

## **Canadian Participation in the Tripartite Talks and the Beginnings of the North Atlantic Treaty**

Over time Canada has grown from a Dominion dependant upon Britain to a mature state that committed its economic and military support to the defence of Western Europe. Canada actively shaped and participated in a revolutionary new multilateral collective defence agreement between North America and Europe. The events of the Second World War, and the beginning of the Cold War period changed Canada from a passive observer of international events to an active participant. These conditions motivated Louis St. Laurent to articulate the guiding principles of Canada's new foreign policy. The British proposal of an Atlantic pact gave Canada its first opportunity to translate these stated goals into action.

The Second World War was the catalyst which allowed Canada to evolve its foreign policy from that of the 1930's, which was one of non-commitment, even to our then-closest ally, Britain, to pushing for the establishment of a multilateral collective defence agreement guaranteeing the safety of Western Europe. World War II had a tremendous impact on the psyche of the Canadian people and on the diplomats and politicians representing them in the world:

Mackenzie King, Louis St. Laurent, Brooke Claxton, and Lester Pearson, who were responsible for this decision, had lived through two world wars. They were convinced that Canada could not escape being an active belligerent in a third world war. They believed that the first and second world wars would not have broken out if Germany had known that it would eventually face a coalition... and that the way to prevent a third world war was to convince Stalin that in such a war he would face from the outset an even stronger coalition..."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Escott Reid. *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 229.

The general lesson that the war had taught Canadians was that it was better to firmly confront aggression early to prevent a war from being forced upon them later. The public sentiments of English and French Canada were in favour of military commitments abroad, a new development that Canadian diplomats were quick to seize on and build upon.<sup>2</sup>

The development of the Cold War also had a profound impact on Canadians and the international institutions that Canadians were helping to construct and beginning to value. To the frustration of Canadian diplomats, the new realities of the Cold War saw the emergence of deadlock in the United Nations Security Council, due to vetoes by the competing superpowers. This largely rendered the collective security aspects of the organization impotent.<sup>3</sup> It was becoming increasingly obvious to Canada that the United Nations could not guarantee its security nor prevent the outbreak of a third world war into which Canada would certainly be drawn.

The realities of the bi-polar world precluded the option of neutrality. Canada would be firmly in the American camp for the duration of the Cold War, for “...there was never any serious question about Canada’s international alignment. History, geography, culture, economics, military strategy and political tradition – all interwove Canada’s fate with that of the United States and its principal allies.”<sup>4</sup>

While Prime Minister Attlee of Great Britain officially put the notion of a regional security pact forward, all three nations that were to participate in the talks had their own ideas as to the size, scope, and principles of what this security pact should be.

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<sup>2</sup> Diplomats like Escott Reid were already presenting speeches in the summer of 1947 on the subject of a regional security organization. Reid, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid*, 222.

<sup>3</sup> Hector Mackenzie, “Canada, the Cold War and the Negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty,” *Diplomatic Documents and Their Users*, eds., John Hilliker and Mary Halloran, (Ottawa, 1995) 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Canadian diplomats had the chance to formalize defence co-operation between itself and its two great allies and the added challenge of trying to make the outline of the security agreement meet the standards of Canada's newly minted foreign policy principles.

Canada's concept of what the future security agreement should comprise was largely based on a series of speeches by then-Secretary of State for External Affairs Louis St. Laurent, which culminated in his Gray Lecture. This speech was critical to Canadian participation in the tripartite talks, for it outlined the future of Canadian foreign policy and Canada's values and objectives therein.

Canada's overarching objective for the talks can be considered as an attempt to make the future North Atlantic Treaty fit the template offered by St. Laurent in his Gray Speech. As mentioned earlier, the idea of a collective defence agreement with the United States and Western Europe did not jeopardize the national unity of Canada, St. Laurent's primary concern in conducting the foreign relations of the country. He stated, "No policy can be regarded as wise which divides the people whose effort and resources must put it into effect... The role of this country in world affairs will prosper only as we maintain this principle, for a disunited Canada will be a powerless one."<sup>5</sup> The reason for the North Atlantic Treaty, protecting liberal democratic Western Europe from Soviet aggression, adequately met St. Laurent's second requirement in the Gray Speech: political liberty. "We believe that the greatest safeguard against the aggressive policies of any government is the freely expressed judgement of its own people... It means equally that we have

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<sup>5</sup> Louis St. Laurent, *The Foundation of Canadian Policy in World Affairs*, (Toronto: University of Toronto 1947).

realized that a threat to the liberty of Western Europe, where our political ideas were nurtured, was a threat to our own way of life.”<sup>6</sup>

Canada would attempt to and in many ways succeed in influencing the drafting of the treaty to reflect the spirit of St. Laurent’s third requirement for Canadian foreign policy: the rule of law in international affairs. Canada was instrumental and firm in advancing clear and substantive language into the treaty’s text that bound members to their pledges in the fashion of international law: “...we authorized Wrong to tell the State Department that a weak pledge would reduce the treaty ‘almost to the level of a Kellogg-Briand peace pact’ and that if there were no satisfactory pledge in the treaty, ‘we might have to re-examine our whole position...’”<sup>7</sup> Numerous references to the United Nations were eventually worked into the text in an effort to grant the treaty increased legitimacy under international law. Canadian diplomats also added socio-economic elements into the treaty, which reflected the values of Western civilization as stated by St. Laurent, constituting his fourth principle in guiding foreign policy. Canada always endeavoured to make the spirit of the North Atlantic Treaty more than a mere defence pact, but a collective security agreement with nations being charged to uphold social principals and increasing trade between the participants. Many Canadian diplomats hoped that by inserting socio-economic elements into it, the treaty would form the basis of an eventual community of nations reflecting St. Laurent’s stated ideas.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Canada set out to accept the mantle of international responsibility by participating in the talks for the creation of the North Atlantic Alliance to conclude the basic principles set out by St.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Reid, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid*, 234.

<sup>8</sup> Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Volume 2, 1947-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 44.

Laurent. He asserted, “If there is one conclusion that our common experience has led us to accept, it is that security for this country lies in the development of a firm structure of international organization.”<sup>9</sup> The treaty represented Canada’s first formal peacetime overseas military commitment.

The British goal for initiating the tripartite talks was to organize an “Atlantic Pact”, which would include the United States and Canada, as a form of deterrence against Soviet aggression. The immediate objective of the British was to have the Americans first make an immediate military commitment to the existing Brussels Treaty, given to the pressure Britain felt it was under with a recent Communist coup in Czechoslovakia and Soviet pressures on Norway. After the formation of the Atlantic Pact, the British envisioned a second Mediterranean Pact to facilitate expected American security concerns for that region.

The United States entered the tripartite talks hesitant to violate American tradition and commit to “entangling alliances”. The Americans were only willing to offer presidential security guarantees to Europe, to avoid having to deal with the issue of pushing the potential treaty through Congress and the Senate. The United States believed in the “eventual extension of the Brussels Treaty to Scandinavia and other Western European countries upon the assumption that some further assurance of American support would be forthcoming.”<sup>10</sup> Some diplomats in the United States also argued that formal involvement of North America in a Western European security agreement might hinder future American hopes for the potential development of a “United States of

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<sup>9</sup> St. Laurent, *The Foundation of Canadian Policy in World Affairs*.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Henderson, *The Birth of NATO* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 16.

Western Europe”.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the United States wanted to include countries outside the Atlantic region such as Turkey, Iran, and in particular, Italy. The Americans were adverse to the idea of moving beyond a military alliance into the realm of collective security; however, they were interested in extending their sphere of influence as far as possible.

Canada’s hopes for the tripartite talks were quite contrary to those of the United States. In the words of L.B. Pearson, “Here it is essential to remember that the purpose of the pact is to rally the spiritual as well as the military and economic resources of Western Christendom against Soviet totalitarianism.”<sup>12</sup> Canada would be pursuing a strictly Atlantic Pact, which excluded many of the states the Americans were interested in, specifically Italy. Canada did not want to extend its military commitment to too many nations too far abroad for reasons of logic (Italy’s lack of borders on the Atlantic), and efficiency, along with Prime Minister King’s habitual wariness to military commitments.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this Atlantic Security Pact would have to meet St. Laurent’s second principle (political liberty), that only democratic states should be able to join.<sup>14</sup>

Canada also differed from the United States and Britain in that it was more focused on the long term goals of the security agreement, and not a rapid response to Soviet expansion. “Pearson believed that a collective defence scheme was justified on

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<sup>11</sup> This view was attributed to Hickerson. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1948, Volume III, Western Europe* (Washington, 1974), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Hector Mackenzie, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations [DCER], Volume 14, 1948* (Ottawa, 1994) pp.432

<sup>13</sup> While this statement is not directly supported by this source, Dr. Mackenzie does sum up the general behaviour of King to overseas commitments, which comes into play throughout the talks. Mackenzie, “Canada, the Cold War and the Negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty,” 10.

<sup>14</sup> Portugal was especially important to United States defence plans due to its possession of the Azores Islands, an important link between North America and Europe. Henderson, *The Birth of NATO*, 48-110.

broader grounds and should have a positive and not merely a negative purpose.”<sup>15</sup> The major Canadian concern was the incorporation of economic cooperation clauses into the agreement, which would eventually take the form of Article 2 in the Atlantic Alliance draft. For this reason, Canada hoped to expand the basis for the treaty from simply Article 51 under the United Nations Charter to include Article 56 as well. Article 2, later to be dubbed “the Canadian Clause,” was not supported by Britain and was opposed by the United States.

The initial tripartite talks opened on March 22, 1948 in Washington D.C. in the form of six meetings concluding on April 1 of that year. Chief amongst the concerns were that of security and secrecy, and the understanding between the parties that the talks were not binding them to a commitment, but were simply exploring the concept of a regional security pact as a means to deter Soviet aggression.<sup>16</sup> Secrecy was important not only as an effort to prevent an affront to the sensibilities of potential signatories to the future treaty, particularly France, but also to prevent the possible interference of the Soviet Union were they to find out. Ironically one of the British representatives, Donald Maclean, was providing the Soviets with a constant flow of information regarding the progress of the talks. This may have actually had a pacifying effect on the Soviet Union, for it assured them that the proposed pact was defensive in nature, and that they were not threatened by any immediate attacks from the West.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the conflicts that Canada waged with the United States and the United Kingdom over the initial negotiations for the North Atlantic Treaty were consequences of

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<sup>15</sup> Henderson, *The Birth of NATO*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> *FRUS, 1948, Volume III, Western Europe* (Washington, 1974), 58-72.

<sup>17</sup> Escott Reid, “*Time of Fear and Hope*,” (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977). 80.

Canada's attempt to impose its values on the nature of the agreement in an effort to preserve its newly minted foreign policy principles. The first meeting demonstrated that the United States did not want to commit itself to any binding agreements. The Americans simply wanted to guarantee US support to Western European nations through presidential decree. One of the major motivations for this was that President Truman wanted to avoid problems with securing support from Congress, which would be needed to cement any formal treaties.<sup>18</sup> The Americans hoped presidential assurances would be enough to deter the Soviets, and be an effective way around Congress.

This lack of real commitment was not acceptable to either Canada or Britain. Therefore, the meetings were designed to appear to be an American initiative for later presentation to the US Congress. Under combined Canadian and British pressure, and despite contrary efforts from the State Department, American representatives were to concede the point that their nation would have to enter into a binding agreement and that verbal guarantees would not be enough.<sup>19</sup> The agreement of the United States to sign on to a regional security pact was the major hurdle of the initial tripartite talks for Canada. Additionally, still other questions regarding the nature of the treaty needed to be addressed.

Canada was instrumental in influencing the size of the regional pact. As mentioned previously, Canada did not want the future security organization to expand outside the Atlantic region. Canada was concerned that nations from regions around the world, such as South America and Australia, would try to become members of the security agreement to gain institutionalized American defence support in the event of

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<sup>18</sup> *FRUS, 1948, Volume III, Western Europe* (Washington, 1974), 60.

<sup>19</sup> Hector Mackenzie, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations [DCER], Volume 14, 1948* (Ottawa, 1994) 456.

aggression.<sup>20</sup> However, Canada did want the regional security pact to include all the territories of the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, as Canada wanted to protect its Arctic Islands from Soviet interference. Additionally, Canada wanted Denmark in the treaty so that Greenland could be included as well. American minutes of the meetings make reference to questions regarding these Canadian concerns: “Could Greenland be included if reference were made only to “metropolitan territories” of the parties... it was agreed that Alaska and Greenland would have to be covered...”<sup>21</sup> Canada was able to successfully limit the size of the regional security agreement to meet the country’s abilities to successfully contribute to the future treaty and to address its own security concerns.

Canada’s other major concern was to stop the envisioned treaty from becoming just another military alliance: “...I stated that more than once that the document should not be exclusively military in character and that there were economic and even spiritual defences against communist attack which should not be overlooked.”<sup>22</sup>

Canada forced the issue of economic cooperation to be included in the treaty due to the domestic politics of the country, and the fact that Canada was disproportionately dependent on international trade.<sup>23</sup> The inclusion of economic cooperation was anathema to the American representatives because of the trouble this would cause with Congress. However, Canada was nevertheless successful in getting the United States and the British to agree to introduce this clause into the eventual North Atlantic Treaty. This can be seen

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp.456.

<sup>21</sup> *FRUS, 1948, Volume III, Western Europe* (Washington, 1974), 67.

<sup>22</sup> Mackenzie, *Documents on Canadian External Relations [DCER], Volume 14, 1948*, 462.

<sup>23</sup> Mackenzie, “Canada, the Cold War and the Negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty,” 3.

as a limited success for Canada and an acknowledgment of its contribution during the talks.

Unfortunately for Canadian diplomats, during the actual North Atlantic Treaty negotiations this article was marginalized by other powers (especially the UK), and Canada was unable to make what would become Article 2 a truly functional part of the North Atlantic Treaty. “Article 2 remained virtually a dead letter for substance action on economic matters... The reality is that the spirit to implement the economic aspects of Article 2 was *never* there and that an economic basis for the realization of its larger political goal was never created.”<sup>24</sup>

Canadian participation in the top-secret tripartite talks resulted in a qualified success for Canadian foreign policy. Canada was able to help shape the draft of the North Atlantic Alliance in a matter that made it compatible with the previously stated Canadian foreign policy goals of St. Laurent’s Gray Lecture. The result of the tripartite talks was that the United States was on the verge on agreeing to sign on to a regional collective defence agreement under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter before the official talks over the North Atlantic Treaty began. But this almost did not happen.

The US State Department was never keen on the idea of committing the United States to a regional collective defence pact. The State Department’s goal was to extend implied American support to countries in the Mediterranean and the Middle East as well as the Atlantic, but at the same time limit the scale and conditions of the commitment so that the US might choose when, where, and how to intervene in the event of a crisis with the Soviet Union. The State Department wanted as much freedom of action as possible.

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<sup>24</sup> Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Volume 2, 1947-1957*, 66.

Additionally, the United States felt that the Europeans should be contributing more to their own defence and stop relying so heavily on American military support. After the conclusion of the tripartite talks, but before the official talks began, the State Department was preparing to scuttle or at least drastically alter the character of the treaty's draft for the future North Atlantic Alliance. It was during this time that Canada was able to once again exercise its influence on the United States in an effort to make it more agreeable to Canada's goals for the Atlantic Alliance in the form of a speech given by St. Laurent:

The formation of such a defensive group of free states would not be a counsel of despair but a message of hope... the western European democracies are not beggars asking for our charity. They are allies whose assistance we need in order to be able successfully to defend ourselves and our beliefs. Canada and the United States need the assistance of the western European democracies just as they need ours... On this basis and pending the strengthening of the United Nations, we should be willing to associate ourselves with other free states in any appropriate collective security arrangements which may be worked out under Article 51 or 52 of the Charter."<sup>25</sup>

Both the United States and Britain saw this as an example of Canada's growing participation and leadership in international affairs. The effect of the speech was that it caused the proposed regional collective security agreement to gain the support of George Kennan, a powerful member of the State Department.<sup>26</sup> Kennan's political goal was to see a closer political union between all western democracies, and he did not wish for the United States to "...place ourselves in the position of being the obstacle to further progress..." in the accomplishment of such a goal.<sup>27</sup> The State Department decided to allow the official negotiations to go ahead as planned in the tripartite talks.

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<sup>25</sup> Henderson, *The Birth of NATO*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Reid, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid*, 232.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

Due to the top-secret nature of the talks, only Britain and the United States (and the Soviet Union) knew about Canadian participation in the tripartite talks. It should be of note that Canada was beginning to earn a reputation with both the United States and Britain due to the negotiations. Some American diplomats were not happy with the Canadian approach to diplomacy consultation. To Dean Acheson, Canadian diplomats were “moralistic” and “interfering”.<sup>28</sup> Lester B. Pearson also recounts a personal encounter with another American political heavyweight, John Foster Dulles, “You Canadians [he almost sneered] are always complaining that we never consult you about our policies.”<sup>29</sup> While America was annoyed with the conduct of Canadian foreign policy, it did win praise from the British. Some British representatives at the negotiations, whom had to work with Canadian diplomats to get Washington to agree to a collective security agreement, stated that, “the Canadians moved forward with the courage that they were to display throughout the negotiations.”<sup>30</sup>

The global situation that resulted from the end of the Second World War allowed Canada to become a more active and independent member in the world. The country was beginning to advocate its goals and views at the highest levels on the world stage, and was working to see them implemented. Canada was instrumental in bringing about the agreement for a collective defence organization linking North America to Western Europe. As Louis St. Laurent said, “...we must play a role in world affairs in keeping with the ideals and sacrifices of the young men... of this country who went to war. However great or small that role may be we must play it creditably. We must act with

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<sup>28</sup> Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Volume 2, 1947-1957*, 68.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Henderson, *The Birth of NATO*, xi.

maturity and consistency, and with a sense of responsibility.”<sup>31</sup> Throughout the tripartite talks, Canada worked to follow St. Laurent’s policy objectives and was able to sway the British, and to a much greater extent, the United States, to make the North Atlantic Treaty consistent with these objectives.

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<sup>31</sup> St. Laurent, *The Foundation of Canadian Policy in World Affairs*.

