

Oral History Interview
with
JOHN D. HICKERSON

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by Richard D. McKinzie, Harry S. Truman Library

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MCKINZIE: Ambassador Hickerson, I notice that you began your career in the State Department with posts mostly in Latin America, and that in 1930 you came into the Division of European Affairs. Is that a conscious choice on your part?

HICKERSON: Well, I came in a little earlier than that, the end of 1927 actually. I had served for nearly three years in Ottawa and I was brought into the--I'll call it European Bureau, they had

different names then. It's now the European Bureau and it's simpler to call it that. I came in to take the Canadian desk. They try to have in the geographic bureaus of the State Department on the country desks, officers that have had actual experience in that country. They knew their way around, all the leaders and things of that sort.

It was determined for me. The Latin American part was not particularly my idea. My first assignment was Vice-Consul at Tampico, Mexico. If they asked me to pick out a place that I didn't want to go to that would have been high up on my choice. One branch of my family had cattle ranch interests in Mexico, and I thought I knew something about it and I wanted to see something else.

I suppose the fact that I spoke Texas-Mexican Spanish may have had something to do with it. I learned Spanish from Mexican cotton pickers. I, picking cotton along with them on the farm. There were lumps in my grammar but I was fairly fluent.

MCKINZIE: Did you have at that time a particular interest in European affairs? Was that an ultimate career goal for you?

HICKERSON: In those days we were told where to go. They would make the best use of our talents and we'd take it and like it, and as a disciplined service do what we were told. But my real interests were, for some reason, in Europe.

My father raised cotton, had cotton gins, and bought and sold cotton on a small scale. I remember as a youngster having the Liverpool quotations from middling cotton at the breakfast table.

MCKINZIE: Most young men don't have that.

HICKERSON: And my interest was primarily there. I spent a good bit of my last years in the university preparing for the Foreign Service examination. I had majored in history in the university, minored in economics and had pointed toward the examinations. And I was interested in Europe. I hoped sometime to get there, and I got there through Canada.

MCKINZIE: You were the U.S. delegate to the joint U.S.-Canadian Defense Board.

HICKERSON: That was 1940. I still had the Canadian section then. By that time I had the entire British Commonwealth section in the European Bureau. But that board you mentioned was set up because it was one of President Roosevelt's ideas. The Joint Defense Board (U.S.-Canada) was quite effective. It was quite helpful to the administration and to the Canadians. We weren't in the war at that time, and didn't come in for about 15 months after that.

Incidentally, it has always seemed a little bit curious to me that international lawyers and historians haven't picked up the fact that the creation of that board was in itself a very interesting thing. The purpose was to work out defense plans for the northern half of the Western Hemisphere. Canada was at war and had an expeditionary force in England at the time. Under the rules of war, the Germans had the right to retaliate. What we, in effect, said to the Germans

was, "Okay, do your retaliating on their forces overseas, but don't you shoot up the North American continent or you're going to have us to reckon with," which I think was very sound policy and I was always in favor of it. But, I say, it was something of a phenomenon in international law.

MCKINZIE: I want to ask about the work of the European Bureau during the war. By the time that President Roosevelt died and President Truman was inaugurated, you surely were pretty deeply involved in a postwar planning and getting ready for the world after the war. I'm wondering what immediate effect President Roosevelt's death and President Truman's assumption of leadership might have had on your work, and your reactions to all that? I'm sure that everybody recalls a little bit about how he felt.

HICKERSON: Yes. Actually it had surprisingly little effect. Now, let me give you an illustration of that. Part of the planning was on the future United Nations Organization. Secretary [Cordell] Hull started that. He started it right after we got into the war. He started talks with congressional leaders and he set up a staff in the State Department working up plans. And he had the rest of the leaders right along with them. Of course, Secretary Hull had favored our joining the League of Nations, as did I as a young man. He wanted to carry the political leaders along with him so that he would get in, so there would be no doubt about it; not only because of the changed circumstances, but because he thought it was a good idea.

Then in 1944 we had the Dumbarton Oaks talks. Two stages: the first stage with the British and Soviets, and then the Soviets wouldn't talk with the Chinese because they didn't like Chiang Kai-shek. So we had a separate session covering the same ground, the British, the Chinese and ourselves. That was in 1944.

In '45, when the President died, we were deep in the preparations for the San Francisco UN Conference. The date had been set. President Truman took office and the first thing he did was send for Secretary [Edward R., Jr.] Stettinius, who was then Secretary of State, and say, "We want to go right ahead with this thing, everything just as planned." And we just went ahead. Now that is one illustration.

Another illustration. We had started talking to the British about cooperation, reduction of trade barriers etc. after the war; and those talks went right along just as if nothing had happened. The President said, "Full steam ahead on everything you were doing." And it's all the more interesting because of the fact that President Roosevelt had not kept Mr. Truman as well informed about what was going on as he should have. Indeed, that was one of the reasons why the National Security Act of 1947 was passed. You may remember that the Vice President under that is a standing member of the National Security Council.

We went right ahead; really we weren't conscious of any change.

MCKINZIE: Mr. Ambassador, you would not agree with the historians of recent day who have said that Mr. Truman didn't really come to grips with the full responsibilities of his office for a year or so?

HICKERSON: Oh, no. No, that isn't correct.

MCKINZIE: They normally cite cutting off lend-lease as an error in foreign policy . . .

HICKERSON: I think in retrospect it possibly was, but I think it was understandable at the time, because there were clamors about what we had done and all that sort of thing. Of course, there were many things that were done that we shouldn't have done. You can't blame all those on President Truman. We shouldn't have demobilized immediately. The Russians didn't, you know. And that caused part of our difficulty. To say that the President didn't take over fully ignores the fact that in that period he made the decision to test the atomic bomb out in New Mexico. He made the decision to drop the first atomic bomb; he went right ahead with the UN organization and all of those things.

Now, this is one reason why, in retrospect, we should not have stopped lend-lease. I don't think anybody on this side of the ocean realized the condition that Western Europe, including Great Britain, was going to be in after the war. There had been some damage in France; a little bombing damage in England; but all over the area the devastation was really nothing as compared with the disruption of their economic life.

Will Clayton, who was Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs at that time, made several trips to Europe. He made speeches about this, He was just appalled at what had happened there. Partnerships dissolved, one partner dead, the difficulty of getting things going again, the lack of capital, distribution systems completely messed up. Not only that, but the fact that so many people thought, and I did to a certain extent, that Russia had suffered enough that the Russians might, just might, in their own interests behave themselves for awhile. But they didn't. They didn't. I would remind you that in 1945, autumn, we got the first news of the Canadian spy thing. A little file clerk in the Soviet Embassy decided to defect and put his arms around all the files he could carry and went to the Canadians with them. That was September 1945.

Then, Stalin's speech at the conference of Communist parties in February 1946. All of that came along. Nobody could foresee that that was going to happen, that way, because of the commitments that Stalin had made during hostilities. And so the whole situation changed. Then, again, you have to take into account the drought in Europe in 1947, which really fathered the Marshall plan.

I think President Truman, taking everything into account, stepped right into the breach. He astonished a lot of people, including me, at his grasp of things--with so little preparation. By the way, I have heard it said that President Truman, as Vice President, did not know of the Manhattan project until after he became President.

MCKINZIE: I believe that's true.

HICKERSON: It was the best kept secret the U.S. Government ever had. I knew about it, but just in vague, general terms. But I didn't need to know and I wasn't curious.

I remember one time being at a joint State Department-military group talking about economic warfare. This was about '44 I guess, and somebody on our side--a State Department economist--mentioned the word "uranium" and a major general in our Army dropped and broke his coffee cup.

I have heard the story, I don't know whether it is true or not, but as an anecdote, that somebody quoted President Truman as saying, confirming that he didn't know about the Manhattan project, that to him Manhattan meant just two things: an island in the Hudson River that he didn't particularly admire, and a cocktail that he didn't like.

MCKINZIE: Mr. Ambassador, some historians are now writing that during the Johnson years, the United States tended to neglect Europe. Those same people are quite often inclined to say that the U.S. overemphasized Europe in 1945 to 1953. I put this to Dean Acheson in a short discussion two years ago and he said, "Well, yes, . . . that's where the Russians were,"

HICKERSON: Militant Russia. Now, listen, let me digress at this point a moment. I said a little earlier that some of us thought that the Russians had suffered so much. Their casualties, the devastation in their country was terrific. We thought there would be a breathing spell when they'd be trying to rebuild their country. That doesn't mean that I felt or that my colleagues felt that the Russians had been converted to Christianity and that they would permanently behave, but we thought it was so clearly in their interest.

MCKINZIE: In the course of this did you seriously consider the reconstruction loan to the Soviet Union?

HICKERSON: I wasn't in on that; but that was considered.

MCKINZIE: It was not something that went through your office?

HICKERSON: Oh, no. No, that wasn't. That was on a higher level. Averell Harriman wrote something about that. There was even talk of a large interest free loan I think I heard him say in a public speech, or read an article he wrote, that one time Molotov, who really was a so-and-so, he's alive--well, he still is a so-and-so if there ever was one--was in conversation with Harriman and brought this up and said, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador, the Soviet Union will be very glad to cooperate with the United States and help you avoid a depression by taking a large interest free loan from you."

MCKINZIE: There's a new biography out now of Dean Acheson by Gaddis Smith of Yale.

HICKERSON: I haven't seen that, I read a brief review.

MCKINZIE: Well, one of the reviews says that under Mr. Acheson the State Department really functioned more like the British Foreign Office, that the State Department had more power, more prerogatives to resolve the problems and present the solutions then, and the President simply gave a yes or no; at least, more of a yes or no than any President previously or since; that in a

sense the President took a less personal part in policy formation than any other Presidents. Do you think that is fair?

HICKERSON: Well, I think that overstates it a little bit. I think that the relationship was an excellent one. Of course, that is based on the fact that there was a very deep, close friendship between Acheson and President Truman. And it's also based on the fact that Acheson, I think, had excellent judgment.

Incidentally, I have heard him numerous times in the years after he retired as Secretary of State, down to not too long before his death. He frequently referred to President Truman as "My President."

Don't misunderstand, President Truman used the State Department as I think it ought to be used. But that doesn't mean that he rubber stamped what Acheson recommended. If he agreed with him, yes he approved; if he didn't agree, he sent it back and said, "Now, wait a minute, wait a minute." Sometimes he changed his mind. We did, though, have a chance to do what I think a foreign office ought to do. That is, if we saw something that the President was considering that we thought was wrong, we would tell him, write a memoranda, tell him "Look out, we don't think this is a good idea for the following reasons." Sometimes the memoranda bounced and I guess in some cases we were right, in some cases we were wrong, but in all events we did have that right, and it's something that should exist all the time. I don't know whether it does currently; I won't comment on that situation. In those days we really functioned as I think the State Department ought to.

After Mr. Truman's term--I wasn't in the State Department, I was overseas--Foster Dulles was Secretary of State and he had great influence with President Eisenhower. The relationship was somewhat comparable to that that Acheson had with President Truman. On the other hand, down the line, in the State Department, I think the criticism was made that Dulles carried too much of that around in his head and didn't use his own State Department as much as he should have.

MCKINZIE: But you thought that Mr. Acheson did indeed use the talent that was at his command?

HICKERSON: Wherever there was talent he was eager to use it. There's no doubt about that; I know that.

MCKINZIE: From your vantage point in the Office of European Affairs, you were in a position to observe the policy planning at the end of the war, including the plans for the occupation of Germany.

HICKERSON: Right.

MCKINZIE: And then to see the situation deteriorate rather than improve after all those plans had been made. You have already alluded to the fact that you think that the planners simply erred in their judgment about the extent of the devastation and disruption from the war. Was

there a period of dithering about before somebody got the idea that there was going to have to be a massive injection of capital, which finally came about with the Marshall plan? There was a period between the end of the war and the spring of 1947 in which there seemed to be a little bit of limbo. Do you recall the reaction to the deterioration, or what people were thinking about that before the Marshall plan came along? Was your office dealing with that at that time?

HICKERSON: We had a planning section in the State Department. But there were planners in various fields. We were all so busy on current business. I was. I have no specific recollection of feeling that things were going to hell in a hack.

MCKINZIE: What about the plans for Germany? Did you feel at the end of the war that those were adequate for necessary reconstruction? Acheson later said something to the effect that , "To consider Europe without industrial Germany is like considering a body without a heart." The reparations and the deindustrialization of Germany would seem to defeat reconstruction.

HICKERSON: Well, we have a German section in the State Department. Some of the time I was their boss, when I was Acting Director of European Affairs. They were quite good. We had so many frustrations and difficulties; for instance, the Morgenthau plan, the pastoral state, all such perfect nonsense as that. I can't tell you how poor Mr. Hull grieved over that.

You must remember that Morgenthau got himself invited up to the second Quebec Conference in 1944, and he actually set up that pastoral state plan and got FDR's initials on it and Churchill's. Mr. Hull hadn't been asked to go, and wouldn't go unless he was asked. And when he found out, he put all of us to work. He prepared himself for a meeting with FDR. That meeting took place in September 1944, right after the conference. Mr. Stimson, Secretary of War, was incensed about this thing and stood right with Mr. Hull on it.

Mr. Hull went to see the President--a memorable meeting, in which he convinced him and Roosevelt pulled the plug on that. Mr. Hull came back to the State Department, and it was the last time he came into the State Department as Secretary of State. He went to his apartment and went to the hospital a few days later and never returned as Secretary of State. He resigned a little bit later.

He was terribly worked up over that. I remember I lived out beyond what was then the Wardman Park--the Sheraton Park they call it now--hotel in Cleveland Park. And because I lived out there, on the way out before his meeting I took out his final briefing papers to him. I went in, chatted for a little while, and had a drink with him, and he walked up and down and said, "I'm going to say this, and I'm going to say this." He didn't even need the papers. He had it all in his head.

The next morning he went to the White House, I think 9:30 or 10 o'clock, and spent a couple of hours with the President, when he came back, and my immediate boss Jimmy Dunn and I were summoned. He (Hull) had just 15 minutes because he had some Senators coming in on the United Nations plan that he had to talk to. He described the conference and it was a little hilarious.

Hull said, "Mr. President, maybe you can explain this to the American people, but by Christ I can't explain it, and by Christ if it's explained you're going to have to do it." That's something.

MCKINZIE: This was what you had to build your planning around.

HICKERSON: Well, that was thrown overboard but then we had to work with some of the same people and it went on and on, and it was very frustrating. Then we finally got the plans, such as they were, and then we had trouble with our allies. The level of industrial production in Germany set off French screaming. It was a time of utter frustration and confusion.

Reparations. Of course we wouldn't let anything be taken out of our zone. The Russians stripped their zone,--oh, it was a bad time.

MCKINZIE: Did you have any feeling in the spring of '45, summer of '45, that the UN held some hope for the resolution of the problems of the postwar . . .

HICKERSON: I was an adviser on international politics on our delegation.

Well, I think I ought to tell you. Some of us, particularly those of us who had spent a good part of our careers in foreign service, believe it takes somewhere between 10 and 15 years of actual service in the Foreign Service for a man really to mature. I once said that when we got a young officer it would be 15 years before we knew whether we had a star or a stuffed shirt. You absorb a certain amount of things you can't read in books. You just get a feeling about things. Now, the people who had sufficient service to reach that general feeling of maturity I'm talking about, I think, felt that there was a chance. But, in the final analysis, it depended upon whether the Soviets behaved, whether they considered it in their interest to behave. The way the UN charter is written, it depends on the principal powers with veto. Actually there should be two permanent members of the Security Council, the U.S. and USSR China was a joke, a FDR joke. France, the U.K.--not necessary. It could have been handled and ought to have been.

Well, I remember talking among ourselves. We said, "If the Russians themselves behave and cooperate as provided in the Charter to make the others behave it will work. If the Russians don't cooperate and themselves misbehave, the UN party is really over--until they change their mind." In other words the UN charter can only work if the U.S. and Russia themselves behave and cooperate to make the others behave. And we just didn't know whether they would or not.

MCKINZIE: I read last week a little book published in autumn of 1945 about the UN Conference, edited by Frederick Louis Allen who used to be the editor of *Harper's* magazine.

He said that all the charter did was to make a beginning. Since the charter the atomic bomb had made many people wonder if this was not a false beginning, and whether a new conference should be called to undertake a more ambitious plan for real world government. Was that feeling just Frederick Louis Allen's or did you sense among other people that the bomb itself created some unique . . .

HICKERSON: I didn't share that feeling. The bomb changes warfare of course, completely. There's no point going into that. But the UN Charter, despite the existence of the bomb and the differences between the U.S. and the USSR, still would work if the premise upon which the UN Charter was signed turned out to be correct. That is, that if the two countries would themselves behave and cooperate to make other countries strictly carry out the provisions of the charter, they could do it: The teeth are there, and it's all based on that, and it hasn't happened.

MCKINZIE: When were you personally convinced that the Soviets weren't going to behave themselves, that postwar cooperation with the Soviets was pretty well a dream of the past? Mr. Harriman has said that he thought that cooperation with them was possible until sometime in 1947.

HICKERSON: Well, the thing that I think started me off was the Canadian spy trial. We got a blow-by-blow account of that. They kept the President up to date on that, and they had this Royal Commission investigation and a daily report. We got two copies; one for the Secretary of State and one for the President. And I read those things. They sent one over, and the President and Admiral Leahy were the only people who had access there at the White House. My assistant Jeff Parsons, later Ambassador to Sweden, retired now, and I were the only people who really read it at State. Mr. Byrnes didn't. He said, "Now, tell me anything I ought to know." And we did that. But that thing was a revelation. They published some of it, but not the whole thing in their white paper. And it's absolutely an eye opener.

Then, after that, Stalin's speech of February 1946. By 1946 the pass had been made at Iran, in the north. I would say that by 1946 I was convinced that we were in for it.

MCKINZIE: And yet you seemed to have been a moderating force on some other people. I have read one story that makes the point that in May 1946 there was fear on the part of some people that there would be a Communist uprising in France and that a General McNary got very upset and wanted to intervene. The account notes that you froze his order until such time as it could be reviewed. Now maybe that just came in the course of daily business?

HICKERSON: It probably did, I'd forgotten that. I'm frequently confronted with such things. Somebody showed me a memorandum that I wrote one time and I read the thing and I couldn't remember anything about it. And I said, "All I can say is, one, I don't remember anything about this particular incident and, two, it's a pretty good memorandum. I wrote better then than I do now."

MCKINZIE: But I gather from that incident that your feeling was . . .

HICKERSON: Well, the French thing. The Communist Party is probably not as strong as the 25 percent vote they get. That is a protest vote, We used to have problems with infiltration into the French foreign office and having access to material. It leaked like a sieve, and usually turned up in the Communist press and that affected a lot of our dealings with Europe. But I never really felt in that period, or still, that the Communist influence was strong enough for any serious trouble, a coup d'état or anything like that.

MCKINZIE: Could you talk about Will Clayton as Under Secretary for Economics.

HICKERSON: Yes, he was first Assistant Secretary and then they upped him to Undersecretary of Economic Affairs. Will Clayton was head of the firm Anderson, Clayton & Co. which started out as cotton buyers. My father sold cotton to Anderson, Clayton for years and years and years. He was a name to me and I never met him until he came to the State Department, but we became great friends and I have the highest regards for him, one of the finest men I ever knew in my life.

MCKINZIE: Did you agree with his economic ideas?

HICKERSON: I did,

Will Clayton really had more to do with the adoption of the Marshall plan than any other single person. Of course many people contributed. General Marshall personally didn't have much to do with it. He read a speech at Harvard that started the public notice of it, Dean Acheson had a lot to do with it, Dean was Under Secretary of State at the time, and he enjoyed General Marshall's full confidence. Dean sent up a trial balloon down in Mississippi somewhere. What was it, that lovely word "adumbrating" the Harvard speech. The trial balloon went pretty well and they went ahead with the speech. General Marshall was a man of great talents. He lent his prestige and his effort. It's called the Marshall plan, I guess, correctly, because he's Secretary of State, but he had less to do with it than several other people. I didn't have a great deal to do with it myself, because I was more in the political side of the European Bureau, but a little bit. I think it should have been called the Truman Plan.

MCKINZIE: I was going to ask if your office supplied the State, War and Navy Coordinating Committee with any of its raw information. Dean Acheson said he asked them--SWNCC--to look over the "grizzly" telegrams and reports that were coming in. I wondered if the European Bureau was the recipient of those.

HICKERSON: Oh yes, we saw all of those.

MCKINZIE: Well, then the raw information for those people to work with would come through your office.

HICKERSON: That's right, that's right.

Incidentally, I'd like to digress from here for a minute back to Mr. Truman. When the British told us about Greece in February '47, we didn't have much notice. They just said they couldn't do it, if it would be saved we would have to do it. They realized everything involved but they were broke and couldn't go on. Well, we did some hasty work and picked up the squawling brat along with Turkey, which wasn't quite as bad, at the time, but potentially it was. And then the drought in Europe. It was said at the time that the wheat crop in France was the smallest wheat crop since the days of Napoleon. It was a real disaster. That was when the Marshall plan was forming, getting under way, all these things came in.

We started a massive plan shipping wheat. We ran out of wheat, and shipped corn. The French did something that I don't see how they could have been so foolish. Certainly they didn't have Will Clayton's advice on that or anybody's from the South. Corn bread is very good, I love it, eat it every chance I get. But they mixed wheat flour and corn meal and produced a product fit for neither man nor beast.

In any event one of the devices used to get the wheat to move off the farms was a 25 cent--which in those days was something--increase in the price of wheat. President Truman had a press conference soon after that. The experts may have been able to anticipate what happened, but the laymen couldn't. At the press conference he was confronted with an angry question. A newspaperman had been primed by the poultry producers association, saying that this had completely upset the ratio between wheat for feed and for flour, and they were just up against it.

I wasn't in on this thing because, as say, I was on the fringes of the political side. But our people had sent over a list of questions the President might expect at his press conference, and suggested lines to take in answers. This question certainly wasn't on it, I know for a fact, because two of my colleagues had actually edited the thing before it went over. And this correspondent said to President Truman: "The poultry people say they're facing ruin if this thing stands."

And he answered off-the-cuff, "If I have to choose between pullets and people I will choose people."

MCKINZIE: There was a voluntary food conservation campaign at that same time, as I recall, in the winter of '47. The idea was to eat a slice of bread less a day so that there would be more wheat available for export. As I understand it the idea was to try to make another hundred million bushels available for export without actually having to go into rationing again.

HICKERSON: I had forgotten that, I vaguely remember it. All these things run together. I spoke of the corn that was sent to France. I tasted some of that stuff and I assure you it was horrible, and I love corn bread. And I love French bread; their bread is better than ours, and I think we have pretty bad bread. At all events, by that time the Communist propaganda was doing its stuff and the French finally gave up this mixture and did produce some cornmeal for corn bread. Then the Communist propaganda started a whispering campaign that it was a well-known scientific fact that if one had a steady diet of bread made from cornmeal it would tend to produce impotence in males and ultimately sterility. Well, you know what effect that would have in France. A favorite indoor-outdoor sport more or less. It was so easy for us to counter that. We flooded the country with pictures of colored in the United States, 8, 10, 12, 15 children, whose sole bread was corn bread.

MCKINZIE: How did you see George Kennan fitting into all of the Marshall plan planning?

HICKERSON: Kennan was chief of the Policy Planning Staff. Acheson, as Under Secretary, really was responsible under Marshall for the policy planning staff, and there was also the idea that the military was always planning. I don't know whether Acheson suggested the planning staff, or whether George Kennan had the bright idea. or whether he and his colleagues collectively had the idea that they would launch this thing by centering on a particular project,

and aid to Europe was that project, and the necessity therefore. They produced a report recommending this aid program subject to the condition that the Europeans themselves get together and all this be coordinated and that they do certain things.

MCKINZIE: How did this affect your work in Europe, the political end of it?

HICKERSON: We were kept informed and contributed somewhat to that, but the planning staff did the work. They called us in to testify, but as I say, the European Bureau's work was primarily on political relations. Now, we had an economist or so in the office and all of us had to have some economic knowledge. But we were sort of on the fringes of this thing. The policy planning staff is entitled to great credit for this very fine report that they turned out. In other words, Europeans themselves had to take the initiative of getting together, and they did.

MCKINZIE: I noticed that Will Clayton wrote a memorandum, evidently independently of the policy planning staff and he said almost exactly the same thing--that the initiative had to come from them. But of course, there were some political reasons for that weren't there, political reasons why the Europeans should do it themselves.

HICKERSON: Well, number one, in those days--whenever since the war days--it had been the policy of the U.S. Government to encourage them to get together politically. In every foreign aid bill we passed, from the days of those massive bills, there was a preamble saying that there was a policy of the Senate and the House of Representatives and the policy of the U.S. Government to promote closer political relations, and so on. So we wanted them to do it, to get together politically, maybe even create a United States of Europe or something of their choice, if they could agree on that.

In the next place, there were all sorts of things--if they put their heads together in this organization--that they could have shared, and maybe relieve the amount of aid that was necessary. Each could help out with certain things. So, it made sense from the economic as well as the political standpoint.

MCKINZIE: What about the business of dividing Europe? This aid was to go to Western Europe and not to the Soviet bloc countries. It would in a sense, would it not, split the world into spheres?

HICKERSON: But you must remember that the original proposal was open to Eastern Europe also, even to the Soviet Union. Czechoslovakia, I know for a fact, signified that they wanted to join; maybe Poland, I'm not sure, but in all events the Soviets said no and made the Czechs reverse their position.

MCKINZIE: In your opinion, do you think that there would have been any chance of getting the aid program through Congress had either Czechoslovakia or Poland participated?

HICKERSON: I think there probably would have. I think that the Soviets made one of the biggest mistakes they ever made by not themselves coming in, by saying "we want help." Of course, by that time they were getting along pretty well. They had a good wheat crop in the

Ukraine in 1947. I think they made a very serious mistake by not joining up. I don't know how Congress would have reacted to this. I think at the time, maybe. But they (the Soviets) had behaved pretty badly. But we didn't really expect--I didn't expect--the Soviets to join. I was not surprised at that.

Because of the material we got from the Royal Commission in Canada in 1945; the passes that the Soviets made at Iran in 1946 ; because they started to take over parts of their own satellite countries,--I guess Bulgaria was the first--I didn't really expect them to join in the thing. And they didn't. I think they'd have been wise to join, even to try to frustrate it.

MCKINZIE: You may be aware of a school of historians now who look back at the Truman years and argue that almost everything was determined on the basis of economics. One goes so far as to say that even if there had been no political crisis, the Marshall plan was necessary for domestic economic reasons, and that the anti-Communist rationale was simply rhetoric. The argument goes that Europe had to be rebuilt in order to promote an anti-Communist stability in Europe and to prevent a depression here, because European trade was necessary for U.S. prosperity.

HICKERSON: You know there may be something in that. Even if the Soviet Union had not existed, you would have had that devastation and interruption of partner relationships, and all those things that Clayton so eloquently described--even though the Soviet Union had just not existed. Now the fact that they existed and had their accomplices at work promoting discord, of course, made it even more necessary. Remember that the need was increased by the weather too, the drought in '47.

MCKINZIE: So you would argue that there was an urgency, because of the drought and because of the balance of payments problem something was going to have to happen really fast.

HICKERSON: That's right.

MCKINZIE: In your dealing with political affairs while the Marshall plan was being devised, do you recall any discussion about a military component in 1947? Dean Acheson has alluded to the fact that when they talked about aid originally they talked about all kinds of aid--one kind being military aid. But they decided, he says, that this would have been too difficult to sell, and military aid was not productive of reconstruction. Do you recall any European nations arguing for military as well as for economic aid in 1947, 1948?

HICKERSON: Well, for military aid, as such, I personally don't recall. But I do recall very vividly that the North Atlantic Treaty discussions (we didn't call them that) really started at the end of 1947.

MCKINZIE: Would you narrate the history of that?

HICKERSON: One of the ideas that we produced in the European Bureau during the war was the idea of a Council of Foreign Ministers. We wanted to restrict it to Europe and take the French and British along with us and the Soviets, just the four. The idea went to the White

House; I think it was presented for the first time maybe at Yalta or maybe one earlier conference. But oddly, President Roosevelt insisted that we have five, and have the Chinese. Of course, the Russians wouldn't have anything to do with the Chinese. So it really functioned in Europe-just the four. They (the council) had a number of meetings and then it fell into disuse.

I repeat, we all realized that if we really got anywhere, the big powers had to work together, especially the U.S. and the USSR, and we felt that this council might, in effect, write the peace treaties, the postwar settlements. The Italian were the only major treaty that was signed, we haven't yet a peace treaty with Germany.

Well, it did not work out that way. They had a number of meetings. They had a meeting in Moscow in the spring of 1947 that lasted 7 weeks. That was General Marshall's introduction into international diplomacy as Secretary of State.

A second, a follow-up meeting was called in London for the end of November. By that time I had become director for European affairs. I was senior political adviser and between the Moscow Conference and the London Conference General Marshall sent for me and said in effect, "Now I do not wish to repeat that experience in Moscow; seven weeks and getting nowhere." He said, "If there's any hope, I've got all the time in the world. I don't mind spending Christmas in London. I have many friends in London, and all the time in the world, but I just want to tell you here and now that I'm going to look to you, in consultation with your British and French opposite numbers, to make reviews from time to time, and if you conclude that there's no hope, then we're going to wind it up." He said, "How long do you think it will take before you can reach a conclusion?"

I said, "Well, this is just pulling a figure out of the air, I would say three weeks."

"Very well, Hickerson, get me out of London in three weeks."

I said, "Well, now, wait a minute. I was pulling it out of the air. I know what you want; and we'll do it."

Actually it turned out that the thing lasted about three weeks, but it was so clear that we weren't getting anywhere. I won't go into that conference, except to say that it was utterly and completely frustrating. It had some hilarious moments, but I went to the Secretary and said, "Now, look, I've talked with my British and French colleagues and we are convinced that we're not going to get anywhere."

"Okay," he said, "You and your boys start writing a statement for me to make a speech. Of course, it must be kept absolutely quiet." We wrote the obituary--my boys and I. We wrote the draft and then we went over it sentence by sentence with the French and British, my opposite numbers, the senior political consultants. Finally came the day the General delivered it and Molotov was really visibly surprised. I'll tell you one little incident. He started saying, "Well, look, we've been talking about Austria, I can make this marked illustration of the fact that it's too soon to adjourn. I have authority to say that we will reduce our demand for reparations from Austria by 10 percent."

Ernie Bevin, then the British Foreign Minister, said, "Ten percent? That's fine, but 10 per cent from what?"

Molotov said, "I'm not in a position to tell you."

Well, everybody roared with laughter and that just sealed the thing.

Well, then we broke up. I think the General stayed over one full day. One of the reasons was that we had dinner with the French delegation, and the General had to say his good-byes to his colleagues. His last day there he went down to make a farewell call on Bevin. To my very deep regret there was not that warm, personal friendship between Marshall and Bevin that Jimmy Byrnes had had, and Dean Acheson later had. Of course, I think Ernie Bevin is the greatest Englishman in the-postwar period. Marshall was not that type; he's a cold, sort of formal person.

In any event, he went down alone; there was no language difficulty, there was no problem. It was just to say goodbye. General Marshall came back and said to me, "You'd better go down to the foreign office and see some of your friends." He said, "I just went down to say goodbye and Bevin started talking to me about some future arrangements. He mentioned two circles." And he said, "I wasn't prepared for it. If I had known he was going to talk about this I would have taken you down. You've got to go down and see what the guy has in mind. I just told him that I'd be glad to have him elaborate on that and that we would consider it and so forth and so on. "

Well, what Bevin was talking about, I found out, was that they were about to launch the negotiations for the Brussels Pact. That was one circle, a tight one. Then they wanted another circle taking in the Brussels Pact countries and the U.S. and Canada, not quite as tightly drawn, but still a circle to bring us into a collective defense arrangement. They told me in the foreign ministry that the idea of the circles was Mr. Bevin's own idea, that they were still working on it, that they had not gone far enough to go much beyond that, but that they would keep us fully informed, and that Bevin would make a statement in the House in the middle of January.

Now, that is the first mention I ever heard of an Atlantic pact. Bevin didn't call it an Atlantic Pact. All that was worked out later on, but that was it.

MCKINZIE: What was your response to this?

HICKERSON: Well, I just listened. I said, "All I can do is listen, I'm interested in this, and when we get your ideas we'll give you our comments."

Well, we had a number of telegrams spelling this out some more. Finally the British Ambassador came in and left a note with a draft of the Brussels Treaty asking us for our comments. They wanted our blessing, and they asked not only do you agree, which we did, but asked for our comments, and our suggestions.

Secretary Marshall sent it up to us to prepare a reply. Now, we first gave it our blessing, and said we thought this was a good idea and supported them. Then we focused on an article in their

draft. You see, they had signed a treaty with France, the Dunkirk Treaty, based upon the danger of revival of German aggression. The Russians had planned some treaties like that, and they had taken that same thing to this thing. In our draft reply, that is, the reply of the European Bureau, we focused on that and said: In the light of happenings at the Foreign Ministers meeting, it is perfectly clear that things have got to move in Germany. Because of the present and indicated future activities of the Soviet Union, we think we are facing a very serious situation and it is likely that ultimately West Germany will have to be brought into association with the other Western countries and their manpower used if Europe is going to be saved. Therefore, we think it is a very bad idea to direct this treaty, of the Brussels pact powers, against a probably future ally. We suggest that you drop that completely and take this Rio Treaty formula, which stipulates that an attack on one is an attack on all, instead.

Well, Robert Lovett, the Under Secretary and an exceedingly able man, and I argued about it and he said, "I don't think we had ought to do this. Let's just give it our blessing."

I said, "No, I feel it very strongly."

I wasn't present at this conference with Marshall on this. Marshall, a good staff man, of course, took Lovett's draft giving the blessing. But he said, "Now, give this back to Hickerson. He feels strongly. Tell him to call in the British Ambassador and give him all this (the objections) orally, but on the record this (the blessing) is all we've done."

I sent for Inverchapel, and handed him the note signed by the Secretary. I said, "Now here is the note I wanted to send, and I'm authorized by the Secretary to let you see this." I said, "If your memory were perfect you could memorize that, so I'll just give you a copy of it. It has no status except to refresh your memory. I read it to you, and in your memorandum of conversation you may quote this."

I was delighted to see that they took our advice and rewrote that article and made their own modifications on the Rio formula--an attack on one is an attack on all--rather than directing it against West Germany which would have been a hell of a note years later.

MCKINZIE: The draft presented by Secretary Lovett was delivered?

HICKERSON: It was delivered. I said, "That's our blessing, and here's the comment."

MCKINZIE: And then Inverchapel sent it back to Bevin and . . .

HICKERSON: He telegraphed it and they talked it over, and they adopted that idea in the Brussels Treaty of an attack on one being an attack on all, rather than revival of German aggression against the Brussels pact countries.

Now, that's just the Brussels pact. Things were happening: the takeover in Czechoslovakia; the spy scare in Scandinavia; the Berlin blockade, all of those things scared the living daylights out of people. Out of that we had approaches from everybody, scared stiff. There came the talks

leading to the North Atlantic Treaty but the two circles is the first tangible suggestion I had heard for an alliance--which after intensive negotiations became the North Atlantic Treaty.

MCKINZIE: When you were talking to these people about the terms of the Brussels pact, was there feeling on their part that they couldn't afford a military buildup, that other problems of reconstruction were so great that it was going to be difficult to...

HICKERSON: Actually no, because we were talking, really,--and even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization--about a commitment, a political commitment, of what we would do in the event of an attack, without considering anything beyond the political commitment to do that. And frankly in the back of our minds was the hope that that commitment itself would be enough to restrain any aggression. Indeed, the NATO machinery wasn't really set up until after the Korean attack, you know. We had the Council provided for, but a Supreme Commander and all that sort of thing that came only after Korea. So, we didn't get into the subject of military preparations at all.

Second Oral History Interview with John D. Hickerson,
Washington, D.C., January 26, 1973, by Richard D. McKinzie,
Harry S. Truman Library.

MCKINZIE: You have related the circumstances under which NATO came about, the meeting between Secretary Marshall and Bevin in London. Might you go into some detail about subsequent events, particularly the process by which the provisions of the treaty were worked out. I understand there were some meetings between U.S. and British someplace in the Pentagon; that is, of a working group.

HICKERSON: That's correct. The fact that the meetings took place is still classified, although references have been made to it. I tried to get the papers released on that and I thought I had an agreement two years ago that they were going to be published in six months, and they are still not out. [They were published in *Foreign Relations, 1948* in early 1975.]

But I can tell you for our purposes here, that the meeting took place on the suggestion of the British. It took place in the quarters of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon. It was top secret. The British sent a small group over, mostly civilian. There were one or two military advisers. We had a small group, and there were the Canadians. The only reason for keeping that secret after the treaty was signed was the fact that the French had not been invited. The reason the French were not invited was that their codes were not secure and everything that they reported got into the wrong hands.

Those talks were in late March or early April. They are still classified top secret. One of my friends, a retired British diplomat, was writing his memoirs. He had spent two days in talks, and for use in his memoir he wanted to check certain things with me. His book is now out. His name then was Gladwyn Jebb but he's now a member of the House of Lords. He is a very distinguished British diplomat, a little on the stuffy side, but he really had ability. I got his letter

asking these questions. I had known him for years; we had been on a first name terms. If his letter had come two weeks earlier I could have answered his questions. But, I had been working trying to get these documents released and had finally gotten an agreement from the State Department on the condition that I come over with Ambassador Achilles (Retired), an associate of mine in the negotiations, and go over the documents and sort them out for things to be published, and discuss it with their historical adviser there. I told Lord Jebb this and said, "I did that just ten days ago, and now I'm sort of fenced in, having just read the darn things it would be, I think, completely unethical for me to answer your questions. Now, if you had asked me two weeks ago before I had seen the documents again, I would have said, 'Since I am trying to get them published, go ahead, here are my answers.'"

This is all associated with the birth of NATO. As I told you last time, Mr. Bevin talked to General Marshall, as Marshall put it, about circles. Well, Marshall didn't go down and find out what it was all about. I knew the British had, for a long time, drawn a large circle and then other circles. The large circle includes the Commonwealth but the next circle U.S. and U.K., the third circle Western Europe and U.K. They used to have an axiom that the only place where they could take effective action was where the three circles intersected, common areas. I had a feeling what it was all about, and they told me what Bevin anticipated was a very "close" treaty with France and Benelux countries, and a larger, looser circle, taking in the U.K., U.S. and Canada, and that they would elaborate on that and tell us more about it later on. They did in due course, as I told you last time, and we commented on that proposed treaty, the Brussels Treaty, and made some suggestions about it,

Now, things started happening after these December 1947 talks fairly quickly. The most dramatic thing was the Soviet takeover of the Czech Government, followed by Masaryk's suicide. That scared the living bejesus out of everybody in Western Europe. All of that at a time of crisis in the north, There was a frustrated Communist effort in Finland, The Finns had lost the war and they had a coalition government with Communists in it. The Communists plotted to take over the government of Finland and that was frustrated and the Communists thrown out. And there was a spy scare in Norway. The result of all of that was that everybody was scared absolutely sick. Now, later on, there was another ingredient, the Berlin Blockade, but that only came in June. But the February takeover in Czechoslovakia triggered the whole thing.

Now, the British proposed these talks we discussed earlier and said they were going ahead and sign the Brussels Treaty. We had the talks after that. We sat down and talked about the situation; what could be done about. The general consensus was that there probably would have to be a treaty, a defensive alliance between the U.S. and Canada and the Benelux countries and Great Britain and France, with perhaps additions of other countries to it. We talked at considerable length about the kind of provisions it would contain. And I think at one point we actually produced a form of words--not a draft treaty, but as an illustration of what we were talking about.

MCKINZIE: Even going so far as to deal with the substantive provision that an attack upon one would be considered an attack upon them all?

HICKERSON: Yes. Yes, not that language, but in effect it was that an attack on one was an

attack on them all. Now that language was in the earlier, Rio Treaty, and we recommended that the British adopt that for the Brussels Treaty rather than the Dunkirk formula based on German aggression. We argued that it was a little ridiculous to include a future ally as the villain in their treaty when we all knew perfectly well that if Western Europe was to be defended, Western Germany had to be brought into it. It was not a comprehensive draft, just some suggestions to be considered, and that was duly reported to our governments.

Now about the same time, my political bosses, General Marshall, but more importantly Bob Lovett--Marshall turned this over largely to Lovett--were having consultation with our leaders on the Hill. Vandenberg was then chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. Vandenberg volunteered to introduce a resolution in the Senate, the Vandenberg resolution, which was the springboard for the North Atlantic Treaty,

He asked us to do a draft for him, which we did. I mean, he gave us his ideas and we wrote them up. He called me and said, "Too damn long, got to get this on one page," And we got it on one page. My deputy, Theodore Achilles, now a retired Ambassador, actually did the drafting of this and did a fine job. Now, I repeat, the ideas were Senator Vandenberg's, and we just did the drafting which he approved. We argued with him a little bit here and there, but he's entitled to full credit for the resolution, And that passed with an overwhelming vote,

MCKINZIE: Was his resolution as strong as your drafts had recommended?

HICKERSON: I guess so. As a matter of fact, since this was to be our first peacetime commitment to this sort of thing, I'm sure all my colleagues were influenced by the axiom that politics is the art of the possible. Our suggestions were not so much substantive as stylistic changes to make it a little smoother here and there, but the ideas were his, It wound up emphasizing strengthening the UN and regional and common defense associations. The key words were "and the association of the U.S. with such of these mutual defense organizations as affect our defense and our security." That's under Article 51 and 52 of the Charter. That passed overwhelmingly and soon after that, the President after consultation with the Senate leaders, invited the Brussels pact countries, France and the U.K., Canada to open talks in Washington to consider what should be done about the situation. Those talks opened in early July, 1948, In the meantime the Berlin Blockade had come along and given a further boost to the urgency of this idea, The blockade lasted until the following March or April; it didn't work, of course, and the Soviets gave it up; but by that time the treaty was signed.

At the opening meeting-in July, 1948, General Marshall, Secretary of State, presided and then announced that he was turning this over to Mr, Lovett, his deputy, to run, I, as Director for European Affairs, was next in line under Lovett to run the thing. We drafted a press statement to be issued at the end of the meeting. In the press release it said that there would be informal, secret discussion on what, if any, agreed recommendations should be made to the governments, There would be absolutely no press releases and no press statements, and the members of the groups had agreed that in no circumstances would they give interviews or give out any information whatsoever until the report had been made to the governments. Then it would be up to the governments to decide what to do about it.

They set up a working group. I was to preside, which I did most of the time, except for a brief time when I had to be away and somebody else did it in Lovett's name. We extracted a blood-sealed oath from all those there that they just wouldn't talk. And nobody talked to the press. Well, we got on fine, had no leaks.

But just to take that a step further. I've known Scotty Reston a long time; I like him very much; I think he's a very fine man, an excellent newspaperman. Scotty came to me one time, not immediately after this, but a few days later. I knew that he had made the rounds, he said, "Now look, the *Times* is in a sort of special category, You just have to tell me some of this stuff, for the background."

I said, "Now, Scotty, Scotty, Scotty, I'm just not talking, We're not going to accomplish anything there," It worked though. It worked, and we never were able to pin any leak on anybody in that group.

MCKINZIE: You got the report back to the governments?

HICKERSON: We got the report back to the governments. We finished it before the election; we had to wait until the election was over because everybody, including me, thought Truman was going to lose. Although, I won \$20 on that from a newspaperman who bet me \$20 against a dollar that Dewey would win, and I just couldn't refuse those odds. I think the prevailing odds were about ten to one.

The report was finished and the report recommended a treaty. We worked out a draft, a real formal draft of the treaty. It was understood when we adjourned in late October that nothing would be done until after our election, and then we'd just see where we went from there, We tried to keep it completely nonpartisan, keep it out of the campaign, and did, because we had had little or no publicity about it,

Truman scored his big upset. Senator Tom Connally replaced Vandenberg as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. It took a little doing to get Uncle Tom back in line, because he felt a little neglected. In other words, Vandenberg, an old isolationist who had been welcomed back as a prodigal son when he saw the light, had eclipsed Uncle Tom, who all these years supported the League of Nations and all; he was a little resentful. Mr. Truman took care of that for us. He called him up and said in effect, "Now look Tom, I want you and Lucile to come down and have supper with Bess and me, just the four of us. I'll tell you what I want to talk about, We've got to get moving on this North Atlantic Treaty thing, and these damn Republicans--Vandenberg is a hell of a nice fellow, he's fine, he's fine, but now I want you to take this thing over and I want to bring you up to date on anything you may have missed along the line, and you just take charge on this thing," And Tom just ate it up, He was wonderful.

Incidentally, there is one thing I remember about the election. On election day General Marshall was out of town, but I had gone to Lovett anyway because Marshall had delegated things to him. I took down to Bob Lovett telegrams addressed to Vandenberg and Connally, identical telegrams saying in effect, "Thank God, we kept this proposed treaty completely out of the campaign, It's a

national matter, has no political partisan difference whatsoever, but I want to talk to both of you. People are voting today, and whatever they decide, I want to talk to both of you as soon as you get back to Washington so we can move on from here--whatever the outcome." I liked Bob Lovett a lot, but Bob read the telegram and said promptly, "I'll sign the one to Vandenberg but not to Connally who is going to be in the minority. Sure, we have to talk to him, but not the same sort of telegram."

Now, I thought Truman was going to lose. I said, "Bob, hand me both telegrams. These telegrams were my idea. Both go or neither one goes." And I tore them up,

Bob Lovett left in January 1949 and Dean Acheson came back to the Department as Secretary of State. He pitched right in and took over and ran things himself after that, The treaty was in pretty good shape. We made some changes; we had some other countries join us, but it was pretty well in hand.

You know to his dying day what Mr. Acheson called Mr. Truman, "My President. He was my President." There was a mutual admiration society there. Acheson was Eastern establishment, if you will--all the right schools, all the right clothes, intellectually arrogant, as he sometimes was. But he and Truman really were buddies; and Acheson had the warmest admiration for him, and vice versa. Mr. Truman told Acheson, "Well, there's been pretty good consultation, I want it to be even better."

Acheson said, "I couldn't agree more, this is very important thing. We've got to take both parties along with us."

Acheson went up, I'd say during the last six or eight weeks of negotiation before the treaty was signed, at least once a week and sometimes twice a week and sat down with the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate and went over drafts and discussed every blessed thing in the treaty. They would suggest various things and we talked them over and if the suggestions were good ones and at all reasonable, we would see what we could do about this, and some of them we were very useful. Vandenberg was delighted with all this. Of course he was still in the Senate. He said it was the first treaty in the history of the United States being concluded with the advice and consent of the Senate.

He said, "In the past they just set them up." He said, "It wasn't entirely the President's fault, it has a long history." General Washington allegedly tried to go up to try to get the advice of the Senate. He cooled his heels for a long time, and they decided on constitutional grounds, separation of powers, that they would rather not hear him. And he was the last one to do it. He allegedly rode back down Pennsylvania Avenue and said, "I'll be damned if I ever do that again." And he didn't, and nobody else did.

This time, not the President himself, but representatives--now they use the word "surrogate." I don't know where that came from; I didn't hear and I didn't really know what it meant until this campaign--dealt with the Senate,

By the time we finished and were ready to sign that treaty, nearly all of the members of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate could say, "I contributed something to that. Here's a phrase, here's an idea." That's something,

MCKINZIE: What do you think the Senate contributed in a substantive way?

HICKERSON: I'll tell you one thing immediately. The Brussels pact countries wanted a 50-year treaty, that to parallel the Brussels pact. We said, "Too long." We talked it over with the Senate Committee and finally compromised on 20. We said, "Okay, 20 years, to continue indefinitely, and anybody can serve notice of dropping out after 20 years on one years notice," That was a Senate idea. That was the most substantive change they made. That's a very important one,

Aside from that, we have a group in Washington called the Institute for Foreign Affairs, which is like the Foreign Relations group in New York. You can't belong to that if you're on active duty for the U.S. Government, They have a number of retired Ambassadors and some practicing lawyers, particularly in the international law field,-and outstanding businessmen and so forth and so on, and it's a good group,

We gave a dinner for the new French Ambassador night before last at the F Street Club. The French have behaved so badly in recent years and I had considerable difficulty in resisting an impulse to privately tell the new Ambassador about an incident during the negotiations. Talking about their relations; you know they still are members of the treaty, professing undying alliance to what they call the Atlantic Alliance. But they dropped out of the NATO command structure; that is, the planning groups and all the things that must be ready if a balloon goes up so that everybody knows what to do. And after one meeting of the working group, the French representative, the Ambassador, stayed behind and said to me, "'Now, look I went along with the proposal for 50 years, but I just want you to know that my government would like to have this a perpetual treaty,"

I said, "But that's a long time." We hadn't talked to the Senate. I knew we couldn't do that.

He said, "Now Jack, I'll tell you." He said, "I'm all ready for that." He said, "It's a very common thing in this country to sign leases for 99 years. How about making this for 99 years?"

I laughed and said, "I don't think so, I do not think so." But they wanted it a 99-year treaty and now they're cavorting around, but they'll get over that, they'll come back.

MCKINZIE: Did I read someplace that Senator Vandenberg wasn't very interested in a social provision in the treaty?

HICKERSON: That's what we called then, and still call "the Canadian Article." It's what Dean Acheson called the "pie in the sky article." He didn't want it, Frankly, we set out to draft the military alliance. The Canadians were quite keen on this. They converted me and I twisted Acheson's arm and said, "Look, it means a lot to them, there's no fixed commitment, it couldn't possibly do any harm, and there are circumstances I can visualize when this might be sort of a

stepping-stone to something. For instance, if we ever try to join the Common Market--I mean, my god, you got that thing right there." Well, I didn't anticipate joining the Common Market. But I said, "This involves no commitments."

Finally he (Acheson) was in bed with the flu. Hume Wrong, the Canadian Ambassador, and I went out and talked to him. In his weakened condition we "twisted his arm and beat his brains out" and he said, "I'll recommend it to President Truman. We'll do it."

We had to talk with a Senate group explaining there was no commitment, that this was just aspirations and things, and they and Vandenberg bought it.

But in the debate on the treaty--and he was a tower of strength in that--he made the statement that I have quoted scores of times in speeches. I can quote that sentence almost verbatim, In the debate on the treaty in the Senate in August 1949, Vandenberg said, "Unless this treaty becomes far more than a simple military alliance it will be at the mercy of the first plausible peace initiative from the Soviet Union."

Now, I never talked to him about it, I just accepted it. I guess he meant some sort of political association, I don't know just what. I think there was a lot of truth in that. Because I believe in that kind of thing, I think that we've got to have political association with Western Europe; we call it here the Atlantic Community. I work here [This memoir was taped in the offices of the Atlantic Council, Washington, D.C.] for free, give them four days a week for whatever it's worth, looking towards something like that. Loose, yes. We don't know yet what kind of machinery to have, but it's got to be some kind of machinery. We want a uniform foreign policy. And then you get into economic policy--well, that doesn't present much difficulty, just a little bit more. It will be a free trade area with some sort of general controls over certain things; and the divorce laws and education, everything like that will go on just as we do now.

I must tell you something about Tom Connally. After two years in the wilderness when the Republicans had control of the Senate, '46 to '48, Tom came back as chairman, I've known Tom all my life. Tom was my Congressman, 11th District of Texas, and my father knew him very well. I was in the career foreign service, completely out of politics, and Tom wasn't in the Senate when I passed the examinations. I think he was in the House then, but you do that on your own without any help. I knew Tom socially and as time went on I came back on assignment to the State Department, European Bureau, they began using me, a little bit because of early connections with Tom. One of the problems I had, and I had it particularly with Acheson, was that I just couldn't convince Dean that old Tom was a pretty smart cookie and that all of this waving his arms and killing time and all that sort of thing was just part of an act. Acheson, I think finally came around and believed that the old boy really did know his stuff. but there was no love lost between Acheson and Connally. I would say to Acheson, "Now, you ought to call Tom on the telephone and tell him, or go up to the Hill and tell him." I could know how we stood with Tom by his greeting. I 'd walk in, and if he said, "How are you, Jack," everything was all right. If he said, "Morning, Hickerson, I'd say, ", "Now, what the hell have we done wrong today?"

"I'll tell you what you've done wrong."

Third Oral History Interview with John D. Hickerson,
Washington, D.C., June 5, 1973, by Richard D.
McKinzie, Harry S. Truman Library.

MCKINZIE: Do you recall where you were when you received notification of the intervention in Korea?

HICKERSON: Yes, I was at home. My wife and I owned, for many years, a nice little house with a lovely garden in Cleveland Park. It was Saturday night, I guess about 10 o'clock. In those days night calls weren't unusual. Some problems one could deal with over the telephone, others you couldn't. I had by that time fallen into a habit that was somewhat descriptive of the hectic life we led. If the telephone rang after 9 o'clock as I started to the telephone I involuntarily picked up my car keys, just in case.

In those days, the regional bureau had what they called a watch officer. They rotated the duty so that no one worked every night. This call was from the watch officer of the Far Eastern Bureau, and said, "There's a development and I think that you would want to come in right away. I can't discuss it on the telephone."

I got my car and drove down through Rock Creek Park. We were then in what was called "new State"--that was a building we took over from the War Department on 21st and Virginia. It's now part of what they call "New, New State," I guess.

Driving through the park I passed in review in my mind what it might be. I was then Assistant Secretary for UN Affairs, after a long service in the European Bureau. I thought it obviously was a Far Eastern development, because it was their watch officer who called. Interestingly enough, the thing I thought likeliest was that the Chinese Communists had attempted an invasion of Taiwan.

MCKINZIE: He had sounded so urgent on the phone to make you think it was something of that magnitude?

HICKERSON: That's right. It was pretty clear. I judged that it involved some military action, and I thought that that was the likeliest one. Chiang Kai-shek's forces had been expelled in late 1949, And this was 1950 and the Chinese Communists had been making noise about that in spite of what we had said about protecting Taiwan with our seventh fleet, When I got down to the office we had just one telegram from Ambassador [John J.] Muccio saying that a "massive invasion has occurred." North Koreans. He said it was unexpected and "the South Koreans are not prepared, and they are pretty demoralized." And then we got a steady stream of telegrams.

MCKINZIE: What did you find when you got to the State Department that night? Had a lot of people been called in besides yourself?

HICKERSON: No. I called in one or two of my boys after that, because I knew that we had a night's work cut out for us. Actually Dean Rusk and one or two of his boys and I were the only ones at the time. We lived right close and dashed right in. Then the number improved somewhat, but Dean and I talked it over. He had talked to the Secretary, I think the Secretary had a secure line with the State Department that couldn't be tapped--what we called a scrambler or something--and I also talked to the Secretary several times. Rusk and I talked it over and decided that obviously the first thing we'd do, while trying to find out what was possible, would be to raise the question in the UN. We put that up to Dean Acheson, and he said it sounded fine, but he wanted to check with the President, who was in Independence, and he did check.

MCKINZIE: In this discussion with Dean Rusk, did you go through what they call now "policy alternatives?"

HICKERSON: We did that later on in the evening. The first thing, the UN, was just automatic. I mean it was aggression, and that we knew we were going to do. Naturally the President would have to approve.

Of course, the President had secure telephone lines. He wanted to hop in the plane and come right back that night, and Acheson talked him out of it: "There's not a thing to do, you stay there until at least tomorrow, and we'll be in touch, but you can't do a thing tonight." And the President approved taking it up with the United Nations.

By that time Frank Pace, who was Secretary of the Army, and one or two others, came in, Right after the President's approval of taking it to the UN, which we knew held do, I put in a call for our office at the UN. Senator [Warren Robinson] Austin, was our permanent representative to the UN. I knew that the Senator was out of town, he had gone up to Vermont for the weekend. I knew there was no point in trying to get him and Ernest Gross was his deputy. I had a call put in for Gross' house. He was out for the evening. I left urgent word with one of his daughters to trace him if she knew where he was and have him call immediately. It took a little while. I don't know the age of this girl, and we just couldn't wait. Around midnight I decided that we just couldn't wait and I called Trygve Lie, Secretary General at his home, on the telephone, and told him what had happened. I told him that Gross would be in touch with him as soon as I could reach Gross, but I wanted to alert him, let him know what had happened.

He hadn't heard it, but by that time it was on the radio. He turned on his radio and yes, there it was. I never shall forget, Lie was quite the fellow. I liked him. He, of course, was Norwegian, spoke English very well, but with a pronounced accent. I told him what had happened and his first words were, "My God, Jack, that's against the Charter of the United Nations!" (in a strong Norwegian accent). I couldn't think of anything more original to say than, "You're telling me, Trygve, of course it is!"

By that time the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I think, were in session. They didn't come to the State Department, but I'm sure they were called in, and they were considering the military side of the

thing and what we could do. But the UN was just automatic, it gave us time for one thing--action immediately.

By that time Ernie Gross telephoned. His daughter had located him, and I told him about this, and told him to get in touch with Lie about this emergency meeting of the Security Council. I also told him that my boys and I were drafting a resolution for him to present stating that the North Koreans had committed the aggression and calling on them to go back where they came from, and various things. That's all public now, so there's no point in going into that.

One of my boys was David Wainhouse. I'd summoned him along with one or two others. I told Gross that David Wainhouse, a very good lawyer among other things, would fly up early in the morning with this draft resolution, and that if he had any comments, to call me,

Then he told me, of course, that he had telephoned Senator Austin, and he was coming back, but would not get back in time for the meeting on Sunday, I told Gross to go ahead until that happened.

Gross was an able lawyer and a very energetic man. We burned up the telephone throughout the night. There we had a secure line too.

We talked about the possibility of whether Malik, the Soviet representative who had walked out because he wouldn't sit with the Chinese representative, would return. I asked Gross, since Malik had walked out if Lie felt that the Russians ought to be notified, Gross said that he had thought about that and hadn't talked to Lie, but he would mention it to him, but he was pretty sure that in all of the meetings notification was simply a matter of course, because they were a member and entitled to come, that they were sent a routine notification. Then we speculated, and incidentally we agreed that the chances were unlikely that Malik would come back,

MCKINZIE: Why?

HICKERSON: He would have to get instructions from home about that, and he probably assumed they couldn't do anything since the Security Council can't order forces or take any real military action without unanimity. He probably assumed that he'd have time to come in. He didn't come back until August actually, and under the pretext that that was his month to be president of the Security Council and he had to come back, he couldn't neglect that duty, even though he hadn't changed his position about the Chinese representative.

Well, he stayed away. The Security Council passed one resolution that day--calling on the North Koreans to go back. That passed unanimously. The resolution on Monday did not pass unanimously. That was drafted in my office. I helped David Wainhouse and one or two of the boys. I think David Popper, who has now just been nominated Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, was there, and there may have been one or two others. Things were so hectic. David Wainhouse was the senior one of the boys there. Well, he got on the plane and took it up to New York and it passed.

MCKINZIE: In the meantime President Truman had come back to Washington.

HICKERSON: He got back in the late Sunday afternoon. Acheson was with him constantly on the telephone. Acheson, Sunday morning came in from his farm bright and early. Incidentally he had a scrambler telephone at his house and at the farm too, so he could talk through the White House switchboard with the President anywhere.

We worked all day. By that time all of us were working on the second resolution. My memory is too fuzzy for that after all these years but it's all public and people won't have any trouble finding it.

Before he took off from Independence, the President told Dean to ask the group--the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department group--to come to Blair House for dinner that night. You see, the White House was being rebuilt. That was the first of the "Blair House meetings." There is a list of the people there. The Joint Chiefs; the State Department contingent" Acheson, Jim Webb the Under Secretary, Phil Jessup, Ambassador-at-Large, and Dean Rusk and I. I don't think there's anybody else, but the President has that in his book; Margaret has it in her book.

By that time a lot of information was in. There was one very interesting thing that I don't think has ever been made public. Korean President Syngman Rhee was absolutely terrified. Now, I don't think that it was cowardice or anything like that, He was advised by some of his people that they must not in any circumstances allow him to be captured by the North Koreans, And, in effect, he took off for the tall timber.

John Muccio, our Ambassador, decided this was a hell of a thing for the president of a beleaguered country to do, so he got in his car and went out, and metaphorically collared him and said, "Mr. President, you can't do this,"

MCKINZIE: This was in the first hours after the invasion?

HICKERSON: Yes. Muccio talked him into coming back. The palace guard, he said could take care of the immediate danger. The thing that President Truman got the biggest laugh out of in the course of this thing; Muccio said, "I talked long and hard and the thing that started him to change his mind was when I said, 'Mr. President, if you don't go back, think what history will say of you.'"

The President said, "That did it," Every president has to worry about history.

In all event, that meeting was very interesting, It's been described and I can't add much to that except to confirm the things that had happened. The various messages were read; I reported on the action in the Security Council and we were to go back and do some further work on the resolution that we were working on for the next day.

MCKINZIE: At that first meeting air support and naval support were discussed?

HICKERSON: That's right. Air support immediately, and under the theory that the difference seemed to be the tanks that North Koreans had. The South Koreans had enough manpower, but

they didn't have tanks, They were lightly armed, you know. The President had reports from everybody. By that time, General [Douglas] MacArthur was in the act.

Incidentally, not one word was said at dinner about Korea. The President said no. And then the table was cleared, the doors locked, no servants around to overhear anything, and then a discussion.

After all the information that we had had been laid out and discussed together with the possible alternatives about what we could do--the air and naval support immediately that was agreed on--the President went around the table to each individual asking, "Do you have anything to say? What do you think of this? If you don't agree with this, have you any alternatives to suggest? I want you to tell me what's on your mind and what's in your heart, because this is a great moment in the world. " He turned to everybody in the room. Everybody agreed--with some discussion and comment of various sorts, I can only remember that I said that I agreed because of the fact that this was a first actual test of the United Nations, and that if the United Nations didn't react to it the organization would embark on a downward course and then be doomed just as the League of Nations was doomed. I said, "This is an aggression, not only against Korea, but it's against the whole system of collective security. It's just as naked an aggression as if the Soviets had given the go ahead sign. There was no question. They (the North Koreans) wouldn't have dared do it otherwise. Well, there were comments like that.

MCKINZIE: There was no question in their minds but what the Soviets were connected to this. Is that a fair statement?

HICKERSON: Yes, that's correct. We broke up, By that time there was a large collection of newspapermen on the Pennsylvania Avenue side, and the President suggested everybody leave by the back door. We said, "It won't do any good, they'll just run around there." But nobody was to talk, any statement was to come from the President,

Now, then there was our second Security Council resolution, There was some confusion about that--especially among the third world representatives. I remember that at one stage along the way, in the course of the day, Gross and Senator Austin were on the telephone and said, "'We've gone as far as we can. If we could postpone this another 24 hours, we might get the Indian vote, but we're not at all sure, What do we do?"

I've forgotten what the lineup was, but the Indian vote would have been important. But I said, "I'll check this with the Secretary, and call you back, but I don't think we can wait. You've given all the arguments and they know this thing. There's a UN Commission in Korean. There was; and they reported there had been aggression and the North Koreans did it," I said, "What more can you say than that?"

Acheson confirmed what I said and I reported back to Senator Austin at the UN, India and one or two other states abstained but the resolution passed.

Then we had the second dinner at Blair House, just a review of the situation. I believe almost exactly the same people were there. And the operation was launched, The Soviet representative did not appear and he boycotted meetings until August.

The President's statement--we had a draft of that, and he called in the Congressional leaders the next morning and then released that. That was discussed at considerable length that night.

MCKINZIE: Was there any talk about getting a congressional declaration of war?

HICKERSON: Not that night, It was just too soon to get that. In all events, we sort of scattered--not all at once you know. Dean Acheson and I were the last two to leave. I rode back to the State Department in his car. He had something else to talk to the President about, I've forgotten what it was now, The President said, "Now, let's all have a drink. It's been a hard day,"

So we had a drink, I think it was bourbon, He said, "I have hoped and prayed that I would never have to make a decision like the one I have just made today," "But, he said, "I saw nothing else that was possible for me to do except that," he said, "Now, with this drink, that's out of my mind." He turned to me and said, "Jack," I think by then he was calling me Jack, "There's something I want you to know." He said, "In the final analysis I did this for the United Nations." He said, "I believed in League of Nations. It failed." And he said, "Lots of people thought that it failed because we weren't in it to back it up." He went on, "Okay, now we started the United Nations. It was our idea, and in this first big test we just couldn't let them down." He said, "If a collective system under the UN can work, it must be made to work, and now is the time to call their bluff." Those are almost exactly his words; and that's certainly an accurate account of the sense of what he said.

MCKINZIE: When did you sleep during all of this?

HICKERSON: I don't remember for sure. I'm not at all sure that I had all my clothes off Sunday night and Monday night. I do know that I didn't get home. I did maybe catch a few winks, but I didn't have my clothes off. I know that after the vote Jim Webb came up to the office and took me by the ear and said, "Get the hell out of here, go home and get some sleep.

The resolution called on members to support the United States, and the administering agent, MacArthur. They didn't elect MacArthur, they called on the President to designate him.

We had the task of determining what other nations could do. I started beating the drums to get as many troops as possible, and we ran into some interesting, and in retrospect, amusing situations,

The first decision by the Joint Chiefs of Staff--which shows how the military mind works--was that we would welcome support, but that it was impracticable to accept a contingent in less than fully-equipped division strength.

Well, they got off of that; finally they got down to accepting at company level.

MCKINZIE: Were you in direct contact with foreign representatives about troops?

HICKERSON: Oh yes. Here (Washington) and in New York too, They had officers up there and here. And I was in constant touch with Lie. For things really requiring action we went through Senator Austin up there. But every now and then things would come up. He called me on the telephone and one of those things was about offers. I believe it was Saudi Arabia which replied almost immediately that they had almost absolutely nothing that they could send to Korea except a company of camel cavalry.

Well, that's not camel territory you know. Lie told me that for a laugh. And I told him, "You know, Trygve, I think that you ought to accept that, but do it this way. Obviously they couldn't be sent to Korea, but accept them for the reserve and have them put the UN flag over that company out there in the desert,"

One of the Central Americans (another one of these amusing things), right at the start said, "We believe in the collective system and we want to help out, but our army is very small and does not amount to very much. But we will pledge ourselves to supply, if you can accept them, 1,000 naked, untrained men."

Well, we couldn't do that. We'd have to equip them. That was in the early days. We thanked them very much, but we couldn't accept it--but I had an idea that later on, before we got out of Korea we would have accepted it.

Let me go back to something, Have you by any chance read Mr. [Nikita] Khrushchev's book, *Khrushchev Remembers*?

MCKINZIE: No, I have not.

HICKERSON: Well, I suggest on Korea, you pick up a copy of that. He has a chapter devoted to it.

MCKINZIE: Is it a plausible explanation?

HICKERSON: Oh, I'm sure it is, It describes it in detail, and when they okayed this thing they all drank a champagne toast and the Chinese went along with considerable enthusiasm. Of course, the relations between the I.J.S.S.R. and China were okay then, but the North Koreans had to clear it both places, and it was cleared.

MCKINZIE: As soon as this all happened, European policy began to change--all the aid programs began to be shifted toward rearmament and there was some feeling that many European nations weren't pulling their part of the load.

Did you have any dealings with those Western European nations, through your duties in the UN?

HICKERSON: Not very much, The British organized what they called the Commonwealth Division. The French were up to their ears in Indochina and they said, "We are fighting Communists in Indochina,"--they may have sent some token forces. There were fifteen or

sixteen countries who sent forces to Korea. Incidentally, the South Africans sent a squadron of fighter planes out there and did darn well; they are good flyers. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, yes, But there should have been more help. I think every country should have sent fighting men out there.

MCKINZIE: And efforts to get them to send men were made both through UN auspices in New York and here...

HICKERSON: Yes and through their capitals, through our Embassies there.

There is one sort of footnote to my part in this thing, After I got two nights sleep--and things had calmed down and I could go home at night, though I frequently had to come back--I got to thinking and called in my senior officers in the Bureau of United Nations Affairs. I said, "Look, we had a break on this; the Soviets could have vetoed all of these resolutions, and we couldn't have gotten the General Assembly in session in less than two weeks. We need a resolution of the General Assembly to close the loophole so that the General Assembly can move into action if it has to."

I started the boys off to work and we did draft after draft and discussed it, and at the September 1950 session we introduced a resolution called "Uniting for Peace Resolution," which closed those loopholes, It provided that the Secretary General could call the General Assembly into session on 24 hours notice, and it urged on countries to designate, in their armed forces, groups to be specially trained and be made available instantly to the United Nations on the call either of the Security Council, or if it couldn't act, on the call of the General Assembly by an appropriate vote. We got that passed--and incidentally, our delegation member who fought that thing through was one Foster Dulles, He was all for it. But he was a curious fellow, He said at first, "We'll never get this thing through, Sure, they ought to do it, but they're not going to do it." I told him that we were pretty good at what the press frequently called up there, "arm twisting," and that I thought that if he worked on the high level of the delegation heads, and my boys worked on the low level, I said, "the British and the Canadians and the French, they'll all help us, and we'll get the Latin-Americans in there whooping it up." Incidentally the only Latin-American country to send forces was Colombia. I've forgotten the size of their contingent, but they did pretty well too.

Well, we got this resolution passed overwhelmingly and Dulles was pleased as punch, as were all of us, It's on the books, it's frequently referred to--a noble effort that didn't happen to produce the kind of results that we hoped for, but it did close that gap, It took two weeks to get the General Assembly in session, and we closed that to "not to exceed 48 hours, on the call of the Secretary General."

MCKINZIE: How did the dismissal of Douglas MacArthur affect your own work?

HICKERSON: It didn't, particularly. The President nominated [General Matthew B.] Ridgway and the UN approved him, and Ridgway did a magnificent job.

I was not in on the firing of MacArthur, it was handled at a very high level, very few people knew anything. I can only say that I shared the opinion of most of the generals, even military commanders, that the President waited too long to get rid of him. I had no doubt MacArthur was a brilliant field soldier, but he got us into one hell of a mess by advancing too far too fast, outrunning supplies and that sort of thing. Ridgway did a masterful job in getting us out of that mess. Foster Dulles was in Tokyo when this news came on June 25, 1950, and Foster Dulles told me that when the first word came in MacArthur dismissed this as "just a border aggression of no consequence, these things are happening all the time."

Dulles was quite concerned. I think Margaret brings that out in her book, but he told me that MacArthur said, "nothing to it." Foster didn't agree with that. He was a collective security man, and he sent, along with John Allison, a Foreign Service officer who was helping him, a joint telegram to the President saying that they hoped that the South Koreans can turn back this attack, but if they couldn't they wanted the President to know that they both agreed that the United States should stand firm in the United Nations and under the United Nations to repel this aggression.

MCKINZIE: Dean Acheson took a lot of heat in subsequent months, because of the speech he made at a press club luncheon in which he had not included Korea in the defense perimeter. There were even calls on the part of some people, called the Neanderthal men in his book, to impeach him, or to at least get the President to relieve him his duty. I know that the State Department's stock in terms of popularity and prestige plummeted. When you were dealing with UN affairs did that kind of domestic criticism bear on your ability to deal with delegations of other countries

HICKERSON: No, I do not think it did. Acheson was tremendously popular with foreigners as well as one of the ablest men I have ever worked with, and I think that was recognized pretty well for what it was. Remember Senator McCarthy made his first speech in 1950 before this Korean thing happened, and I don't honestly think it had any effect on dealing with other countries. It is true that we took a beating in prestige, not so much just that, but I mean McCarthyism, the 57 card carrying Communists--it led pretty well to the disruption of our own excellent China service contingent in the Foreign Service. Nearly all those boys had to leave, the ones who were right about Chiang Kai-shek and how you could not unify the country, and were accused of being Communists because of it--John Service, and a half a dozen others. Of course, they were the boys who knew all along, but they were without a job.

MCKINZIE: Thank you Mr. Ambassador.

INDEX

Acheson, Dean:

and Connally, Tom

and NATO treaty

and Truman, Harry S.

Achilles, Theodore
Allison, John

Bevin, Ernest
Blair House meeting, on Korean War
Brussels Pact, origins of

Canada, and NATO treaty
Clayton, Will
Communism, in Western Europe
Connally, Senator Tom
Council of Foreign Ministers, origins of

Dulles, John F.
European Bureau of U.S. State Department

France:
 and Marshall Plan
 and NATO treaty

Gross, Ernest

Hickerson, John D.:
 and Connally, Tom
 and NATO, formation of
 and Truman, statement on Korean intervention

Hull, Cordell
 and Morgenthau Plan

Institute for Foreign Affairs

Kennan, George
Korean War:
 military support from UN members
 outbreak of, and UN resolution
 and Soviet Union's involvement
 and U.S. intervention

Lend-lease, termination of
Lie, Trygve
London Conference of Foreign Ministers, in 1947
Lovett, Robert

MacArthur, Douglas, dismissal of
McCarthyism

Malik, Jacob
Marshall, George C., and Council of Foreign Ministers
Marshall plan, beginnings of
 and Communist countries
 and European initiatives
Morgenthau plan
Muccio, John, and Rhee, Syngman

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):
 origins and organization of
 and U.S. Senate's role in

Reston, James ("Scotty")
Rhee, Syngman, and reaction to outbreak of Korean War
Rusk, Dean, and Korean War

Service, John
Soviet Union:
 and reconstruction of Europe
 and spy ring, in Canada
 and United Nations
 and United States
State, War, and Navy Coordinating Committee

Truman, Harry S.:
 and Acheson, Dean
 and Connally, Tom
 and Korean War, decision to intervene
 and wheat prices in 1947-1948

United Nations:
 founding of
 resolution on Korean War
 "Uniting for Peace Resolution"
United States-Canadian Defense Board

Vandenberg, Arthur, and NATO

Wainhouse, David