Western civilisation in the preamble, but should oppose articles calling for the establishment of special machinery for the consideration of such questions.

(c) He should suggest that in due course, in addition to the Brussels Treaty Powers, the United States and Canada, Eire, Iceland, Portugal, Norway, Denmark and if possible Sweden should be sounded as to their readiness to accept an invitation to a conference for the framing of the treaty.

(d) He should argue against the inclusion of Italy in the first instance, though it should be made possible for her either to adhere to the treaty in some capacity at a later date, or, if the Americans insist, for her to send a representative to the conference in some distinctive capacity, but only on the understanding that some provision is made for the security of Greece and Turkey.

(e) He should argue that the exact footing on which Italy and any country other than those named above could enter a treaty should be decided at the conference itself.

(f) He should suggest that if the attitude of any of the countries approached proves likely to delay the conclusion of the treaty, that country should be dropped from the list of participants.

(g) He should suggest that the United States should be asked to take preliminary steps to convene a conference as soon as the domestic situation in America allows it.

Arguments

15. The readiness of the United States and Canadian Governments to enter into binding military commitments in
Europe represents a notable revolution of thought both in America and Canada. Without such a trans-Atlantic commitment, Western Europe would risk having for the third time to confront an aggressor whilst the United States were slowly girding themselves for the fray. Moreover, without a treaty it would be difficult if not impossible to secure the deliveries of arms or to arrange the advance military planning in peace-time which are essential to Western security.

16. The United States and Canadian Governments seem to favour including in the treaty provisions for economic, social and cultural collaboration. It would in my view be a mistake to risk duplicating the work of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and the Brussels Treaty machinery, which is beginning to work well. The point, however, does not seem of capital importance, and if later our attitude is violently opposed by the United States and Canadian Governments, it may be necessary to go some way to meet them, provided that nothing is done to weaken the existing machinery of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and the Brussels Treaty.

17. The Americans and Canadians, with some reason, attach great importance to the participation of Norway and Denmark and, perhaps to a lesser degree, of Iceland, Eire and Portugal. If all or any of these countries prove willing to participate, it would be difficult to find good grounds for opposing their inclusion. Neither the Americans nor the Canadians are likely to be impressed by the French argument that our limited resources must be concentrated entirely on the defence of the Rhine. There is, of course, little doubt that the defence of the Rhine should have priority and the Americans are likely to recognise this. But they will argue that the distribution of available resources will be decided by the Governments on the advice of their military advisers and that the Western world should not be deprived of the political and strategic advantages flowing from the participation of these other Powers simply because the French Government wish to be the sole recipients of American aid.

18. The position of Italy raises great difficulties. The Americans set some store by Italian participation. On the other hand, the Military Committee of the Brussels Treaty have expressed the opinion that, while the inclusion of Italy would be useful from a purely strategic point of view, the shortage of military supplies and the limitations imposed by the Peace Treaty would make her a liability at present. But they recommend that the question should be kept in mind as the supply position improves. Secondly, as pointed out above, Italy cannot well be included unless provision is made for the security of Greece and Turkey. Finally, there is in Italy to-day a strong public sentiment in favour of neutrality. The Italian Government would therefore probably feel driven to represent their participation as a favour to the Western world, a favour which would have to be required by revision of the Peace Treaty, by Colonial concessions and by a large share of any material aid given by America. On these grounds it seems desirable that Italy should not be one of the Powers sounded in the first instance.

19. In handling all these matters it is important to ensure that nothing should delay the convocation of the conference and the conclusion of the treaty. The tide is now flowing in our favour and we must take it at the flood. Otherwise delays may lead to doubts and so to the collapse of the
whole project. On these grounds I recommend that any
countries whose attitude proves likely to cause delay should
be at once discarded. Their accession can, if necessary, be
arranged at a later stage.

20. Finally, since the Washington exploratory
conversations took place ostensibly as the result of the
Vandenberg Resolution and the declarations of the President,
it seems appropriate that the conference should take place
in America and that the United States should make the
preliminary soundings and issue the invitations. The
conception of a North Atlantic Treaty has been widely canvassed
in the United States, where it has been regarded as an American
initiative. The circumstance that the idea originated in this
country is not known except to a very narrow circle of officials
who have been careful not to reveal it. There has been
virtually no articulate opposition from the public, the press
or Congress. If this state of affairs is to continue, there is
much to be said for allowing the United States Government to
continue to appear to be taking the initiative.

DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN UNION

Statement of the Case

21. For some time now His Majesty’s Government have been
under increasing pressure to agree to some further, and if
possible, some demonstrative move tending to reinforce Western
Union. This pressure has come partly from France, partly from
America and partly from active elements in this country on
both sides of the House. The Hague Conference last June
focused a great deal of the very general feeling that some
such move must now be made, and though it is true that
subsequent to the conference many divergencies of view began
to manifest themselves in the ranks of the European “Federalists”;
nevertheless there is still strong sentiment in favour of the
French proposal for a “Consultative Assembly”, more particularly
perhaps in France, where the constitution of some such body
would undoubtedly have a favourable effect on the prospects of
the present Government, and assist it in its struggle against the
Communist and the Gaullist menaces. As for the Americans, there
is no doubt that the predominant feeling in the United States is
that the democracies of Western Europe ought to enter into some
closer association, and this notion was vigorously emphasised
by Governor Dewey himself during his recent Presidential campaign.
There are clear signs that Mr. Dewey intends to use the European
Recovery Programme as a lever to compel the closer integration
of Western Europe. In consequence, we cannot ignore the
possibility that if no further advance is made, the effect on
the credits which are to be voted next February may be considerable.

22. In point of fact, the achievements of the past year
represent a notable advance towards European unity, and I have
no doubt that the method of steady and gradual progress would be
the right way to bring about even greater unity in the future.
Unless therefore we are to adopt a purely negative attitude,
with unfortunate consequences in America, France and elsewhere,
itis essential to devise some scheme which will satisfy the
demand for a move and at the same time avoid any commitment to
the dangerous expedients advocated by the Federalists and their
allies. Such a scheme should represent an orderly development
of the general conception underlying the Treaty of Brussels.

23. It was with this object that towards the end of
September I suggested to the Prime Minister and to one or two
of my colleagues that some regular meeting of responsible
Ministers of the Western European countries might be considered, and after some discussion I put forward a proposal on the following lines:

(a) The new scheme would be for a meeting which might be termed "A Council of Ministers of Western Europe" which would meet at stated intervals, perhaps twice a year, and be composed of governmental delegations with advisers from each of the countries concerned. The exact Ministerial representation would vary with circumstances and with the items on the agenda of the Council.

(b) If this proposal were accepted, steps would be taken to create an adequate secretariat, and the intention would be to run the "Council of Ministers" on rather similar lines to the General Assembly of the United Nations, though of course on a much smaller scale. Thus any reports which would be placed in front of the Council by any of the organs established under the Treaty of Brussels might be referred, in the event of any divergence of view, to committees and sub-committees for investigation and report; and an effort would thereafter be made to achieve agreement on the basis of full discussion in the Council itself.

(c) The proposed new system might be subsequently extended so as to permit the participation of any German or Western German Government. There would in fact be nothing to prevent a German Delegation from sitting in at the Council, though it might well not be possible for that Delegation to take any part in the discussion of certain subjects, such as those relating to defence or foreign policy. The same might be said in regard to possible Italian representation, and indeed it might be that the difficulty of admitting Italy to the Treaty of Brussels might be overcome by associating her with the proposed "Council of Ministers" rather than by her accession to the Treaty of Brussels itself.

24. Such a system would go a long way towards spiking the guns of those who wish to frame a Constitution and who criticise His Majesty's Government for not going fast enough in the direction of "Western Union", while at the same time preserving in effect the full sovereignty of the participating States and in reality adopting the basis of the so-called "empirical" approach rather than the alternative basis of some formal "Constitution".

25. There was some discussion of this matter with the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, and it will be recalled that in the minutes of the meeting held at 11 a.m. on 19th October (F.M.M.(48) 9th Meeting) I am recorded as saying that "the time would shortly come when it would be advisable to hold general meetings attended both by the Foreign Ministers of the signatory (Brussels) Powers and of the members of the functional committees. Experience had proved the difficulty of isolating special problems and this appeared to offer a better means of obtaining effective collective decisions".

26. As I understood it, none of our Commonwealth colleagues had any particular objection to such a development, and that being so, though I could not put it forward officially, I did make a general allusion to my scheme at the meeting of the
Consultative Council on 25th October. This was done, of course, partly with the desire to deflect attention from the rival Franco-Belgian proposal for a Consultative Assembly which was on our agenda, and partly because I am convinced that only by some such approach as I have suggested are we in practice ever likely to solve the vexed problem of the association of Italy with other European democracies, and above all the even more difficult and urgent problem of the eventual association of Germany with Western Europe.

27. In the subsequent discussion I detected a sense of relief on the part of M. Schuman that my suggestion had been made, and indeed I was informed by M. Chauvel afterwards that M. Schuman for his part would be only too willing to take my scheme in preference to his own official one if he could persuade his wilder "Federalist" colleagues that only by such acceptance was any progress ever likely to be made in the direction of a closer unity which would include Great Britain. In any case, seeing that we were now in possession of more than one suggestion, the Dutch proposed, and it was subsequently agreed, that the sensible thing to do would be to set up a Committee to examine both these suggestions, and indeed any other suggestion that had been or might be made, and report back to their Governments at an early date.

28. The Consultative Council accordingly reached the following conclusions unanimously:-

(a) that a body should be set up to study the problem of closer union in Europe in accordance with the discussions of the Council;

(b) that the body should make recommendations to Governments;

(c) that the representatives on the Committee should be appointed by Governments;

(d) that the membership of the Committee should be 5 French, 5 British, 3 Belgian, 3 Dutch and 2 Luxembourg members;

(e) that it should meet in Paris;

(f) that the Committee should study the geographical scope of any steps that it might recommend and, if it considered desirable, might put forward various alternatives;

(g) that the meetings should be held in private;

(h) that the report of the Committee should not be published until presented to Governments, who would take joint decisions in matters of publicity;

(i) that the Committee should report by the next meeting of the Consultative Council.

Recommendation

29. I ask my colleagues-

(a) to approve in principle my proposal for a "European Council" as outlined above, and
to approve the agreement reached in Paris that the five Brussels Powers should appoint a Committee of Enquiry to examine all proposals for greater European unity and report to Governments.

Arguments

30. The case against adopting a purely negative attitude has already been stated in this paper, but there are some general considerations affecting the position of the French Government to which I should like to call the attention of my colleagues.

31. There is, I fear, no doubt that the present French Government and indeed the whole French nation are in a parlous state. On the side of the public there is a general apathy, a lack of confidence and an absence of any sense of civic responsibility, while the Government for their part show little capacity to give leadership, to tackle the problems of the day and to inspire public confidence. In consequence things are drifting dangerously. Yet it is probably true that France is economically in a better position than this country and that if a French Government were to show the same resolution as we have done, they would find that their road to recovery was easier and less painful than ours. What is required is the necessary moral effort; and it is even now not too late. The repugnance of the nation to the extremes of Communism and Gaullism have given the present Government a prospect of life which they have scarcely deserved.

32. I have been carefully considering what can be done to fortify and stimulate the French Government, for we must recognise that France is essential to the Western system and that her collapse would involve the collapse of the whole. While we cannot hope to regenerate France from this side of the Channel, there are two things we can do. First, we can help to promote the revival of the French Army. At present, memories of the German occupation are so lively that the defencelessness of France has a demoralising effect on the whole body politic, which can be likened to creeping paralysis. It may be that a consciousness of reviving strength and growing confidence in the capacity of France to defend herself with her Allies may help to restore the national self-respect, the loss of which is at the root of France's present troubles. Secondly, we should continue to do all we can to give the French people a sense of political solidarity with the other Western Nations. This has been our policy since the beginning of the year and we have already seen its beneficial results. Without the Treaty of Brussels, for example, it would not have been possible to induce the French Government to take the risk of associating themselves with us in Western Germany or still less of backing us in the Berlin dispute. The state of France is bad, but without the sense of solidarity created by the Brussels Treaty it would be worse. This is recognised in France and the fact accounts for the widespread desire to forge closer bonds with the countries of the West, even to the extent of full Federation. With the French in this frame of mind it would be dangerous to throw France back on herself by rejecting out of hand her proposals for closer union. Hence the proposals I have put forward. They are designed to avoid the constitutional and other pitfalls prepared by the Federalists, but represent the minimum which can be safely offered if we wish to foster political solidarity in the West.

E.B.

Foreign Office, S.W.1.
2nd November, 1948.