CABINET

NORTH ATLANTIC PACT

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

My colleagues will have read in the press of the deplorable debate which took place in the American Senate on 14th February. I attach at Annex I three telegrams giving Sir Oliver Franks's comments on this debate, which I need hardly say had a depressing effect on M. Lange and has no doubt also encouraged the Soviet Government and their sympathisers all over the world.

2. The immediate point to be considered is how far ought we to go in accepting the greatly modified version of Article 5 of the proposed North Atlantic Treaty which will probably be acceptable to Senators in the light of this debate. I attach at Annex II the draft Article 5—

(a) as it emerged from the last meeting of the Ambassadors' Committee in Washington;

(b) as subsequently modified on 4th February to meet the Senators' preliminary objections; and

(c) as now proposed publicly by Senator Connally, apparently at the suggestion of the State Department.

Even in the event of this last version being accepted, however, it has been suggested by some Senators that it would not connote even a moral obligation on the part of the United States to go to war if a co-signatory of the Pact is the victim of recognised aggression, though no doubt in such circumstances the United States would go to war, more especially of course if United States armed forces had previously engaged in hostilities. Mr. Acheson is no doubt doing his best to wrestle with the Senators, and we shall know the result of his efforts in a few days time when the Ambassadors' Committee reassembles.

3. Clearly draft (b) is better than draft (c), since it retains the thought that an attack on one is an attack on all and does not specifically say that the determination of any action that any party may take is a matter for individual judgment. Our Ambassador is doing his best to keep as much stiffening in the Article as possible, and in particular to restore the words "military or other action" which appear in draft (a) but not in (b) or (c). If, however, all that we can get the Senators to agree to is Senator Connally's version, we shall have to decide whether a Pact so weakened is still worth signing. (I need not here discuss the further unsolved difficulties, such as the definition of the area; whether Italy should be excluded; whether Algeria should be within the scope of the Treaty, and so forth, since, though important, they are all largely dependent on the solution adopted in regard to Article 5, and cannot be dealt with satisfactorily until that has been settled.)

4. First of all we must be clear on one thing: what we have to decide is, would it be better to have the Pact as watered down by the Senate than not to have any Pact at all. Even with the feeble version of Article 5 we should still presumably secure consultative machinery and, above all, the establishment of a military committee which would be capable of drawing up plans and of dividing up the available arms among the signatory Powers. By such means we could, of course, hope that, when and if the aggression came, the operative clause (Article 5) would be of less importance since, under the various schemes and
plans adopted by the military committee, a situation would have been created
in which, in fact, the United States would not able to avoid being involved in
the conflict whatever view the Senate took as to its technical right in regard to
the declaration of war. In the end, I suppose it is the existence of prepared
common plans, rather than of paper commitments, which usually proves effective
in determining a Government to go to war in aid of an ally.

5. On the other hand, I cannot say what the views of my Brussels Treaty
colleagues are, and notably the French. The French have unhappy memories of
being let down by the Americans in 1919, and it may be that the Parliamentary
Opposition to the present Government in France would profit by the obvious lack
of teeth in the Pact as drafted to cause the defeat of the Government if it accepted
it and endeavoured to get it ratified by the National Assembly. On the other hand,
a weakening of Article 5 would also mean a loosening of French and other
European commitments in the event of a Soviet-American conflict in some other
part of the world, and might therefore help certain elements in French opinion
to accept the Pact. However, this can only be found out by consultation with
the French themselves, and I hope to ascertain their views in the Permanent
Commission.

6. It may be, however, that it might be best for tactical purposes for all
the Brussels Treaty Powers to tell the Americans that they could not guarantee
the acceptance of the Pact by their own Parliaments if it were redrafted in
accordance with the Senate’s wishes. This being so, they would request
Mr. Acheson to go back to the Senators and try to induce them to stiffen up the
Article, if not to the extent of accepting the original version as it came out of the
Ambassadorial Committee, at any rate to the extent of making it clear that
military aid would be afforded by America to a co-signatory which the United
States Senate had itself recognised as victim of aggression. This end might,
I suggest, be achieved by inserting the phrase “according to its own Constitu­
tional processes” after the words “by taking forthwith” in the text of Article 5,
which would make it clear that nothing could be done except with Senatorial
consent.

7. The article as it would then appear, is given as the fourth alternative
(d) in Annex II.

E. B.

*Foreign Office, S.W. 1,
18th February, 1949.*
SECRET

ANNEX I

TELEGRAMS FROM SIR OLIVER FRANKS

1. No. 938 of 15th February

Senate debate on North Atlantic Pact.

You will have seen in the newspapers accounts of the discussion on the Atlantic Pact which took place yesterday in the Senate. We have now had time to study the full text in the record which we are sending you by bag together with a covering letter.

2. In the meantime you may be interested in the following impressions:

(A) The debate was impromptu and it seems clear that several Senators spoke without very much thought regarding the exact meaning of what they were saying, still less its repercussions abroad;

(B) The most important fact is that Vandenberg tried to minimise the extent to which the United States was committed to take action under the Rio Treaty and went on to insist that a similar complete reservation concerning American decision to act must be made plain in the Atlantic Pact. He rested his case on the belief that "the mere formal recognition" of the community of interests of the Atlantic countries would be the best assurance against another war almost regardless of the form which the wording took;

(C) Connally’s intervention was lamentable and served only to make matters infinitely worse. Senator Borah himself could hardly have done better with his remarks, cautioning the United States against playing the rôle of Sir Galahad and plunging into war every time a gun was fired and similar insanities such as "letting European nations declare war and letting us fight";

(D) The voices of Lodge and Knowland were the only ones of the half-dozen speakers raised in opposition to all this negative emphasis.

2. No. 939 of 15th February

My telegram No. 938.

Senate debate on North Atlantic Pact.

While the debate, coming as it did on top of the Norwegian affairs, is unfortunate in that it may still further delay matters and, while we may regret some of the remarks made in the Senate, more especially by Senator Connally, we should not, I think take matters too tragically, nor feel that the debate in any way implied that Congress was opposed to the principle of a closer association, in some form of pact, between the United States and the countries of Western Europe. The debate will certainly have the effect of making Acheson redouble his efforts to push on with his talks with the Senators and speed up the business of reaching agreement with the Ambassadors in Washington on the actual text of the pact. I think (and in this both my Netherlands and Belgian colleagues agree) that it would be a mistake for the Brussels Governments to say anything to the State Department about the debate and that we ought to do what we can to persuade our own newspapers to adopt an attitude of restraint—a line which I see from your telegram 1550 you are already taking in London.

2. There was bound to be a rambling debate of this sort in the Senate some time and although, as I have reported, there has been surprisingly little opposition to the idea of the pact from the press and public opinion as a whole, it does involve a very radical reversal of traditional United States policy and, in view of the amount of publicity it has recently attracted, it is only natural that some of the Senators should have been inquisitive and dubious about its proposed terms.

3. The State Department have, during the Washington discussions, repeatedly referred to the necessity for carrying the Senate along with them at all stages of the negotiations but I am afraid the plain fact is that they have made a bad job of doing so. During December and January, Lovett said on several occasions that he was in close touch with Senate leaders and, after
a morning spent by Bohlen and himself in mid-January on Capitol Hill, the State Department assured us that everything had gone well and that Senate leaders seemed quite happy about the broad implications of the draft treaty. It seems doubtful, however, whether the State Department can have consulted the Senators in any detail about the actual provisions of the treaty or whether they took Connally into their confidence.

4. At all events, it was only after Acheson came into office and started discussing matters with Connally and Vandenberg that we heard of objection by the two Senators to the wording of Article 5. Connally has undoubtedly been more awkward than Vandenberg. He is of course a man of lesser calibre and may not fully understand the issues involved. But I suspect that he is jealous of Vandenberg and disposed to be difficult about the North Atlantic Pact on the grounds that it derives largely from the Vandenberg resolution. He would also no doubt like to establish a position for himself as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee comparable to that previously held by Vandenberg and is no doubt anxious to assert his own independence and that of the Senate vis-à-vis the State Department and the new Secretary of State. The fact, too, that he is an old man and naturally conservative may make him genuinely hesitant about the idea of "entangling alliances."

5. I think Vandenberg's attitude is somewhat different. He undoubtedly wants a strong pact and I am not too worried about what he said yesterday in the Senate. It is part of his technique, if he wants something badly, to avoid showing his feelings too obviously in the early stages. He may have felt yesterday that he would only have stultified his position had he disclosed his full support for the Pact.

6. However that may be, and unwise though it is to make predictions, I think that, as I said above, it would be wrong to be too disturbed by the debate. But I think the debate will encourage the Senators to continue their opposition to a reference to "military action" and that they may insist that Article 5 should state clearly that each Government should decide for itself what action it will take in the event of an attack. Acheson will no doubt do what he can to persuade the Senators to modify their attitude. I am afraid, however, that, in the light of the debate, the Senators may be hard to shift and that we may well be asked by Acheson to submit to our Governments a revised text on the lines desired by the Senators.

3. No. 965 of 16th February

   My telegram No. 498: North Atlantic Pact.

   When I saw Acheson to-day in connexion with the signing of the Anglo-American Consular Convention, he spoke to me for a few minutes about the North Atlantic Pact and, in particular, about the formula for Article 5 suggested publicly by Senator Connally (at, as we know, the instigation of the State Department). He asked me what I thought of this revised text.

2. I explained that I had no idea what your views or those of the other interested Governments on the Connally text would be. I could, therefore, only speak entirely personally. Acheson then asked what I thought of the insertion of the words "as it may deem necessary" in place of the words "as may be necessary" in arguing that, since it was everywhere agreed that the decision as to what action individual Governments should in practice take would in fact always be taken by those individual Governments themselves, it was difficult to maintain that this should not be spelled out in the Article. Acheson will no doubt do what he can to persuade the Senators to modify their attitude. I am afraid, however, that, in the light of the debate, the Senators may be hard to shift and that we may well be asked by Acheson to submit to our Governments a revised text on the lines desired by the Senators.

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the one form of action which the United States Government did not contemplate taking was military. It was, in my view, most important that it should be made clear to the world at large that in fact the parties to the treaty were prepared, in certain eventualities, to consider taking military action.

3. Acheson then asked if it would make things any easier if the word "forthwith" were to be re-inserted. I told him that while I would welcome this, I did not regard it as of great importance. Certainly it would not make up for the omission of "military or other." I made it clear, that the Article must be regarded as a whole and that the individual phrases could not be dealt with piecemeal. We did not discuss the alterations proposed by Connally in the earlier part of the Article.

4. Later in the day the French Ambassador summoned a meeting of the Brussels Powers representatives. After giving the latter an account of what had transpired during the Norwegian Foreign Minister’s visit to London, for which they were very grateful, I told them of my conversation with Acheson. They seemed generally to agree with the line which I had taken and to feel that the Connally text was open to grave objection. In addition to the points I had made with Acheson, they clearly attached importance to retention of first passage of original Article 5 and of reference to assisting the parties attacked. It was decided to ask Acheson to summon an early meeting of the seven, at which it was hoped he would be able to give the considered views of the United States Government on Article 5. It was agreed, however, that it would be a mistake to cause Acheson any embarrassment in his discussions with the Senators and that it should be made clear to him that we did not want to press for an immediate discussion of Article 5 if he thought this would make things more difficult, and that we should be ready, if he preferred, to discuss other topics, such as Italy.

5. On the latter point, it was generally agreed, in view of Acheson’s remarks to the Norwegian Foreign Minister, that a firm effort should be made to extract from him a definite statement of the American views on the admission of Italy. Incidentally, it became apparent that the French Ambassador was still under the impression that it was definitely agreed at the Consultative Council that the Brussels Powers should now take initiative in withdrawing their opposition to Italy’s admission. He agreed that there was a good deal of misunderstanding over what had actually happened at the Consultative Council and will, I think, ask Paris to try and clear matters up.

ANNEX II

ATLANTIC PACT

ALTERNATIVE DRAFTS OF ARTICLE 5

(a) As drafted by last meeting of Ambassadorial Committee

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all, and consequently that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking forthwith such military or other action, individually and in concert with the other Parties, as may be necessary to restore and assure the security of the North Atlantic area.

(b) As subsequently modified by State Department to meet the Senators’ preliminary objections

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual and collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking action, individually and in concert with the other parties, to restore and assure the security of the North Atlantic area.
(c) As now proposed by Senator Connally

In the event of armed attack on another nation signatory to the Treaty, a party to the Treaty, in exercise of the right of collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will, individually or in concert with other parties, take such measures as it may deem necessary to maintain security of the North Atlantic area.

(d) Possibly acceptable compromise

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking, in accordance with its own constitutional processes, such military or other action, individually and in concert with the other parties, as it may deem necessary to maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.