

Charles de Gaulle had already understood this; the French nuclear programme, begun in 1954, continued to swell France's independent nuclear arsenal.

Discussions within the alliance led to the development of a new policy which allowed those in command more leeway concerning the use of nuclear weapons. In 1967 NATO acknowledged the changed conditions by adopting "flexible response." "If the level of defensive action taken initially did not achieve success, then the strategy of flexible response required a gradual progression to more advanced types of defence, while maintaining control of the situation."⁵ This new doctrine applied to both conventional and nuclear warfare.

Apart from these strategic and military problems, one of the most important factors which led to the formation of the NPG was the need for the allies to be consulted and to have a voice in decisions concerning the use of nuclear weapons. The deployment of these weapons in Europe, whether as part of the equipment of the US forces or of other national forces, posed problems concerning their use in time of war. As was noted above, in some instances the European NATO members possess the launchers while the warhead itself remains under US control. In the event of a crisis any decision to launch should, in principle, be taken bilaterally. In fact, it quickly became apparent that, because the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) is also Commander-in-Chief of the US forces in Europe (CINCEUR), the United States would be able to take any such decision alone.

There have been many attempts to place NATO's nuclear forces under joint control so that the allies could take part in collective decision-making, and would have greater control over these forces; all these attempts have come to nothing. Among the numerous proposals put forward it is worth noting the one made by General Charles de Gaulle in 1958. He sent a memorandum to the United States and Britain proposing that a directorate comprised of representatives from each of their three countries be put in charge of NATO;⁶ this suggestion was rejected. In 1960 General Norstad, then Commander of the Allied Forces, put forward the idea that NATO should become the "fourth nuclear power" in the West, by setting up a multilateral authority to be in charge of nuclear warheads.⁷

Later the same year this recommendation was overtaken by another US proposal, this one suggesting the creation of a multilateral nuclear force which would

consist of five ballistic missile submarines. This scheme was rejected but reappeared in 1962 under the name of the Multilateral Force (MLF). This time it was to consist of twenty-five surface ships armed with two hundred missiles which would be under the joint ownership and control of those who participated.⁸ President John F. Kennedy and British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan discussed this plan at the Nassau Meeting in 1962. However, this offer was rejected by France in January 1963 and the matter was shelved until 1965. It had foundered on the problem of who should control the warheads and on the question of the US veto. "The failure of this project brought to light the inherent contradiction between nuclear logic and national sovereignty, and the impossibility of reaching a decision on the use of nuclear weapons unless this took place in a national context."⁹

In May 1962, while all this was going on, NATO adopted a series of measures concerning the circumstances in which the alliance should resort to the use of nuclear weapons. In a speech which he made at the time of the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Athens, the US Secretary of Defense, Robert MacNamara, presented to his colleagues what is now known as the Athens Guidelines on Nuclear Defence.

In general these guidelines described NATO's nuclear commitments in the event of aggression as well as the degree of political consultation which should occur in such circumstances. They also laid down procedures for an allied exchange of information on nuclear matters and stipulated that this should take place in a Nuclear Committee, which was to be the precursor of the NPG. The Athens Guidelines, combined with the memory of earlier setbacks, encouraged the United States to be more cooperative with its allies. In June 1965 at the time of the defence ministers' meeting it was agreed that the allies should have more say in nuclear planning and a special committee spent a year studying how this could best be achieved. In December 1966 NATO announced the creation of the Defence Planning Committee and the Nuclear Planning Group.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE NPG

Robert MacNamara's main idea in initiating the NPG was to allow the allies to take part in discussion concerning nuclear weapons. At the NPG's first meeting on 6 April 1967 he enumerated the various attempts which had been made over the previous decade in an effort to determine how "the non-nuclear allies might have a greater voice in assessing the nature of the nuclear threat to the alliance, in determining