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On 22 January 1948, Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, gave an address in the House of Commons in which he denounced the Soviet threat. He affirmed his resolve to develop Britain's cooperation with France and the Benelux countries within a Western Union.

A few days later, the coup d'état in Prague on 25 February 1948, in which the Communists took power in Czechoslovakia by force, heightened the climate of international tension and danger that prevailed during the Cold War. On 17 March 1948, in Brussels, five countries signed the Treaty establishing Western Union, which aimed no longer merely to guard against a potential German threat but to prevent any armed aggression in Europe.

This treaty was amended by the Paris Agreements of 23 October 1954, founding Western European Union (WEU) shortly after the failure of the proposed European Defence Community (EDC).

The five European signatories to the Brussels Pact soon realised that alone they would be incapable of mounting any effective resistance to an attack from the USSR.

On 11 June 1948, the US Congress passed the Vandenberg resolution, which put an end to American isolationism by authorising the United States to be involved in international alliances even in peacetime. This paved the way for the Atlantic Alliance. On 4 April 1949, twelve Foreign Ministers signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, thereby establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The Five of Western Union were joined by the United States, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway and Portugal.

The creation of a Euro-American alliance was strongly contested by Communists across the world. Negotiations on the North Atlantic Treaty were marred by threats and barely veiled intimidation from the Kremlin towards the Western powers. But the climate of fear surrounding the ratification of the accession treaties by the Western Parliaments only served to speed up the process. The North Atlantic Treaty came into force on 23 August 1949 and established a transatlantic framework for the defence of Western Europe.

In 1953, the new US President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles extended the Truman Doctrine by introducing the 'rollback' policy, which aimed not merely to contain Communism but to actively drive it back. This required the formation of military alliances with countries threatened by Communist expansion. The early 1950s were characterised by a phenomenon termed 'pactomania'. Several treaties similar to the North Atlantic Treaty were signed: the ANZUS Treaty (Australia, New Zealand and the United States) in 1951, SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation) in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact in 1955.

The USSR responded in 1955 with the creation of the Warsaw Pact. Following the FRG's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty on 9 May 1955, the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe also united to form a military alliance. The members of this mutual defence pact to counter aggression were the USSR, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Poland and Romania.