

NATO members are committed to consult each other whenever "the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the parties is threatened." Each member retains full status as an independent nation free to decide upon the best means of providing mutual support. In Article five, members have agreed to treat an attack on any one of them as an attack on all. Each member is committed to "take such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."

NATO's Organization: How it Works

All sixteen member states of the Alliance are represented on the North Atlantic Council, the highest consultative forum in the Alliance. Each has an equal voice and all decisions require consensus. The Council meets weekly at the level of Ambassadors, and twice yearly at the level of Foreign Ministers. It may be called into emergency session at any time.

The Defence Planning Committee, established in 1966, and made up of representatives from all members except France and Spain, is responsible for questions concerning NATO's collective defence activities. This committee meets regularly at the level of Ambassadors, and twice yearly at the level of Defence Ministers.

Only three members of NATO (the United States, United Kingdom, and France) have nuclear weapons. Of these, the United States and the United Kingdom are integrated into the military structure of NATO. To facilitate involvement by the non-nuclear members of the Alliance in NATO's nuclear affairs, the Nuclear Planning Group was also established in 1966. This group has permitted wider participation in the nuclear decision-making process.

The senior military authority of NATO is the Military Committee made up of all NATO members except France and Spain. It advises both the North Atlantic Council and the Defence Planning Committee.

NATO's integrated military forces are divided into three major commands: Europe, the Atlantic, and the Channel. Each Supreme Allied Commander is responsible for the planning of the defence of the region for which he is responsible, under the guidance of the Military Committee.

To assist in the co-ordination of work, a large number of subordinate committees and groups have been established to