

BACKGROUND

Dept. of External Affairs  
Ministère des Affaires extérieures  
NATO'S ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS  
AND  
CANADIAN INTERESTS AND OBJECTIVES MAY 1987

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I. Background

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a defensive alliance of sixteen democratic nations in Western Europe and North America acting collectively to deter, and if necessary defend against, any aggression, particularly from the member nations of the Warsaw Pact. While its primary purpose is to defend the NATO area through effective co-ordination of the collective military capabilities of Alliance members, it also serves the equally important political role as the central Western forum for consulting on developments of common interest, particularly on means of, and where appropriate concerting member nations' efforts towards, reducing East-West tensions and maintaining international peace and stability.

Founded in 1949 by the original twelve signatories to the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO's orientation, functions, and membership have grown and evolved to the stage where the breadth of interests considered in the Alliance is extraordinarily wide-ranging, and the organizational infrastructure developed to deal with these interests is large and complex.

- Primarily a consultative organization in the beginning, headed by the North Atlantic Council (NAC) which co-ordinated the concerns of Foreign, Defence and Finance Ministers, by the early 1950's NATO had established a Defence Committee of Defence Ministers, had initiated collective defence planning on a co-ordinated basis, and had begun the development of a commonly-funded and utilized military infrastructure.
- In the mid-fifties, the adoption of the "Report of the Three Wise Men" substantially re-organized and strengthened the political/economic consultative mechanisms and procedures of the Alliance, including inter alia the establishment of the Science Committee.
- During this period, the membership was increased to fifteen with the accession of Greece and Turkey in 1952 and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955.
- In the late sixties, the organization underwent a major evolutionary change with the withdrawal of France from the Alliance's Integrated Military Structure and its related defence planning activities, and the subsequent emergence of a re-vamped Defence Planning Committee (DPC), which became the co-ordinating and decision-making body for all questions concerning the Integrated

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