

(Summit) but normally meets twice-annually at Foreign Ministers' level (Ministerial sessions). It considers all issues of general policy concern which affect the interests of all sixteen members, whereas the parallel Defence Planning Committee, composed of Defence Ministers (also meeting twice-yearly) concentrates on defence planning issues. The third Ministerial grouping, the Nuclear Planning Group, again composed of Defence Ministers meeting bi-annually, determines policy on nuclear issues. Below the Ministerial level, the day-to-day business of these three groups is conducted by Permanent Representatives based in Brussels. Policy papers on issues of concern to Alliance members are co-ordinated and funneled to Perm Reps and Ministers by a large and complex array of subordinate Committees, Working Groups, Ad Hoc Groups etc. - some 300 at any one time. The principal committees, however, number about a score - e.g. political affairs, economics, defence review, armaments, nuclear planning, civil emergency planning, science, air defence, information, budget, infrastructure, logistics, communications, security, and so on.

This committee structure is manned largely by representatives of national delegations supplemented as necessary by experts from capitals, and serviced by an International Secretariat headed by the Secretary General, who also chairs meetings of Permanent Representatives and Ministers. The staff of the International Secretariat is drawn from member nations and usually hired on a contract basis. It is divided into five divisions headed by Assistant Secretaries General - Political, Defence Planning and Policy, Defence Support, Scientific Affairs, and Infrastructure, Logistics and Council Operations. The Secretariat is essentially a co-ordinating body - it has no supra-national powers.

Paralleling this civilian structure is that of the Military Committee, which provides military advice to the civilian authorities and which conveys civilian policy guidance and instructions to the three Major NATO Commands - SACLANT, SACEUR and CINCHAN. The Military Committee is composed of the Chiefs of Defence Staff of member nations (represented on a day-to-day basis by Permanent Military Representatives), has its own network of committees composed of representatives from national military delegations, and is serviced by the International Military Staff staffed by military officers seconded from national Ministries of Defence. The Chairman of the Military Committee runs the IMS and attends meetings of the NAC, DPC, and NPG.

Although in general the bulk of military forces remain under national command in peacetime, in times of crisis or war,