
Fact Sheet: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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NATO TODAY

The Rome Declaration on Peace and Cooperation issued after the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in November 1991 signaled the vitality of the alliance in adapting to security needs in a post-Cold War world. While NATO continues to adhere to a comprehensive approach of political and military efforts to create a just and lasting peaceful order in Europe, future opportunities for achieving alliance objectives through political means are recognized as being greater than ever before.

To build increased understanding and confidence among all European countries, the new NATO security policy reflects a greater reliance on elements of dialogue and cooperation in addition to the commitment to maintain an effective, collective defense capability. Regular diplomatic liaison and military contacts with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will reinforce stability by affording a means to exchange information on respective security concerns. Greater cooperation among the countries of Europe will lessen political, economic, or social divisions that might lead to future instability and threaten security. Given the transformed nature of the risks facing the alliance, establishing patterns of consultation with the countries of Eastern Europe will be critical in the management of potential crises. Although the political approach to security will continue to grow in importance, the maintenance of an adequate military capability will remain central to the alliance's security objectives.

Secretary Baker has praised NATO as "a sturdy cornerstone and initiator of cooperative structures of security for a Europe whole and free." The Secretary has encouraged the alliance's move to adjust its strategic concept to meet changing times and its decision to open a new agenda with Central and Eastern Europe and the evolving Soviet Union. Calling this the "time to set new goals, which go beyond the concept of balance and begin to establish a basis for a real cooperative security," he emphasized that "NATO has a key role to play in bringing about a Europe and trans-Atlantic community that includes the Soviet Union and is truly whole and free." On the eve of the Rome summit, he looked forward to the opening of "a new chapter in the history of the alliance, a time for genuine peace and partnership."

The New Strategic Concept underlines the essential purpose of the alliance: to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and to work for the establishment of a just and lasting peaceful order in all of Europe. It [NATO] will continue its role in defending member states against any threat of aggression, preserving the strategic balance within Europe, and serving as a transatlantic forum for allied consultations on issues affecting their vital interests.

In an environment of uncertainty and unpredictable challenges, NATO will continue to fulfill a mission in building the architecture of an undivided Europe. The initiative undertaken by the allies in London in 1990 to reach out to the emerging democracies of the East has culminated in an invitation for high-level representatives from Eastern Europe, the Baltics, and the Soviet Union to attend a ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council in December. As NATO members affirmed in Rome in November 1991: "In a world where the values which we uphold are shared ever more widely, we gladly seize the opportunity to adapt our defenses accordingly; to cooperate and consult with our new partners; to help consolidate a now undivided continent of Europe; and to make our alliance's contribution to a new age of confidence, stability, and peace."

President Bush has characterized the NATO allies as "confronting the forces of change liberated by our own success" and has emphasized the importance of their future agenda: "In North America, in Western Europe, and even in the East, the alliance is rightly viewed as the core of European—indeed, world—stability. As its stewards, it is up to us to give the alliance direction and to employ its towering strengths toward noble ends."

U.S.-NATO RELATIONS: "THE TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP"

The decision of the United States after World War II to participate in a regional peacetime defensive alliance represented a fundamental change in American foreign policy. The United States recognized that its interests no longer could be confined to the limits of the Western hemisphere: U.S. security was linked inextricably to the future of the West European democracies. Concepts of individual liberty and the rule of law, coupled with those of a common heritage and shared values, provided the foundation for the NATO alliance. These ideals, as well as the ongoing goal of each member country to achieve a just and lasting peaceful order in Europe, continue to link the fate of America to that of its NATO allies.

The history of U.S.-NATO relations has been one of commitment by America and its allies to reduce tensions in Europe and to improve East-West relations. They have pursued a series of initiatives designed to lower levels of manpower and equipment and increase mutual confidence, while adhering to a policy of political cohesion and military strength. Arms control measures aimed at enhancing stability have included the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1981 and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) in 1990.

NATO's "dual-track" policy and its determination to station U.S. long-range INF missiles in Europe, despite substantial negative public opinion, made possible the successful conclusion of the first treaty designed to reduce, rather than merely limit, increases in armaments. Efforts to achieve these agreements attest to NATO's cohesion and solidarity in carrying out long-term negotiations designed to reduce nuclear and conventional weapons systems and to establish effective verification procedures.

At the North Atlantic Council ministerial meeting in Copenhagen in June 1991, Secretary Baker underlined the durability of the trans-Atlantic link: "The fundamental principle that should guide our efforts . . . is that Europe's security is indivisible from that of the United States and Canada. The Gulf war is only the most recent test of how closely our security needs are linked. In this century, two hot wars and one Cold War have proven this." Despite recurrent debate over issues such as levels of defense expenditures or deployment of U.S. cruise and Pershing missiles on European territory, Western political unity has been a crucial factor in the attainment of long-term NATO objectives.

President Bush has emphasized that the United States supports the development of a European security identity and defense role, a step that the United States views as strengthening the integrity and effectiveness of NATO. At the NATO summit in Rome, he extended strong American support to the prospect of a European political union and defense identity but expressed the continuing need for NATO as the provider of America's defense and Europe's security. The United States would not, he stated, "abandon its responsibilities, its interests, and its place in Europe." The alliance's New Strategic Concept also reaffirmed the essential nature of the trans-Atlantic partnership, recognizing the indivisibility of security of all members.

The North Atlantic alliance and the American presence in Europe have helped keep peace for more than 40 years. The continued existence of the alliance, as President Bush emphasized on his departure for the Rome summit, is vital for the new order. Having forged successful policies

toward the Soviet Union since its foundation, the alliance must play a central role in building the framework of the new Euro-Atlantic architecture.

NATO STRATEGY

NATO collective security strategy was based on the principle of deterrence. Defense capabilities were created to deter military aggression or other forms of pressure. Parties to the treaty agreed to consult whenever the territorial integrity, political independence, or security of any party was threatened. They further pledged to maintain their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack and, should such deterrence fail, to defend the territory of the alliance. As a purely defensive alliance, NATO would maintain only a level of military strength sufficient to be credible. Given the marked inferiority of allied conventional strength in Europe, the NATO guarantee would rest primarily on the nuclear superiority of the United States.

At the conclusion of a 1967 comprehensive review of NATO strategy, the alliance adopted a revised approach to the common defense, based on a balanced range of responses, conventional and nuclear, to all levels of aggression or threats of aggression. This reassessment of the nature of the potential threat to member countries prompted the realization that the alliance must increasingly look to the dangers of more limited forms of aggression beyond the possibility of a massive Soviet attack. The basis of this new concept of "flexible response" was the belief that NATO should be able to deter and counter military force with a range of responses designed to defend directly against attack at an appropriate level, or, if necessary, to escalate the attack to the level necessary to persuade an aggressor to desist.

At the same time, the alliance accepted the recommendations of the Harmel report, titled "Future Tasks of the Alliance," which outlined the need to work toward the achievement of disarmament and balanced force reductions. The maintenance of adequate military forces would be coupled with efforts at improving East-West relations.

Soviet deployment of new mobile theater nuclear missiles (SS-20s) called into question the accepted NATO strategy of deterrence based on the concepts of forward defense and flexible response and led to a decision in 1979 to modernize its defensive capability. The resulting "dual-track" decision by the alliance combined pursuing arms control negotiations with responding appropriately to the increased imbalance created by the new Soviet systems. Alliance governments agreed to deploy U.S. ground-launched cruise missiles in Western Europe.

The successful conclusion of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987, while eliminating all Soviet and U.S. land-based, intermediate-range missiles, required a new appraisal of NATO policy. In response, the alliance developed its "Comprehensive Concept of Arms Control and Disarmament," which provided a framework for alliance policy in nuclear, conventional, and chemical fields of arms control, and tied defense policies to progress in arms control.

The "London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance," issued by the North Atlantic Council in July 1990, inaugurated a major transformation to adapt to the new realities in Europe. Recognizing the contribution of NATO as an agent of change, the ministers pledged to intensify political and military contacts with Moscow and other Central and East European capitals and to work not only for the common defense but to build new partnerships with all the nations of Europe. To foster a continuation in the improving political and security environment, they underlined the need to undertake broader arms control and confidence-building agreements. To further enable the alliance to adapt to an improved security environment, the ministers mandated a fundamental review of the alliance's political and military strategy.

The "New Strategic Concept" was outlined at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in November 1991. The threat of a massive full-scale Soviet attack, which had provided the focus of NATO's strategy during the Cold War, had disappeared after the end of the political division of Europe. The alliance recognized that the risks to its security, such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and acts of terrorism and sabotage, were now less predictable and beyond the focus of traditional concerns. The new strategy adopts a broader approach to security, centered more on crisis management and conflict prevention.

Although the changed environment in Europe does not render the collective security functions of the alliance obsolete, the new strategy addresses the reductions in nuclear arsenals and armies following the withdrawal of Soviet forces and the implementation of arms control agreements limiting conventional forces in Europe. In the context of these changed circumstances, the alliance will maintain a mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe, although at a significantly lower level. To ensure effectiveness at reduced levels, alliance forces will be increasingly mobile to respond to a range of contingencies. Forces will be organized for flexible buildup to respond to aggression and crises. Collective defense arrangements will rely increasingly on multinational forces within the integrated military structure. Nuclear forces will continue to play an essential role in allied strategy but will be maintained at the minimal levels sufficient to preserve stability.

The new strategy reaffirms the principle of common commitment and mutual cooperation in support of the indivisibility of security for all its members and underscores the essential political and military link between European and North American members provided by the presence of nuclear forces in Europe.