

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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[The following study provides historical background material regarding the evolution of NATO whose member countries are major participants in the U.S. Security Assistance Program. The study is reprinted from Department of State Publication 9511, September 1987.]

The North Atlantic Organization (NATO) was born in an era of rising East-West tensions. Its member states joined together to safeguard their national security and political democracy from the challenge posed by Soviet expansionism. In spite of frequent, well-publicized disagreements, the Alliance has been durable, responding to changing international conditions and expanding from its original 12 member states to 16. NATO's strengths remain the military security that membership provides individual states, its ability to facilitate consultation among its members states, and the underlying U.S. commitment to come to the defense of Europe.

THE ORIGINS OF NATO, 1947-1949

The decision of the United States, Canada, and 10 European states to enter into a peacetime defensive alliance was one of the most significant developments of the post-World War II era. For the United States in particular, membership in NATO represented a fundamental change in its more than century-old foreign policy of refraining from involvement with "entangling alliances." The emerging East-West conflict provided the context for the development of NATO. By 1947, the United States and Soviet Union had clashed over nuclear disarmament, the nature of the postwar economic and political settlement in Central and Eastern Europe, Iran, and the shape of peace treaties with the defeated Axis nations. The pace of Western European economic recovery was agonizingly slow. Severe shortages in food, fuel, and the basic necessities of life stimulated popular discontent. Concern grew over the establishment of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The U.S. Government responded with a series of highly creative economic and political initiatives that stabilized both European democracy and a free trading system.

The European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan) of 1948-1952 was a key element in the U.S. program of European stabilization. It rebuilt the sinews of Europe's economy, committed the United States to a long-term role in Europe, and created mechanisms for political consultation between the two sides of the Atlantic. Simultaneously, the European states, with the encouragement of the United States, took the first steps toward economic and political integration by creating in 1947 the Organization for European Economic Cooperation and in 1948 a security arrangement, the Brussels Pact (known after 1955 as the Western European Union). Economic weakness, however, limited Europe's ability to provide for its defense.

After considerable debate within the United States, the leaders of the executive and legislative branches agreed on two immediate U.S. responses to Europe's crisis: participation in a defensive peacetime alliance, and provision of military equipment and technical assistance. Negotiations for the alliance began quietly in March 1948 among the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. On June 11, 1948, the U.S. Senate adopted the Vandenberg Resolution [named for its originator, Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, R., Mich.], encouraging U.S. participation in a collective defense arrangement. The Benelux states and France joined the talks in July. Initial

discussions focused on the text of a treaty and the definition of the alliance's geographical extension and membership.

CREATING AN ALLIANCE STRUCTURE, 1949-1955

On April 4, 1949, the Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal signed the North Atlantic Treaty in a ceremony held in Washington, D.C. The NATO Treaty came into force on August 24, 1949, when the 12 participating nations formally deposited their instruments of ratification.

The state of East-West relations did not permit a leisurely approach to building the military and political structures of alliance. During the summer of 1949, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic weapon. China fell to a Communist revolution during the autumn of 1949. Then, in June 1950, North Korean forces invaded South Korea. U.S. and Western European leaders concluded that the attack on Korea might be the prelude to a military move against Europe.

These external stimuli quickened the pace of NATO's transformation into an active defense structure. Immediately after the Senate approved the NATO Treaty in July 1949, the Truman administration presented Congress with legislation authorizing a Military Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) to provide equipment and training for the armies of the NATO Allies. In October 1949, Congress approved a \$1.3 billion MDAP appropriation. After the outbreak of the Korean war in June 1950, the size of U.S. military assistance grants rose rapidly. The Offshore Procurement Program, which encouraged the creation of defense industries in Europe, supplemented MDAP.

The North Atlantic Council, composed of the Foreign Ministers of the NATO states, met in Washington on July 17, 1949. The Foreign Ministers created committees to handle military planning, established regional planning groups to look at specific local issues, and took the first steps toward building standing mechanisms for economic and political cooperation. A December 1949 agreement provided for an initial division of responsibility among the Allies: the United States would provide the Alliance's strategic bombing capability, while the European states contributed the bulk of its ground troops and tactical air defense. The United States and Great Britain would defend NATO's Atlantic lines of communication, while the United States would increase its military presence in Europe.

The Allies agreed to speedily build a permanent military command structure. President Truman, at the request of the NATO Ministers, appointed General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe in December 1950. Eisenhower quickly built a military chain of command, and in 1952 put the NATO armies through their first major combined exercises. The North Atlantic Council's February 1952 Lisbon meeting established force goals for each NATO member states. Although these goals were not completely met, the Allied states increased their military preparedness and allocated more of their resources to the common defense. In September 1951, the NATO member states agreed to invite Greece and Turkey to join the Alliance [and they became members on February 15, 1952].

By 1954, the NATO states had created a permanent defense mechanism. The North Atlantic Council became the executive, and its standing council of representatives, made up of ambassadors from the members states, provided policy coordination. NATO's permanent planning groups and secretariat were located in Paris. The Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) coordinated defense preparations.

NATO then focused on the role West Germany would play in the defense of the West. Meetings of NATO Ministers in September and October 1950 produced general agreement that

West Germany must be part of NATO. The Allied strategy of forward defense along the borders of Communist states required West German participation. France and other continental European Allies were deeply concerned about the effects of rearming the Germans so soon after the defeat of nazism. On October 24, 1950, French Premier Rene Pleven unveiled a plan for a European Defense Community (EDC), consisting of a standing European army under the control of a European Defense Minister. The plan would commit German manpower to the common defense but without forming a separate German army or general staff. Although the United States actively supported the plan, the United Kingdom declined to join, citing its imperial commitments. The absence of a postwar German peace settlement and the creation of East and West German states made European states wary of the concept of an integrated defense force. The French and Italian Governments delayed parliamentary action on the European Defense Community in the face of combined Communist and nationalist opposition. Finally, in August 1954, the French Government presented the EDC measure to the National Assembly, which rejected it.

The defeat of the EDC was followed by West German rearmament. A September-October 1954 meeting of the Foreign Ministers of nine NATO powers agreed to terminate the military occupation of the Federal Republic of Germany and invite the West German Government to join NATO. Italy and the Federal Republic at this time acceded to the Western European Union. The Government of the Federal Republic voluntarily agreed to limit its arms buildup and undertook not to construct nuclear weapons and certain other types of armaments. In May 1955, the Federal Republic joined NATO [as its fifteenth member state].

THE NUCLEAR CONTROL ISSUE, 1958-1964

In 1958, France's President Charles de Gaulle brought to the surface two of the underlying tensions within the Alliance: concern over nuclear strategy, and France's claim to a special leadership role within NATO. Although Great Britain also maintained a nuclear capability within the Western Alliance, the United States possessed an overwhelming predominance in nuclear weapons stockpile and delivery systems. At their December 1954 meeting, the NATO Foreign and Defense Ministers adopted a policy of nuclear response to a Soviet attack on Europe, commonly referred to as "massive retaliation." The policy reflected a U.S. desire to maintain a credible deterrent at the lowest possible cost. By 1958, however, the Soviet Union had made major strides in both long-range bomber and missile technology and it was capable of striking the United States. Increasingly, Europeans asked if the United States would risk a nuclear attack on its territory to defend Europe.

De Gaulle was among the doubters. He was determined to reduce U.S. control over Alliance nuclear policy by building an independent nuclear force, the *force de frappe*, a goal that he achieved in the early 1960s. The French President wanted France to act as the principal spokesman for Europe in an inner group of three with the United States and Great Britain.

The NATO nations rejected De Gaulle's 1958 bid to create a two-tiered alliance structure, insisting instead on the equality of all NATO members. In an effort to accommodate the French leader on nuclear policy, the West Germans urged the Alliance to create a multilateral nuclear force (MNF) within NATO. The United States initially hesitated to endorse the MNF because of its concern with preventing nuclear proliferation. In 1963, however, the Kennedy Administration came forward with a proposal to create an MNF surface fleet equipped with Polaris missiles under NATO command. The MNF would fit into the overall U.S. nuclear defense strategy. De Gaulle rejected the plan because the United States insisted on retaining final say on the launching of these weapons. The United States quietly dropped the MNF concept in 1964. In 1966, De Gaulle took France out of the Alliance military command structure, while maintaining French participation in the political consultative mechanism. Consequently, NATO headquarters moved from Paris to Brussels and U.S. forces withdrew from France.

FLEXIBLE RESPONSE AND DETENTE, 1966-1974

One factor in De Gaulle's decision to pull French forces out of NATO was his belief that the climate of East-West relations was improving and that the danger of war had lessened. By the mid-1960s, two separate but related processes of normalization of relations were underway between East and West. The United States and the Soviet Union were attempting to lessen tensions between themselves. At the same time, a number of Western European states, including France and the Federal Republic of Germany, were seeking new relationships with the Soviet Union and Eastern European states.

Within the context of this changing political climate, the NATO nations in December 1966 commissioned a study on the "Future Tasks of the Alliance" by a working group headed by Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel. The Allies also agreed to establish two permanent bodies for nuclear planning, the Nuclear Defense Affairs Committee, open to all members, and a smaller Nuclear Planning Group, with permanent and rotating members, to handle the details.

The Harmel Report, issued at the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels in December 1967, concluded that "military security and a policy of detente are not contradictory but complementary," and that NATO had an important role to play in preparing for bilateral and multilateral negotiations between Eastern and Western nations over key issues such as the future of Germany and arms control. Public perception of the Alliance would be significantly improved, the report noted, if the Allied consultative process were strengthened and if the Alliance took an active role in advancing the rapprochement between East and West by coordinating European and U.S. political approaches to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Also at Brussels, the Alliance adopted a strategy of "flexible response," endorsing a balanced range of appropriate conventional and nuclear reactions to all levels of aggression or threats of aggression. The responses were designed first to deter aggression, but failing that to maintain the security and integrity of the North Atlantic Treaty area within the concept of forward defense.

The move toward East-West accommodation met a significant setback in August 1968 when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. The Soviet invasion gave impetus to the buildup of NATO conventional forces and strengthened support for the Alliance. A number of European countries increased their NATO contributions, while the United States cancelled planned troop reductions in Europe.

Detente was further limited by disagreement over the U.S. role in Europe as well as by Soviet support for "national liberation movements" in the underdeveloped nations. While attempting to extend its influence in the Third World, the Soviet Union insisted that detente required the exclusion of the United States from Europe and an end to defensive alliances. It called NATO a U.S.-imposed straitjacket whose continued existence precluded successful settlement of Europe's difficulties. The United States and its NATO Allies rejected this claim and insisted that any improvement in relations between East and West would have to be negotiated within the existing Alliance framework.

The Western view prevailed. During the Nixon Administration (1969-1974), the West succeeded in creating arrangements that fostered both an improved climate of East-West relations and a NATO role in the process. The conclusion in September 1971 of a Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin (which had been occupied since 1945 by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union), reduced tensions between the blocs. The Western Allies extracted Soviet concessions over Berlin in exchange for an agreement to convene a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The caucus of NATO states has been the primary forum for

coordinating Western strategy at successive CSCE meetings. NATO coordination has played an important role in defining the West's CSCE objectives.

Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Talks (MFBR) also began [in 1973] as a result of a NATO initiative. These talks, intended to reduce in a stabilizing way the conventional forces of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe, continue to the present, but the results have not been significant. The Soviet Union has refused to address Western compromise proposals to concentrate on a limited reduction of U.S. and Soviet forces under effective verification measures.

The appropriate level of U.S. participation in NATO was debated vigorously during the Nixon administration. The Mansfield Amendment of 1971, which would have significantly cut the number of U.S. troops stationed in Germany, reflected a widely held view that Europeans must do more for their own defense and that the United States must improve its balance of payments. The Nixon administration, with the support of the foreign policy establishment, headed off a reduction of one-half of the ground troops committed to Europe. West European leaders recognized the seriousness of public sentiment in the United States, and the West German Government arranged to pay a higher share of the costs of maintaining U.S. forces on its soil.

During the mid-1970s, conflicting political and economic interest among NATO's member states created an element of tension within the Alliance. Disagreements over Middle East policy between the United States and its European partners surfaced at the time of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the subsequent Arab oil embargo. Tensions within the Alliance grew more acute in 1974 as a result of a major crisis on Cyprus. A coup by right-wing Greek Cypriots triggered Turkish military occupation of almost 40 percent of the island of Cyprus in July-August 1974. Greece's newly-installed democratic government pulled its forces out of NATO's integrated military command structure to protest the Alliance's inability to prevent or reverse the Turkish military action. Meanwhile, the Allies welcomed the end of the dictatorship in Portugal, but watched the growing radicalization of its military leadership and the increasing strength of the Portuguese Communist Party with mounting concern until democratic forces gained control of the situation in late 1975.

THE DECLINE OF DETENTE, 1975-1980

Detente became increasingly difficult to maintain after 1974. The United States and the Soviet Union clashed over the expansion of Soviet influence in Africa, and negotiations stalled on a second SALT agreement. The Soviet Union undertook a major modernization of its intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), substantially increasing the threat to NATO by replacing older SS-4 and SS-5 missiles with the mobile, longer-range, more accurate SS-20 [missiles], which were equipped with multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRVs). The concept of detente came under attack within the United States from both sides of the political spectrum.

NATO continued to carry out its basic defense functions, and regained its unity through a series of political accommodations and military reforms. The Portuguese situation began to stabilize in 1976-1977. Although Greek-Turkish relations remained tense, the Greek Government recognized the value of NATO participation and rejoined the Alliance's military wing in October 1980. The Western nations also achieved greater coordination on energy policy. Newly-democratic Spain joined the NATO Alliance in December 1981.

The growing Soviet military threat was a key to improved Allied cooperation. In May 1977, the NATO states agreed to increase their defense expenditures by three percent per annum after adjustment for inflation in order to meet the growth in Soviet military power. West Germany took the lead in calling for a NATO response to the Soviet SS-20 intermediate-range missile deployments. Discussions within the Alliance led to the adoption in December 1979 of a "two-track" approach. The Western Alliance would proceed with the installation of 562 U.S. Pershing

II and ground-launched intermediate-range cruise missiles beginning in 1983, while the United States would offer to negotiate with the Soviet Union on an INF balance at the lowest possible level.

FROM A SECOND COLD WAR TO AN ERA OF INTENSIFIED DIALOG, 1980-1987

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 plunged East-West relations into a period of hostility reminiscent of the early years of the cold war. The Carter administration requested a delay in Senate consideration of the June 1979 SALT II Treaty, which was already under heavy criticism. The United States imposed a grain embargo on the Soviet Union and sought to organize a Western boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games to protest the invasion.

Soviet actions continued to feed the crisis. The U.S.S.R. encouraged and supported the Polish Government's imposition of martial law and its repression of popular democratic movements. It propped up a puppet government in Afghanistan and provided it with military support against a popular resistance movement. It intensified the repression of domestic human rights activists. The quick succession of three aging Soviet leaders increased the West's difficulties in dealing with the Soviet Union. The September 1, 1983, destruction of KAL 007, an unarmed [South Korean] civilian airliner that strayed into Soviet airspace, further impeded East-West dialog.

NATO continued to pursue its "two-track" approach on missile deployment. In 1981, the Reagan administration, in close consultation with the Allies, offered a "zero-zero" INF outcome--no Pershing II/cruise missile deployments in exchange for the dismantlement of comparable Soviet weapons systems--and in 1983, an interim INF approach to establish equal low ceilings on these weapons for the United States and the Soviet Union on a global basis. The Soviet Union rejected Western proposals and intensified its propaganda campaign, seeking to exploit a growing pacifist movement in Europe and the United States to "freeze" a status quo that established a Soviet predominance by preventing a U.S. INF deployment. The Soviet Union broke off INF talks in the fall of 1983, as the first U.S. missiles became operational.

Upon taking office in January 1981, President Reagan began a long-term nuclear and conventional rearmament program. The Administration urged the NATO Allies to take a greater share in the defense of Europe through a buildup of their conventional forces. The Administration maintained that the Alliance must solidify the Western defense posture as the first step toward realistic and production negotiations with the Soviet Union. U.S. proposals for Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) foresaw an overall reduction in the number of offensive nuclear weapons each side deployed, as well as a restructuring of these forces to enhance stability. The Reagan administration also sought to reduce the size of the ground forces that both sides had in Europe in the MBFR talks, and to improve European security through adopting concrete and mutually verifiable confidence-building measures. The Madrid meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1980-1983) adopted a NATO-backed proposal for the creation of a Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe (CDE) with a mandate to formulate confidence-building measures. The CDE concluded its meeting in Stockholm in September 1986 with an agreement on a set of mutually complementary measures for monitoring significant military activities in Europe, including mandatory on-site inspection as a means of verification. The ongoing Vienna CSCE review conference is now considering a NATO proposal to establish talks on further confidence- and security-building measures as well as negotiations on conventional stability.

NATO also sought to improve intergovernmental cooperation in other areas of deep mutual concern. A May 1981 NATO declaration deplored the recent resurgence of violent terrorist attacks, agreed on the necessity for bilateral and multilateral cooperation to prevent and combat terrorism,

and expressed determination to take all necessary measures to ensure the security of diplomatic and other official personnel.

The successful conclusion of the Madrid CSCE meeting in 1983 marked the first break in the cycle of East-West confrontation that characterized the relationship since the invasion of Afghanistan. The 1984 reelection of President Reagan and the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev as Soviet leader in the spring of 1985 provided both great powers with stable political leadership. Negotiations on INF and strategic arms reductions as well as on the limitation of space systems began in Geneva in March 1985. The November 1985 Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Geneva produced an agreement to give priority to 50 percent START reductions and to an interim INF agreement. A subsequent meeting of the two leaders at Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986 led to wide ranging discussion of major disarmament initiatives, but no agreement. In February 1987, General Secretary Gorbachev removed his previous requirement that U.S. concessions on the Strategic Defense Initiative precede INF progress. The June 1987 meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers at Reykjavik supported the global and effectively verifiable elimination of both long-and short-range United States and Soviet land-based INF missiles, urging the Soviet Union to drop its demand to retain a portion of its SS-20 missiles. In September, the United States and the Soviet Union announced agreement in principle to a zero level on all INF missiles.

NATO's role in an era of renewed negotiations remains central. It provides the military deterrent essential for success in negotiations. Moreover, as the process of Europe's economic and political integration continues and as Europe's role in its own defense increases, NATO serves a a unique forum in which Allied policy can be forged and differences between the American and European pillars of the Atlantic Alliance resolved.