04.04.49 - The North Atlantic Treaty is signed in Washington, in the framework of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States.

18.02.52 - Greece and Turkey become members of NATO.

06.05.55 - The Federal Republic of Germany becomes a member of NATO.

13.12.56 - The North Atlantic Council adopts a report on improving and extending non-military cooperation between member countries.


01.08.75 - The signature of the CSCE Helsinki Final Act by 35 nations marks the beginning of a new process designed to increase confidence and mutual understanding among European countries and their allies and to protect human rights.

12.12.79 - NATO announces its “double-track” decision on theatre nuclear force modernisation and parallel and complementary arms control initiatives.

30.05.82 - Spain becomes the sixteenth member of NATO.

10.06.82 - In the Bonn Declaration NATO governments declare that “none of our weapons will ever be used except in response to attack”.

19.09.86 - Adoption of the “Stockholm Document” on confidence and security-building measures by CSCE member countries.

08.12.87 - The signature of the Washington Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces between the USSR and the USA eliminates an entire category of forces on a global basis.

09.03.89 - Opening of negotiations in Vienna between the 23 countries of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation and NATO to reduce conventional forces in Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural; and simultaneously, negotiations between all 35 CSCE members on a new set of confidence and security-building measures.

30.05.89 - NATO publishes a Summit Declaration on the role and future functions of the Alliance and a Comprehensive Concept of Arms Control and Disarmament.

09.11.89 - Opening of the Berlin Wall.

08.06.90 - NATO Foreign Ministers issue a “Message from Turnberry” in which they express their determination to seize the historic opportunities resulting from the profound changes in Europe and extend to the Soviet Union and all other European countries the hand of friendship and cooperation.

06.07.90 - In the London Summit Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, NATO governments announce major steps to bring East-West confrontation to an end, including further arms control initiatives and a fundamental review of NATO strategy. They invite the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern European countries to establish regular diplomatic liaison with NATO and to work towards a new relationship based on cooperation.

03.10.90 - Unification of Germany.

19.11.90 - States participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) issue a Charter of Paris for a New Europe and endorse an agreement on a substantial number of new confidence and security-building measures. The signature in Paris of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe introduces major reductions in the conventional forces and military equipment of NATO and Warsaw Pact countries. A joint declaration on peaceful relations is signed.
November 1989 sees the opening of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

At the London Summit Meeting of July 1990 the Heads of State and Government of NATO countries declared: “Today, our Alliance begins a major transformation”

The Washington Treaty of April 1949 brought into being an Alliance of independent sovereign countries with a common interest in maintaining peace and freedom. Consultation and cooperation in political, military and other fields enable them to pool their resources in order to preserve their common security.

The transformation of the political map of Europe since the end of the 1980s has its roots in a number of earlier developments which were to have far-reaching implications. Three such developments during the 1960s and the 1970s became turning points for the Alliance: the adoption in December 1967 of the Harmel Doctrine based on the parallel policies of maintaining adequate defence while seeking a relaxation of tensions in East-West relations; the “Ostpolitik” of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany introduced by Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1969, designed to bring about a more positive relationship with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; and the adoption in Helsinki, in August 1975, of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which was to establish a set of general principles on which relations between all CSCE member states should be based, new standards for human rights and measures to increase mutual confidence between East and West.

Similarly important events marked the course of East-West relations during the 1980s: the implementation of NATO’s 1979 “double-track” decision on intermediate-range nuclear force modernisation and arms control; the resulting Washington Treaty signed in 1987, which provided for the elimination of land-based, intermediate-range nuclear forces on a global basis; early signs of change in Eastern Europe associated with the emergence of the Polish independent trade union movement “Solidarity”; the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989; and the reform of Soviet society, political institutions and foreign relations which followed the 1985 nomination of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

Europe has entered a new era. The unification of Germany on 3 October 1990 marked the end of the 40 year long division of Europe. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are determining their own political and social structures and are embarked on the difficult transition to a new economic system. The Soviet Union itself is facing hard choices as it confronts the pressing need for far-reaching political, economic and social reforms.

NATO is pursuing its role as an agent of change and helping to build the structures of a united continent by enhancing its political role in accordance with the aims of the North Atlantic Treaty. Cooperation based on greater freedom and democracy has replaced competition and ideological confrontation. The allies, adversaries and victims of former wars and divisions in Europe are witnessing new beginnings.

Manfred Wörner, NATO’s Secretary General, being greeted by Mikhail Gorbachev during his visit to Moscow on 14 July 1990.
The North Atlantic Alliance approached its fortieth anniversary in April 1989 amid growing evidence that a process of fundamental change had begun in Central and Eastern Europe. Against this background, the Summit Declaration and the Comprehensive Concept of Arms Control and Disarmament, published by the Alliance a few weeks later, clearly set out NATO's future goals. The next twelve months witnessed developments of major significance for international relations, symbolised above all by the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989.

When NATO Heads of State and Government held their London Summit Meeting in July 1990, they were able to announce major steps to transform the Alliance and bring East-West confrontation to an end. They also proposed that the member countries of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation jointly issue a formal declaration on peaceful relations.

The Alliance invited the Soviet President and representatives of the other Central and Eastern European countries to come to Brussels to address the North Atlantic Council and to establish regular diplomatic liaison with NATO. The Secretary General of NATO, Manfred Wöhrer, visited Moscow to convey these proposals, and above all the Alliance's message of friendship and cooperation, to the Soviet leadership.

The London Declaration met with an immediate and positive response and a few days later the Soviet Union announced its acceptance of full membership of a united Germany in the North Atlantic Alliance after unification of the two German states. The following months saw further new developments involving free multi-party elections and moves towards democratic forms of government in Central and Eastern Europe and an intensification of contacts with the West. All the countries concerned designated points of diplomatic contact with NATO, principally through their embassies in Brussels.

Government leaders and military personalities from the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union have visited NATO Headquarters. NATO's Secretary General has, in turn, visited Central and Eastern European capitals to meet government and parliamentary representatives. A new dialogue has begun. Europe is indeed being transformed.
Rethinking Defence

The political and military changes in Europe have major implications for NATO strategy and the common defence of the member countries of the Alliance. The positive trend in East-West relations, the demise of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation as a cohesive military entity and the conclusion of unprecedented arms control agreements enable NATO to transform its defence structure.

The tasks of military forces are being redefined to enable them to fulfil a defensive role no longer determined simply by specific military risks. Threats to European security arise less from a likelihood of deliberate aggression against Allied territory by former adversaries than from the unpredictable strategic consequences of instability in times of political and economic upheaval. The Alliance will therefore place greater reliance on smaller, more mobile and flexible active forces and on its ability to reconstitute adequate forces for defence and deterrence in the event of a future crisis. In the process, levels of readiness and availability, as well as training requirements and the frequency of military exercises, are being reduced. Multinational formations will assume greater importance as a symbol of Allied solidarity.

A vigorous programme of complementary measures is also being pursued both in order to ensure that agreements reached thus far are fully implemented and to introduce further steps to enhance stability, openness and security. These measures include the prompt fulfilment of the Alliance’s arms control objectives; the intensification of military contacts between NATO and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; discussions on military forces and doctrines; and initiatives such as the “Open Skies” negotiations, designed to increase transparency by permitting overflights of national territory on a reciprocal basis.

The basic elements of NATO’s policies of defence and war prevention remain valid. The ultimate guarantee of peace depends on the maintenance of sufficient conventional and nuclear forces for the prevention of military conflict.

However, NATO will adapt its overall military strategy in a manner which reflects current realities and perceptions of risk, making nuclear forces truly weapons of last resort. Future negotiations will take account of the requirement for far fewer nuclear forces and in particular the diminished need for short-range nuclear weapons. The review of strategy also takes into consideration commitments entered into as a result of agreements to reduce conventional armed forces. The destruction of large numbers of weapons in accordance with the provisions of the CFE Treaty, and in particular the stringent verification requirements which it imposes, represents a new challenge. Although this is essentially a national obligation, extensive coordination also takes place within the Alliance, for example within the NATO Verification Coordination Committee. NATO's Infrastructure Programme as well as armaments cooperation and equipment transfers between member countries are also areas undergoing adaptation.
A new concept of European security is now emerging. While well-equipped and well-trained military forces will always be essential, change in Europe has highlighted the new significance of the political dimension of security. This places the emphasis on peacebuilding as well as peace-keeping. The concept of deterring a direct threat through largely military means is supplemented by cooperative measures to promote trust and transparency among all European nations and to organise military forces as much for crisis prevention and management as for direct defence. This concept involves:
- a reduced need for dense concentrations of military forces at a high level of readiness;
- a wider European framework for security encompassing the interests of all the countries concerned;
- full implementation and verification of arms control agreements;
- new conventional and nuclear arms control negotiations;
- further initiatives to increase confidence between States;
- reliable procedures for preventing conflict and for managing crises;
- regular exchange of information on political and military matters.

Each of the above represents a major focus of Alliance activity. European security nevertheless continues to be affected by political uncertainties, potential threats to stability and new global risks. The Soviet Union retains significant nuclear and conventional capabilities. Prudence requires that these be balanced, but

Forces from different NATO countries on exercise in Turkey.

A New Design for Security

The Soviet and United States Chiefs of Staff meet at NATO in October 1990 (left: General M.A. Moiseiev; right: General Colin Powell).
Four Key Elements

Four distinct but complementary elements ensure that the interests of all parties can be accommodated in Europe’s emerging political structures: the North Atlantic Alliance; European security cooperation; the Council of Europe and the CSCE process.

The Alliance is the framework, established in accordance with the United Nations Charter, for wide-ranging political, military, economic and scientific cooperation between sixteen European and North American democratic nations. It provides a unique collective security and defence structure based on an established partnership and community of values between the two sides of the Atlantic. By guaranteeing the transatlantic dimension of security, it ensures stability and effective defence against future risks from any quarter to the national security or territorial integrity of each of its member countries. It is thus able to provide a stable European environment in which democratic institutions can be firmly rooted.

The nature of the transatlantic partnership is undergoing change and the collective role of the European allies is assuming greater importance. The process of European integration, possibly including a common security policy, will strengthen the Alliance. At the same time it will require the Alliance to adapt its political and military structures to reflect new patterns of responsibility and leadership among the European and North American allies.

The Council of Europe, which is currently in the process of enlarging its membership, will play a key role in promoting democratic institutions, furthering social and cultural contacts and safeguarding human rights.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or CSCE, constitutes a forum for close political dialogue between all the countries of Europe and North America. CSCE Heads of State and Government held a Summit Meeting in Paris on 19-21 November 1990 at which major steps were taken to build on previous achievements and to give the CSCE a more prominent role in Europe’s future. The Treaty limiting conventional forces in Europe from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains was signed by the 22 nations of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation as a distinct but integral part of the CSCE process; similarly, a Joint Declaration issued by the 22 states solemnly declared that the signatories no longer regard each other as adversaries; a substantial agreement on Confidence and Security-Building Measures was endorsed by all 34 participating countries; and a Charter for a New Europe was signed, establishing, inter alia, a CSCE Secretariat in Prague, a Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna and an Office for Free Elections in Warsaw.

These measures, together with additional confidence and security-building provisions and new negotiations on European security, express the determination of participating states to make the best possible use of the CSCE process in order to enhance democracy, prosperity and stability.

* * *

Each of these four key elements has a vital role to fulfil in laying down solid foundations for a new European order, underpinned by the stability and security guaranteed by the North Atlantic Alliance. Thus NATO remains indispensable for four reasons. It provides the basis for a continuing political partnership between Europe and North America. It enables its sixteen member countries to coordinate their security needs in a manner which enables them to achieve, through collective defence, an adequate counterbalance to the military capacity of the Soviet Union and an insurance against other potential risks. It symbolises the political commitment of the United States and Canada to the future stability of Europe. And it stands for a community of values and basic interests which will continue to serve its member countries in a period of major political and military transformation.

CSCE Summit Meeting - Paris, November 1990.