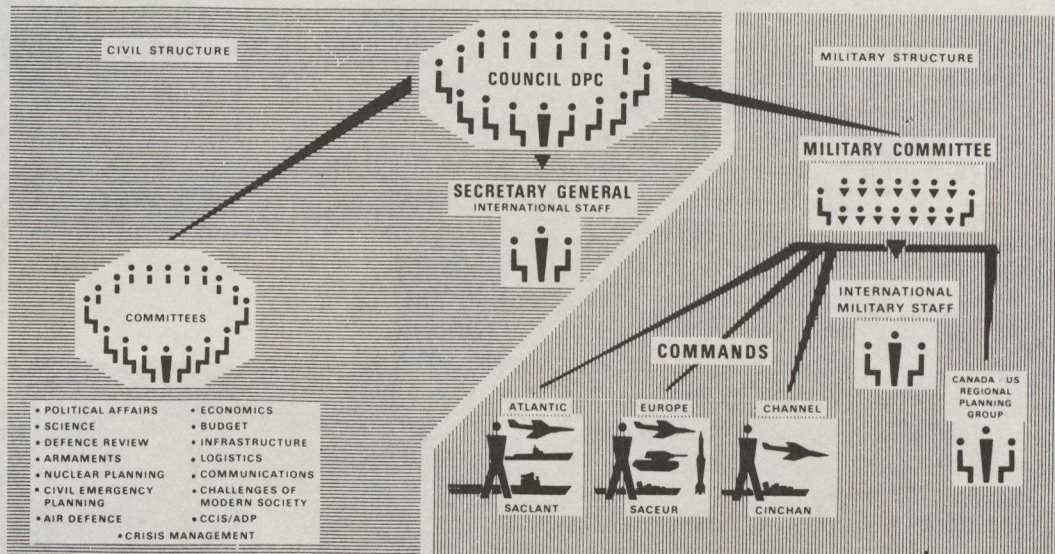


Civil and Military Structure

The North Atlantic Council, the highest authority in NATO, provides a forum for wide political consultation and coordination between the allies. Military policy is discussed in the Defence Planning Committee (DPC) composed of member countries participating in NATO's integrated defence structure. The Council and the DPC meet twice yearly in ministerial meetings when member countries are represented by Foreign and Defence Ministers. In permanent session the Council meets at least once a week at the level of ambassadors (Permanent Representatives). The Secretary General of NATO is Chairman of the Council and the DPC and also heads the International Staff. In support of their roles, the Council and the DPC have established a number of committees covering the whole range of NATO's activities which normally meet under the chairmanship of a member of the International Staff.



The Military Committee, composed of the Chiefs-of-Staff of the member countries taking part in the NATO integrated military structure, is the senior military authority in the Alliance. It provides advice to the Council or DPC on military matters and gives guidance to the Major NATO Commanders. Meeting at Chiefs-of-Staff level at least twice a year, the Committee in permanent session meets weekly at the level of national Military Representatives appointed by their Chiefs-of-Staff. The Chairman of the Military Committee is elected by the Chiefs-of-Staff for a period of 2-3 years. Implementation of the policies and decisions of the Military Committee is ensured by the International Military Staff (IMS) which acts as executive agency. The NATO defence area is divided into three separate regional Commands – Allied Command Europe, Allied Command Atlantic and Allied Command Channel – and a Regional Planning Group for the North American area. Under the general guidance of the Military Committee the Major NATO Commanders are responsible for planning the defence of their areas and for conducting NATO's land, sea and air exercises.