

## CONSULTATION

Since 1967 the NPG has drawn up guidelines as to the kind of consultations which should take place in the event of a crisis. According to Daniel Charles, however, the Group has never outlined precise procedures for the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>16</sup> In the event of armed conflict in Europe the NPG could do nothing. Both consultations and decisions would be the responsibility of the executive branches of the alliance, such as SACEUR and the Defence Planning Committee where the ambassadors of the member governments would conduct their own internal deliberations and would also consult with their allies as to the need to employ nuclear arms.

NATO's cohesion depends entirely on having its members reach a consensus through the process of consultations. This requires meetings at every level and an adequate exchange of information. The NATO countries seem to be satisfied with the procedures which have been set up for carrying out this process. However, the most important question does not concern the type of consultations which will take place in advance of hostilities but rather what will happen once hostilities actually start. Most analysts agree that consultations between those involved will be limited, not only because of the time they would require but also because the United States directly controls most of the nuclear weapons deployed in Europe and would thus be able to use them unilaterally.

If war were to break out on the Central European front, NATO would not necessarily resort to using nuclear arms from the outset. However, it is generally agreed that once the conflict had gone on for several days the military leaders could ask for permission to use them.<sup>17</sup> According to most scenarios, between twenty-four and sixty hours might elapse between the time SACEUR received permission to use such weapons and the moment that they became operational.<sup>18</sup> If one adds to this the preceding period, when the conflict remained at the conventional level, one is led to the conclusion that the allies might have one or two weeks in which to reach a decision as to whether nuclear weapons should be used. Consultation seems, therefore, to be a genuine possibility. Nonetheless, NATO documents do state that SACEUR has the right to authorize the use of nuclear weapons if "neither the time or the circumstances allow for consultations at the national level."<sup>18</sup>

More and more analysts believe that the period of conventional warfare might last longer than the few weeks envisaged by officials. Thus Joshua Epstein even

reckons that NATO is capable of withstanding an attack by the Warsaw Pact forces for at least 136 days without losing any territory.<sup>28</sup> Such a lapse of time would allow the political authorities to give the matter more careful consideration before deciding on the use of nuclear weapons.

## THE DECISION

The NPG cannot decide whether nuclear weapons are to be used in time of conflict. "Consultation, both in the Nuclear Planning Group and elsewhere in the alliance, may serve to prepare the group for collective agreement to the use of nuclear weapons, but, in the final analysis, each individual government will have to decide for itself how it will respond to the possible use by the alliance of nuclear weapons."<sup>21</sup>

The train of events which would lead to the authorization and the use of nuclear weapons would be the following: "SACEUR, on his own or at the request of a subordinate military commander or member state, asks approval from the NATO Military Committee through the Defence Planning Committee. A formal request for weapon release is then forwarded to the United States (and in a few instances to the United Kingdom). A positive answer reflects the national decision that releases control of the weapons to the forces involved (US and allied) and gives the authority to arm the weapons and use them in packages or otherwise. This authority presumably covers initial use and follow-on use. A second chain involves requests by SACEUR for launcher release to all national authorities that control nuclear-capable delivery systems."<sup>22</sup>

Since the nuclear warheads belong to the United States which is bound by specific accords with each of the host countries (the Programmes of Cooperation), the state with the warhead and the state with the delivery system are the only ones which can authorize the use of these weapons. Certainly the elaborate procedures for consultation which have been worked out in the NPG would be employed and officially all members, even the non-nuclear ones, would be kept informed about what was going on. However, there is no obligation to consult the others before ratifying any decision to use the weapons. "National decisions are required; allied consultation is only desirable."<sup>23</sup>

But the country with the warhead and the host country on whose territory the launcher is deployed may be faced with two kinds of situation before they can decide to use nuclear arms. The allied country is usually host to two types of weapons: those for which it