The North Atlantic Treaty

Although the failure of the Berlin blockade demonstrated American ability to counter Soviet moves, the events of 1948 and earlier clearly indicated that stronger measures were needed to block any further extension of Communist power. Besides attempting the blockade, the Soviet Union brought Czechoslovakia into its orbit when the Communists overthrew the legal government in February. In Greece the civil war still raged, while in Asia the Communist armies of Mao Tse-tung by November controlled all of China north of the Yangtze River. Korea had become a divided nation with a Communist regime in power north of the 38th parallel. Moreover, the Soviet Union still maintained a huge land army in Europe and Soviet industry was still geared to the production of armaments. In the face of this the West had no other choice than to rearm for collective security.

A beginning toward collective security in Europe was made in early 1948 when the Low Countries, England, and France signed a treaty of mutual economic and military assistance. This was followed by Senate authorization to enter into defensive alliances and give military assistance to countries joining with the United States in preserving peace. This action cleared the way for the United States to join with Canada and the powers of Western Europe in a defensive alliance. This pact, called the North Atlantic Treaty, united Great Britain, the United States, and 10 western European nations in a common security system. Approved by the Senate in April 1949, the treaty provided for mutual assistance, including the use of armed force in the event of attack upon one or more of the signatory powers. To make the treaty an effective instrument rather than a paper agreement, the member nations established a supreme military headquarters in Europe under the command of General Eisenhower to organize and plan the defense of western Europe and its approaches. Each country earmarked forces to be placed under this command, which received the title of Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe. It marked the first time in modern history that nations, during time of peace, provided a military force in being to support their alliance.