**NATO**

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*This article is about the military alliance. For other uses, see* [*NATO (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_%28disambiguation%29)*.*

[Coordinates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): [50°52′34.16″N 4°25′19.24″E﻿ / ﻿50.8761556°N 4.4220111°E﻿ / 50.8761556; 4.4220111](http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=NATO&params=50_52_34.16_N_4_25_19.24_E_type:landmark)



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| --- |
| **North Atlantic Treaty OrganizationOrganization du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord(NATO / OTAN)** |
| [Flag of NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_North_Atlantic_Treaty_Organisation) |
| NATO countries shown in green |
| **Formation** | 4 April 1949 |
| **Type** | [Military alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_alliance) |
| **Headquarters** | [Brussels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brussels), Belgium |
| **Membership** | [28 states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_states_of_NATO)* Albania

* Belgium

* Bulgaria

* Canada

* Croatia

* Czech Republic

* Denmark

* Estonia

* France

* Germany

* Greece

* Hungary

* Iceland

* Italy

* Latvia

* Lithuania

* Luxembourg

* Netherlands

* Norway

* Poland

* Portugal

* Romania

* Slovakia

* Slovenia

* Spain

* Turkey

* United Kingdom

* United States

 |
| **Official languages** | EnglishFrench |
| [**Secretary General**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_General_of_NATO) | [Anders Fogh Rasmussen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anders_Fogh_Rasmussen) |
| [**Chairman of the NATO Military Committee**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman_of_the_NATO_Military_Committee) | [Giampaolo Di Paola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giampaolo_Di_Paola) |
| **Website** | [nato.int](http://www.nato.int/) |

The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization** or **NATO** ( [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AIPA_for_English)[ˈneɪtoʊ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AIPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AIPA_for_English) [***NAY****-toh*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3APronunciation_respelling_key); [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language): ***Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique Nord*** *(****OTAN****)*), also called the **(North) Atlantic Alliance**, is an [intergovernmental](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intergovernmental_organization) [military alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_alliance) based on the [North Atlantic Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Treaty) which was signed on 4 April 1949. The organization constitutes a system of [collective defence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_defence) whereby its member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party. NATO's headquarters are in [Brussels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brussels), [Belgium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium), one of the 28 member states across North America and Europe, the newest of which, Albania and Croatia, joined in April 2009. An additional 22 countries participate in NATO's [Partnership for Peace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partnership_for_Peace), with 15 other countries involved in institutionalized dialogue programs. The combined military spending of all NATO members constitutes over 70% of [the world's defence spending](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures).

For its first few years, NATO was not much more than a political association. However, the [Korean War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_War) galvanized the member states, and an integrated military structure was built up under the direction of two U.S. supreme commanders. The course of the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War) led to a rivalry with nations of the [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact), which formed in 1955. The first [NATO Secretary General](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_General_of_NATO), [Lord Ismay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hastings_Ismay%2C_1st_Baron_Ismay), stated in 1949 that the organization's goal was "to keep the [Russians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." Doubts over the strength of the relationship between the European states and the United States ebbed and flowed, along with doubts over the credibility of the NATO defence against a prospective Soviet invasion—doubts that led to the development of the [independent French nuclear deterrent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strike_Force_%28France%29) and the withdrawal of the French from NATO's military structure in 1966.

After the fall of the [Berlin Wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Wall) in 1989, the organization became drawn into the [Breakup of Yugoslavia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breakup_of_Yugoslavia), and conducted their first military interventions in [Bosnia from 1991 to 1995](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_intervention_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina) and later [Yugoslavia in 1999](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_NATO_bombing_of_Yugoslavia). Politically, the organization sought better relations with former Cold War rivals, which culminated with several former Warsaw Pact states joining the alliance in 1999 and 2004. The [September 2001 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_2001_attacks) signalled the only occasion in NATO's history that Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty has been invoked as an attack on all NATO members. After the attack, troops were deployed to Afghanistan under the NATO-led [ISAF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISAF), and the organization continues to operate in a range of roles, including sending [trainers to Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Training_Mission_%E2%80%93_Iraq), assisting in counter-piracy operations and most recently in 2011 enforcing a [no-fly zone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No-fly_zone) [over Libya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_military_intervention_in_Libya) in accordance with [UN Security Council Resolution 1973](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1973).

**History**

**Beginnings**

The [North Atlantic Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Treaty) was signed in Washington, D.C., on 4 April 1949 and was ratified by the United States that August.

The [Treaty of Brussels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Brussels), signed on 17 March 1948 by Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and the United Kingdom, is considered the precursor to the NATO agreement. The treaty and the Soviet [Berlin Blockade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Blockade) led to the creation of the [Western European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_European_Union)'s Defence Organization in September 1948. However, participation of the United States was thought necessary both to counter the military power of the [USSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USSR) and to prevent the revival of nationalist militarism, so talks for a new military alliance began almost immediately resulting in the [North Atlantic Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Treaty), which was signed in Washington, D.C. on 4 April 1949. It included the five Treaty of Brussels states plus the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Popular support for the Treaty was not unanimous, and some Icelanders participated in a [pro-neutrality, anti-membership riot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1949_anti-NATO_riot_in_Iceland) in March 1949.

The members agreed that an armed attack against any one of them in Europe or North America would be considered an attack against them all. Consequently they agreed that, if an armed attack occurred, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence, would assist the member being attacked, taking such action as it deemed necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. The treaty does not require members to respond militarily action against aggressor. Although obliged to respond, they maintain the freedom to choose the method. This differs from Article IV of the Treaty of Brussels, which clearly states that the response will be military in nature. It is nonetheless assumed that NATO members will aid the attacked member militarily. The treaty was later clarified to include both the member's territory and their "vessels, forces or aircraft" above the Tropic of Cancer, including some [Overseas departments](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas_departments) of [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France).

The creation of NATO brought about some [standardization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standardization) of allied [military terminology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_terminology), procedures, and technology, which in many cases meant European countries adopting U.S. practices. The roughly 1300 [Standardization Agreements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/STANAG) codified many of the common practices that NATO has achieved. Hence, the [7.62×51 NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/7.62x51mm_NATO) rifle cartridge was introduced in the 1950s as a standard firearm cartridge among many NATO countries. [Fabrique Nationale de Herstal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fabrique_Nationale_de_Herstal)'s [FAL](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FN_FAL) became the most popular 7.62 NATO rifle in Europe and served into the early 1990s. Also, [aircraft marshalling signals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aircraft_marshalling) were standardized, so that any NATO aircraft could land at any NATO base. Other standards such as the [NATO phonetic alphabet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_phonetic_alphabet) have made their way beyond NATO into civilian use.

**Cold War**

Main article: [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War)

The outbreak of the [Korean War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_War) in June 1950 was crucial for NATO as it raised the apparent threat of all Communist countries working together, and forced the alliance to develop concrete military plans. SHAPE, the [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Headquarters_Allied_Powers_Europe), was formed as a consolidated command structure, and began work under Supreme Allied Commander [Dwight D. Eisenhower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight_D._Eisenhower) in January 1951. The 1952 Lisbon conference, seeking to provide the forces necessary for NATO's Long-Term Defence Plan, called for an expansion to ninety-six [divisions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_%28military%29). However this requirement was dropped the following year to roughly thirty-five divisions with heavier use to be made of nuclear weapons. At this time, NATO could call on about fifteen ready divisions in Central Europe, and another ten in Italy and Scandinavia. Also at Lisbon, the post of [Secretary General of NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_General_of_NATO) as the organization's chief civilian was created, and Baron [Hastings Ismay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hastings_Ismay%2C_1st_Baron_Ismay) eventually appointed to the post.

The German Bundeswehr provided the largest element of the allied land forces guarding the frontier in Central Europe

In September 1952, the first major NATO maritime exercises began; [Exercise Mainbrace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise_Mainbrace) brought together 200 ships and over 50,000 personnel to practice the defence of Denmark and Norway. Other major exercises that followed included [Exercise Grand Slam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise_Grand_Slam) and [Exercise Longstep](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise_Longstep), naval and amphibious exercises in the [Mediterranean Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea), Italic Weld, a combined air-naval-ground exercise in [northern Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Italy), Grand Repulse, involving the [British Army on the Rhine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Army_on_the_Rhine) (BAOR), the Netherlands Corps and [Allied Air Forces Central Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_Air_Forces_Central_Europe) (AAFCE), Monte Carlo, a simulated atomic air-ground exercise involving the [Central Army Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Army_Group), and Weldfast, a combined amphibious landing exercise in the Mediterranean Sea involving British, Greek, Italian, Turkish, and U.S. naval forces.

Greece and Turkey also joined the alliance in 1952, forcing a series of controversial negotiations, in which the United States and Britain were the primary disputants, over how to bring the two countries into the military command structure. While this overt military preparation was going on, covert [stay-behind](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stay-behind) arrangements initially made by the Western European Union to continue resistance after a successful Soviet invasion, including [Operation Gladio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Gladio), were transferred to NATO control. Ultimately unofficial bonds began to grow between NATO's armed forces, such as the [NATO Tiger Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Tiger_Association) and competitions such as the [Canadian Army Trophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Army_Trophy) for tank gunnery.

In 1954, the Soviet Union suggested that it should join NATO to preserve peace in Europe. The NATO countries, fearing that the Soviet Union's motive was to weaken the alliance, ultimately rejected this proposal. The incorporation of [West Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Germany) into the organization on 9 May 1955 was described as "a decisive turning point in the history of our continent" by [Halvard Lange](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halvard_Lange), [Foreign Affairs Minister of Norway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_Foreign_Affairs_%28Norway%29) at the time. A major reason for Germany's entry into the alliance was that without German manpower, it would have been impossible to field enough conventional forces to resist a Soviet invasion. One of its immediate results was the creation of the [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact), which was signed on 14 May 1955 by the Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and East Germany, as a formal response to this event, thereby delineating the two opposing sides of the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War).

Three major exercises were held concurrently in the northern autumn of 1957. Operation Counter Punch, [Operation Strikeback](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Strikeback), and [Operation Deep Water](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Deep_Water) were the most ambitious military undertaking for the alliance to date, involving more than 250,000 men, 300 ships, and 1,500 aircraft operating from Norway to Turkey

**French withdrawal**

Map of the NATO air bases in France before [Charles de Gaulle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_de_Gaulle)'s 1966 withdrawal from NATO military integrated command

NATO's unity was breached early in its history with a crisis occurring during [Charles de Gaulle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_de_Gaulle)'s presidency of France. De Gaulle protested the United States' strong role in the organization and what he perceived as a [special relationship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Relationship) between it and the United Kingdom. In a memorandum sent to President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight_D._Eisenhower) and Prime Minister [Harold Macmillan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Macmillan) on 17 September 1958, he argued for the creation of a tripartite directorate that would put France on an equal footing with the U.S. and U.K., and also for expanding NATO's coverage to include areas of interest to France, most notably [French Algeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Algeria), where France was waging a counter-insurgency and sought NATO assistance.

Considering the response he received to his memorandum unsatisfactory, de Gaulle began constructing an independent defence force for his country. He wanted to give France, in the event of an East German incursion into West Germany, the option of coming to a separate peace with the Eastern bloc instead of being drawn into a larger NATO-Warsaw Pact war. In February 1959, France withdrew its [Mediterranean Fleet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Fleet_%28France%29) from NATO command. He later banned the stationing of foreign [nuclear weapons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_weapon) on French soil. This caused the United States to transfer two hundred military aircraft out of France and return control of the [ten major air force bases](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force_in_France) that had operated in France since 1950 to the French by 1967.

Though France showed solidarity with the rest of NATO during the [Cuban Missile Crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Missile_Crisis) in 1962, de Gaulle continued his pursuit of an independent defence by removing France's [Atlantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Ocean) and [Channel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Channel) fleets from NATO command. In 1966, all French armed forces were removed from NATO's integrated military command, and all non-French NATO troops were asked to leave France. This withdrawal forced the relocation of SHAPE from [Rocquencourt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rocquencourt), near Paris, to [Casteau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casteau), north of [Mons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mons), Belgium, by 16 October 1967. France remained a member of the alliance, and committed to the defence of Europe from possible Communist attack with its own forces stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany throughout the Cold War. A series of secret accords between U.S. and French officials, the Lemnitzer-Ailleret Agreements, detailed how French forces would dovetail back into NATO's command structure should East-West hostilities break out.

**Détente and escalation**

Main article: [Détente](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A9tente)

Détente led to many high level meetings between leaders from both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

During most of the Cold War, NATO's watch against the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact did not actually lead to direct military action. On 1 July 1968, the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_Non-Proliferation_Treaty) opened for signature: NATO argued that its [nuclear sharing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_sharing) arrangements did not breach the treaty as U.S. forces controlled the weapons until a decision was made to go to war, at which point the treaty would no longer be controlling. Few states knew of the NATO nuclear sharing arrangements at that time, and they were not challenged. In May 1978, NATO countries officially defined two complementary aims of the Alliance, to maintain security and pursue détente. This was supposed to mean matching defences at the level rendered necessary by the Warsaw Pact's offensive capabilities without spurring a further [arms race](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arms_race).

During the Cold War, most of Europe was divided between two alliances. Members of NATO are shown in blue, with members of the [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact) in red.

On 12 December 1979, in light of a build-up of Warsaw Pact nuclear capabilities in Europe, ministers approved the deployment of U.S. [GLCM](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BGM-109G_Ground_Launched_Cruise_Missile) [cruise missiles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruise_missile) and [Pershing II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pershing_II) theatre nuclear weapons in Europe. The new warheads were also meant to strengthen the western negotiating position regarding nuclear disarmament. This policy was called the [Dual Track](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Double-Track_Decision) policy. Similarly, in 1983–84, responding to the stationing of [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact) [SS-20](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSD-10_Pioneer) medium-range missiles in Europe, NATO deployed modern Pershing II missiles tasked to hit military targets such as tank formations in the event of war. This action led to [peace movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_movement) protests throughout Western Europe, and support for the deployment wavered as many doubted whether the push for deployment could be sustained.

The membership of the organization at this time remained largely static. In 1974, as a consequence of the [Turkish invasion of Cyprus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_invasion_of_Cyprus), Greece withdrew its forces from NATO's military command structure but, with Turkish cooperation, were readmitted in 1980. The [Falklands War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falklands_War) between the United Kingdom and [Argentina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argentina) did not result in NATO involvement because of the limited scope of NATO. On 30 May 1982, NATO gained a new member when, following a referendum, the newly democratic [Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain) joined the alliance.

**After the Cold War**

*Further information:* [*Enlargement of NATO*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlargement_of_NATO)

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact) in 1991 removed the *de facto* main adversary of NATO. This caused a strategic re-evaluation of NATO's purpose, nature and tasks. In practice this ended up entailing a gradual expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe, as well as the extension of its activities to areas that had not formerly been NATO concerns. At the end of the Cold War, European countries accounted for 34% of NATO's military spending; by 2012, that had fallen to 21%.

Reforms made under [Mikhail Gorbachev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev) led to the end of the [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact).

The first post–Cold War expansion of NATO came with [German reunification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_reunification) on 3 October 1990, when the former [East Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Germany) became part of the Federal Republic of Germany and the alliance. This had been agreed in the [Two Plus Four Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_on_the_Final_Settlement_with_Respect_to_Germany) earlier in the year. To secure Soviet approval of a united Germany remaining in NATO, it was agreed that foreign troops and nuclear weapons would not be stationed in the east. The scholar [Stephen F. Cohen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_F._Cohen) argued in 2005 that a commitment was given that NATO would never expand further east, but according to [Robert Zoellick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Zoellick), then a [State Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_State) official involved in the Two Plus Four negotiating process, this appears to be a misperception; no formal commitment of the sort was made. In May 2008, Gorbachev repeated his view that such a commitment had been made, and that "the Americans promised that NATO wouldn't move beyond the boundaries of Germany after the Cold War".

As part of post–Cold War restructuring, NATO's military structure was cut back and reorganized, with new forces such as the [Headquarters Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Headquarters_Allied_Rapid_Reaction_Corps) established. The [Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_on_Conventional_Armed_Forces_in_Europe) agreed between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and signed in Paris in 1990, mandated specific reductions. The changes brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union on the military balance in Europe were recognized in the [Adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adapted_Conventional_Armed_Forces_in_Europe_Treaty), which was signed in 1999. The policies of French President [Nicolas Sarkozy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolas_Sarkozy) have resulted in a major reform of France's military position, culminating with the return to full membership on 4 April 2009, which also included France rejoining the integrated military command of NATO, while maintaining an independent nuclear deterrent.

NATO has added 12 new members since [German Reunification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Reunification) and the end of the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War).

Between 1994 and 1997, wider forums for regional cooperation between NATO and its neighbors were set up, like the [Partnership for Peace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partnership_for_Peace), the [Mediterranean Dialogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Dialogue) initiative and the [Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euro-Atlantic_Partnership_Council). In 1998, the [NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO%E2%80%93Russia_relations) was established. New NATO structures were also formed while old ones were abolished: The [NATO Response Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Response_Force) (NRF) was launched at the [2002 Prague summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2002_Prague_summit) on 21 November, the first summit in a former [Comecon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comecon) country. On 19 June 2003, a major restructuring of the NATO military commands began as the Headquarters of the Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic were abolished and a new command, [Allied Command Transformation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_Command_Transformation) (ACT), was established in [Norfolk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norfolk%2C_Virginia), Virginia, United States, and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) became the Headquarters of [Allied Command Operations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Headquarters_Allied_Powers_Europe) (ACO). ACT is responsible for driving transformation (future capabilities) in NATO, whilst ACO is responsible for current operations.

On 8 July 1997, three former communist countries, [Hungary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungary), the [Czech Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czech_Republic), and [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland), were invited to join NATO, which finally happened in 1999. Membership went on expanding with the accession of seven more Northern and Eastern European countries to NATO: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. They were first invited to start talks of membership during the 2002 Prague summit, and joined NATO on 29 March 2004, shortly before the [2004 Istanbul summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Istanbul_summit). The same month, NATO's [Baltic Air Policing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_Air_Policing) began, which supported the sovereignty of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia by providing fighters to react to any unwanted aerial intrusions. Four fighters are based in Lithuania, provided in rotation by virtually all the NATO states.

The [2006 Riga summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Riga_summit) was held in [Riga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riga), Latvia, and highlighted the issue of energy security. It is the first [NATO summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_summit) to be held in a country that was part of the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union). *Operation Peaceful Summit* temporarily enhanced the ongoing air policing during the summit. At the April 2008 summit in [Bucharest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bucharest), Romania, NATO agreed to the accession of Croatia and Albania and both countries joined NATO in April 2009. Ukraine and Georgia were also told that they could eventually become members. The issue of Georgian and Ukrainian membership in NATO prompted harsh criticism from Russia, as did NATO plans for a [missile defence system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_missile_defence_system). Studies for this system began in 2002, with negotiations centered on [anti-ballistic missiles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-ballistic_missile) being stationed in Poland and the Czech Republic. Though NATO leaders gave assurances that the system was not targeting Russia, both presidents [Vladimir Putin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Putin) and [Dmitry Medvedev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitry_Medvedev) criticized it as a threat. In 2009, U.S. President [Barack Obama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama) proposed using the ship based [Aegis Combat System](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aegis_Combat_System), though this plan still includes stations being built in Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Romania, and Poland.

**Military operations**

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Main articles: [1995 NATO bombing campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995_NATO_bombing_campaign_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina), [IFOR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IFOR), and [SFOR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SFOR)

NATO planes engaged in aerial bombardments during [Operation Deliberate Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995_NATO_bombing_campaign_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina) after the [Srebrenica massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srebrenica_massacre)

The [Bosnian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnian_War) began in 1992, as a result of the [Breakup of Yugoslavia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breakup_of_Yugoslavia). NATO intervention began on 12 April 1993 with [Operation Deny Flight](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Deny_Flight), enforcing a [no-fly zone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No-fly_zone) under UN mandate over central Bosnia and Herzegovina until December 1995, the end of the war. In June 1993, [Operation Sharp Guard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Sharp_Guard) commenced, and ran until October 1996. It provided maritime enforcement of the [arms embargo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arms_embargo) and [economic sanctions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_sanctions) against the [Federal Republic of Yugoslavia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Republic_of_Yugoslavia). On 28 February 1994, NATO took its first military action, shooting down four Bosnian Serb aircraft violating the no-fly zone. A NATO bombing campaign, [Operation Deliberate Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995_NATO_bombing_campaign_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina), began in August 1995, against the [Army of the Republika Srpska](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_the_Republika_Srpska), after the [Srebrenica massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srebrenica_massacre).

On 10 and 11 April 1994, during the [Bosnian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnian_War), the [United Nations Protection Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Protection_Force) called in air strikes to protect the [Goražde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gora%C5%BEde) safe area, resulting in the bombing of a Serbian military command outpost near Goražde by 2 US [F-16](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Dynamics_F-16_Fighting_Falcon) jets acting under NATO direction. This resulted in the taking of 150 U.N. personnel hostage on 14 April. On 16 April a British [Sea Harrier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Aerospace_Sea_Harrier) was shot down over Goražde by Serb forces.

NATO air strikes that year helped bring the [Yugoslav wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugoslav_wars) to an end, resulting in the [Dayton Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dayton_Agreement). As part of this agreement, NATO deployed a UN-mandated peacekeeping force, under [Operation Joint Endeavor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Joint_Endeavor), first named [IFOR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IFOR) and then [SFOR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SFOR), which ran from December 1996 to December 2004. Following the lead of its member nations, NATO began to award a service medal, the [NATO Medal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Medal), for these operations.

**Kosovo**

Main articles: [1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_NATO_bombing_of_Yugoslavia) and [KFOR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo_Force)

German KFOR soldiers patrol southern Kosovo in 1999

In an effort to stop Serbian-led crackdown on Albanian civilians in Kosovo, NATO saw its first broad-scale military engagement in the [Kosovo War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo_War), waging an 11-week bombing campaign starting on 24 March 1999. [Operation Allied Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_NATO_bombing_of_Yugoslavia) targeted the military capabilities of what was then the [Federal Republic of Yugoslavia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Republic_of_Yugoslavia). The conflict ended on 11 June 1999, when Yugoslavian leader [Slobodan Milošević](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slobodan_Milo%C5%A1evi%C4%87) agreed to NATO's demands by accepting [UN resolution 1244](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1244). During the crisis, NATO also deployed one of its international reaction forces, the [ACE Mobile Force (Land)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACE_Mobile_Force_%28Land%29), to Albania as the Albania Force (AFOR), to deliver humanitarian aid to refugees from Kosovo. NATO then helped establish the [KFOR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo_Force), a NATO-led force under a United Nations mandate that operated the military mission in Kosovo. In August–September 2001, the alliance also mounted [Operation Essential Harvest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Essential_Harvest), a mission disarming ethnic Albanian militias in the Republic of Macedonia.

The United States, the United Kingdom, and most other NATO countries opposed efforts to require the U.N. Security Council to approve NATO military strikes, such as the action against Serbia in 1999, while France and some others claimed that the alliance needed UN approval. The U.S./UK side claimed that this would undermine the authority of the alliance, and they noted that Russia and China would have exercised their Security Council vetoes to block the strike on [Yugoslavia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugoslavia), and could do the same in future conflicts where NATO intervention was required, thus nullifying the entire potency and purpose of the organization. Recognizing the post–Cold War military environment, NATO adopted the Alliance Strategic Concept during its [Washington summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_Washington_summit) in April 1999 that emphasized conflict prevention and crisis management.

**Afghanistan**

Main articles: [International Security Assistance Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Security_Assistance_Force) and [War in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_%282001%E2%80%93present%29)

The [11 September attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/11_September_attacks) in the United States caused NATO to invoke its collective defence article for the first time.

The [11 September attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/11_September_attacks) in the United States caused NATO to invoke Article 5 of the NATO Charter for the first time in its history. The Article says that an attack on any member shall be considered to be an attack on all. The invocation was confirmed on 4 October 2001 when NATO determined that the attacks were indeed eligible under the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty. The eight official actions taken by NATO in response to the attacks included [Operation Eagle Assist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Eagle_Assist) and [Operation Active Endeavour](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Active_Endeavour), a naval operation in the Mediterranean Sea and is designed to prevent the movement of terrorists or weapons of mass destruction as well as to enhance the security of shipping in general which began on 4 October 2001.

Despite this early show of solidarity, NATO faced a crisis little more than a year later, when on 10 February 2003, France and Belgium vetoed the procedure of silent approval concerning the timing of protective measures for Turkey in case of a possible war with Iraq. Germany did not use its right to break the procedure but said it supported the veto. On the issue of Afghanistan on the other hand, the alliance showed greater unity: on 16 April 2003, NATO agreed to take command of the [International Security Assistance Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Security_Assistance_Force) (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The decision came at the request of Germany and the Netherlands, the two nations leading ISAF at the time of the agreement, and all nineteen NATO ambassadors approved it unanimously. The handover of control to NATO took place on 11 August, and marked the first time in NATO's history that it took charge of a mission outside the north Atlantic area. Canada had originally been slated to take over ISAF by itself on that date.

ISAF General [David M. Rodriguez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_M._Rodriguez) at an Italian change of command in [Herat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herat).

ISAF was initially charged with securing [Kabul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabul) and surrounding areas from the [Taliban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban), [al Qaeda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Qaeda) and factional warlords, so as to allow for the establishment of the [Afghan Transitional Administration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_Transitional_Administration) headed by [Hamid Karzai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamid_Karzai). In October 2003, the UN Security Council authorized the expansion of the ISAF mission throughout Afghanistan, and ISAF subsequently expanded the mission in four main stages over the whole of the country.

On 31 July 2006, the ISAF additionally took over [military operations in the south of Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coalition_combat_operations_in_Afghanistan_in_2006) from a U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition. Due to the intensity of the fighting in the south, France has recently allowed a squadron of [Mirage 2000](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dassault_Mirage_2000) fighter/attack aircraft to be moved into the area, to [Kandahar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kandahar_International_Airport), in order to reinforce the alliance's efforts. NATO is also training the [military of Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_Afghanistan) and the [Afghan National Police](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_National_Police) to be better equipped in forcing out the Taliban.

**Iraq training mission**

Main article: [NATO Training Mission – Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Training_Mission_%E2%80%93_Iraq)

In August 2004, during the [Iraq War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War), NATO formed the [NATO Training Mission – Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Training_Mission_%E2%80%93_Iraq), a training mission to assist the Iraqi security forces in conjunction with the U.S. led [MNF-I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multinational_Force_%E2%80%93_Iraq). The NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) was established at the request of the [Iraqi Interim Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_Interim_Government) under the provisions of [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1546). The aim of NTM-I was to assist in the development of Iraqi security forces training structures and institutions so that Iraq can build an effective and sustainable capability that addresses the needs of the nation. NTM-I was not a combat mission but is a distinct mission, under the political control of NATO's North Atlantic Council. Its operational emphasis was on training and mentoring. The activities of the mission were coordinated with Iraqi authorities and the U.S.-led Deputy Commanding General Advising and Training, who is also dual-hatted as the Commander of NTM-I. The mission officially concluded on 17 December 2011.

**Gulf of Aden piracy**

Main article: [Operation Ocean Shield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Ocean_Shield)

[USS Farragut](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Farragut_%28DDG-99%29) destroying a Somali pirate skiff in March 2010

Beginning on 17 August 2009, NATO deployed warships in an operation to protect maritime traffic in the [Gulf of Aden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Aden) and the Indian Ocean from [Somali pirates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piracy_in_Somalia), and help strengthen the navies and coast guards of regional states. The operation was approved by the [North Atlantic Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Council) and involves warships primarily from the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) though vessels from many other nations are also included. Operation Ocean Shield focuses on protecting the ships of [Operation Allied Provider](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Operation_Allied_Provider&action=edit&redlink=1) which are distributing aid as part of the [World Food Programme](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Food_Programme) mission in [Somalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalia). [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) and [South Korea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Korea) have sent warships to participate in the activities as well.

**Libya**

Main articles: [2011 military intervention in Libya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_military_intervention_in_Libya) and [2011 Libyan civil war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Libyan_civil_war)

During the [2011 Libyan civil war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Libyan_civil_war), violence between protestors and the Libyan government under Colonel [Muammar Gaddafi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muammar_Gaddafi) escalated, and on 17 March 2011 led to the passage of [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1973), which called for a ceasefire, and authorized military action to protect civilians. A coalition that included several NATO members began enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya shortly afterwards. On 20 March 2011, NATO states agreed on enforcing an arms embargo against Libya with [Operation Unified Protector](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Unified_Protector) using ships from NATO [Standing Maritime Group 1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standing_NRF_Maritime_Group_1) and [Standing Mine Countermeasures Group 1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standing_NRF_Mine_Countermeasures_Group_1), and additional ships and submarines from NATO members. They would "monitor, report and, if needed, [interdict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interdiction) vessels suspected of carrying illegal arms or [mercenaries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercenary)".

Libyan Army [Palmaria howitzers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmaria_%28artillery%29) destroyed by the [French Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Air_Force) near [Benghazi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benghazi) on 19 March 2011

On 24 March, NATO agreed to take control of the no-fly zone from the initial coalition, while command of targeting ground units remained with the coalition's forces. NATO began officially enforcing the UN resolution on 27 March 2011 with assistance from [Qatar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qatar) and the [United Arab Emirates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Arab_Emirates). By June, reports of divisions within the alliance surfaced as only eight of the 28 member nations were participating in combat operations, resulting in a confrontation between U.S. Defense Secretary [Robert Gates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Gates) and countries such as Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Germany to contribute more, the latter believing the organization has overstepped its mandate in the conflict. In his final policy speech in Brussels on 10 June, Gates further criticized allied countries in suggesting their actions could cause the demise of NATO. The German foreign ministry pointed to "a considerable German contribution to NATO and NATO-led operations" and to the fact that this engagement was highly valued by President Obama.

While the mission was extended into September, [Norway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway) that day announced it would begin scaling down contributions and complete withdrawal by 1 August. Earlier that week it was reported [Danish air fighters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Danish_Air_Force) were running out of bombs. The following week, the head of the [Royal Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy) said the country's operations in the conflict were not sustainable. By the end of the mission in October 2011, after the death of Colonel Gaddafi, NATO planes had flown about 9,500 strike sorties against pro-Gaddafi targets.

**Participating countries**

Main articles: [Member states of NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_states_of_NATO) and [Enlargement of NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlargement_of_NATO)

NATO has added new members seven times since first forming in 1949, and now comprises 28 nations. New membership in the alliance has been largely from Eastern Europe and the [Balkans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkans), including former members of the [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact). At the 2008 summit in Bucharest, three countries were promised future invitations: the [Republic of Macedonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Macedonia), [Georgia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_%28country%29) and [Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine). Though Macedonia completed its requirements for membership at the same time as [Croatia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatia) and [Albania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albania), NATO's most recent members, its accession was blocked by Greece pending a resolution of the [Macedonia naming dispute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedonia_naming_dispute). [Cyprus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprus) also has not progressed toward further relations, in part because of opposition from Turkey. Other candidate countries include [Montenegro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montenegro) and [Bosnia and Herzegovina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnia_and_Herzegovina), which joined the [Adriatic Charter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adriatic_Charter) of potential members in 2008. Their accession to the alliance is governed with individual [Membership Action Plans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Membership_Action_Plan), and will require approval by each current member.

Russia continues to oppose further expansion, seeing it as inconsistent with understandings between Soviet leader [Mikhail Gorbachev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev) and U.S. President [George H. W. Bush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_H._W._Bush) that allowed for a peaceful German reunification. NATO's expansion efforts are often seen by Moscow leaders as a continuation of a Cold War attempt to surround and isolate Russia. After the [2010 election in Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_presidential_election%2C_2010), pro-Russian President [Viktor Yanukovych](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Yanukovych) declared his administration would not be pursuing NATO membership. Ukraine is one of eight countries in Eastern Europe with an [Individual Partnership Action Plan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual_Partnership_Action_Plan). IPAPs began in 2002, and are open to countries that have the political will and ability to deepen their relationship with NATO.

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| **Map of NATO affiliations in Europe** | **Map of NATO partnerships globally** |
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|  | [**NATO members**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_states_of_NATO)  |  | [**Membership Action Plan**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Membership_Action_Plan)  |  | [**Individual Partnership Action Plan**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual_Partnership_Action_Plan)  |  | [**Partnership for Peace**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partnership_for_Peace)  |  | [**Mediterranean Dialogue**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Dialogue)  |  | [**Istanbul Cooperation Initiative**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul_Cooperation_Initiative)  |  | **Contact countries** | [[show](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO##)] |
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NATO and the [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union) signed a comprehensive package of arrangements under the [Berlin Plus agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Plus_agreement) on 16 December 2002. With this agreement the EU was given the possibility to use NATO assets in case it wanted to act independently in an international crisis, on the condition that NATO itself did not want to act—the so-called "[right of first refusal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_of_first_refusal)." A double framework has been established to help further co-operation between the 28 NATO members and 22 "partner countries".

NATO organizes regular summits for leaders of their members states and partnerships.

* The [Partnership for Peace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partnership_for_Peace) (PfP) program was established in 1994 and is based on individual bilateral relations between each partner country and NATO: each country may choose the extent of its participation. The PfP program is considered the operational wing of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership. Members include all current and former members of the [Commonwealth of Independent States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Independent_States).
* The [Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euro-Atlantic_Partnership_Council) (EAPC) was first established on 29 May 1997, and is a forum for regular coordination, consultation and dialogue between all fifty participants.

Additionally, NATO cooperates and discusses their activities with numerous other non-NATO members.

* The [Mediterranean Dialogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Dialogue) was established in 1994 to coordinate in a similar way with Israel and countries in North Africa.
* The [Istanbul Cooperation Initiative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul_Cooperation_Initiative) was announced in 2004 as a dialog forum for the Middle East along the same lines as the [Mediterranean Dialogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Dialogue). The four participants are also linked through the [Gulf Cooperation Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_Cooperation_Council).
* Other third countries also have been contacted for participation in some activities of the [PfP framework](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partnership_for_Peace) such as Afghanistan.

Since 1990–91, the Alliance has gradually increased its contact with countries that do not form part of any of the above cooperative groupings. Political dialogue with Japan began in 1990, and a range of non-NATO countries have contributed to peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia. The Allies established a set of general guidelines on relations with other countries, beyond the above groupings in 1998. The guidelines do not allow for a formal institutionalization of relations, but reflect the Allies' desire to increase cooperation. Following extensive debate, the term "Contact Countries" was agreed by the Allies in 2000. Two of these countries are also members of the [AUSCANNZUKUS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AUSCANNZUKUS) strategic alliance.

**Structures**

[Anders Fogh Rasmussen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anders_Fogh_Rasmussen) took over as [Secretary General of NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_General_of_NATO) in August 2009.

The main headquarters of NATO is located on Boulevard Léopold III, B-1110 Brussels, which is in [Haren](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haren%2C_Belgium), part of the [City of Brussels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brussels_%28municipality%29) municipality. A new headquarters building is, as of 2010[[update]](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=NATO&action=edit), under construction nearby, due for completion by 2015. The design is an adaptation of the original award-winning scheme designed by [Michel Mossessian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Mossessian) and his team when he was a Design Partner with SOM.

The staff at the Headquarters is composed of national delegations of member countries and includes civilian and military liaison offices and officers or diplomatic missions and diplomats of partner countries, as well as the International Staff and International Military Staff filled from serving members of the armed forces of member states. Non-governmental citizens' groups have also grown up in support of NATO, broadly under the banner of the [Atlantic Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Council)/[Atlantic Treaty Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Treaty_Association) movement.

**NATO Council**

Like any alliance, NATO is ultimately governed by its 28 member states. However, the [North Atlantic Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Treaty), and other agreements, outline how decisions are to be made within NATO. Each of the 28 members sends a delegation or mission to NATO's headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. The senior permanent member of each delegation is known as the Permanent Representative and is generally a senior civil servant or an experienced ambassador (and holding that diplomatic rank). Several countries have diplomatic missions to NATO [through embassies in Belgium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_diplomatic_missions_to_NATO).

Together, the Permanent Members form the [North Atlantic Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Council) (NAC), a body which meets together at least once a week and has effective governance authority and powers of decision in NATO. From time to time the Council also meets at higher level meetings involving [foreign ministers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_minister), [defence ministers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_Minister) or heads of state or government (HOSG) and it is at these meetings that major decisions regarding NATO's policies are generally taken. However, it is worth noting that the Council has the same authority and powers of decision-making, and its decisions have the same status and validity, at whatever level it meets. [NATO summits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_summit) also form a further venue for decisions on complex issues, such as enlargement.

The meetings of the North Atlantic Council are chaired by the [Secretary General of NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_General_of_NATO) and, when decisions have to be made, action is agreed upon on the basis of unanimity and common accord. There is no voting or decision by majority. Each nation represented at the Council table or on any of its subordinate committees retains complete sovereignty and responsibility for its own decisions.

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| **List of Secretaries General** |
| **#** | **Name** | **Country** | **Duration** |
| 1 | [General](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_officer) [Lord Ismay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hastings_Ismay%2C_1st_Baron_Ismay) | United Kingdom | 4 April 1952 – 16 May 1957 |
| 2 | [Paul-Henri Spaak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul-Henri_Spaak) | Belgium | 16 May 1957 – 21 April 1961 |
| 3 | [Dirk Stikker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirk_Stikker) | Netherlands | 21 April 1961 – 1 August 1964 |
| 4 | [Manlio Brosio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manlio_Brosio) | Italy | 1 August 1964 – 1 October 1971 |
| 5 | [Joseph Luns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Luns) | Netherlands | 1 October 1971 – 25 June 1984 |
| 6 | [Lord Carrington](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Carington%2C_6th_Baron_Carrington) | United Kingdom | 25 June 1984 – 1 July 1988 |
| 7 | [Manfred Wörner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manfred_W%C3%B6rner) | Germany | 1 July 1988 – 13 August 1994 |
| – | [Sergio Balanzino](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergio_Balanzino) *(acting)* | Italy | 13 August 1994 – 17 October 1994 |
| 8 | [Willy Claes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willy_Claes) | Belgium | 17 October 1994 – 20 October 1995 |
| – | [Sergio Balanzino](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergio_Balanzino) *(acting)* | Italy | 20 October 1995 – 5 December 1995 |
| 9 | [Javier Solana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Javier_Solana) | Spain | 5 December 1995 – 6 October 1999 |
| 10 | [Lord Robertson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Robertson%2C_Baron_Robertson_of_Port_Ellen) | United Kingdom | 14 October 1999 – 17 December 2003 |
| – | [Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alessandro_Minuto-Rizzo) *(acting)* | Italy | 17 December 2003 – 1 January 2004 |
| 11 | [Jaap de Hoop Scheffer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaap_de_Hoop_Scheffer) | Netherlands | 1 January 2004 – 1 August 2009 |
| 12 | [Anders Fogh Rasmussen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anders_Fogh_Rasmussen) | Denmark | 1 August 2009–*present* |

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| **List of Deputy Secretaries General** |
| **#** | **Name** | **Country** | **Duration** |
| 1 | Jonkheer van Vredenburch | Netherlands | 1952–1956 |
| 2 | Baron Adolph Bentinck | Netherlands | 1956–1958 |
| 3 | Alberico Casardi | Italy | 1958–1962 |
| 4 | [Guido Colonna di Paliano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guido_Colonna_di_Paliano) | Italy | 1962–1964 |
| 5 | James A. Roberts | Canada | 1964–1968 |
| 6 | Osman Olcay | Turkey | 1969–1971 |
| 7 | Paolo Pansa Cedronio | Italy | 1971–1978 |
| 8 | Rinaldo Petrignani | Italy | 1978–1981 |
| 9 | Eric da Rin | Italy | 1981–1985 |
| 10 | Marcello Guidi | Italy | 1985–1989 |
| 11 | Amedeo de Franchis | Italy | 1989–1994 |
| 12 | [Sergio Balanzino](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergio_Balanzino) | Italy | 1994–2001 |
| 13 | [Alessandro Minuto Rizzo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alessandro_Minuto_Rizzo) | Italy | 2001–2007 |
| 14 | Claudio Bisogniero | Italy | 2007–*present* |

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**NATO Parliamentary Assembly**

Main article: [NATO Parliamentary Assembly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Parliamentary_Assembly)

NATO Ministers of Defense and of Foreign Affairs meet at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

The body that sets broad strategic goals for NATO is the [NATO Parliamentary Assembly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_Parliamentary_Assembly) (NATO-PA) which meets at the Annual Session, and one other during the year, and is the organ that directly interacts with the parliamentary structures of the national governments of the member states which appoint Permanent Members, or ambassadors to NATO. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly is made up of legislators from the member countries of the North Atlantic Alliance as well as thirteen associate members. [Karl A. Lamers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_A._Lamers), German Deputy Chairman of the Defence Committee of the [Bundestag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundestag) and a member of the [Christian Democratic Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Democratic_Union_%28Germany%29), became president of the assembly in 2010. It is however officially a different structure from NATO, and has as aim to join together deputies of NATO countries in order to discuss security policies on the NATO Council.

The Assembly is the political integration body of NATO that generates political policy [agenda setting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_agenda) for the NATO Council via reports of its five committees:

* Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security
* Defence and Security Committee
* Economics and Security Committee
* Political Committee
* Science and Technology Committee

These reports provide impetus and direction as agreed upon by the national governments of the member states through their own [national political processes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_system) and influencers to the NATO administrative and executive organizational entities.

**Military structures**

Main article: [Military units and formations of NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_units_and_formations_of_NATO)

NATO [E-3A](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-3_Sentry) flying with [US](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force) [F-16s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Dynamics_F-16_Fighting_Falcon) in a NATO exercise

The second pivotal member of each country's delegation is the Military Representative, a senior officer from each country's armed forces, supported by the International Military Staff. Together the Military Representatives form the Military Committee, a body responsible for recommending to NATO's political authorities those measures considered necessary for the common defence of the NATO area. Its principal role is to provide direction and advice on military policy and strategy. It provides guidance on military matters to the NATO Strategic Commanders, whose representatives attend its meetings, and is responsible for the overall conduct of the military affairs of the Alliance under the authority of the Council. The [Chairman of the NATO Military Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman_of_the_NATO_Military_Committee) is [Giampaolo Di Paola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giampaolo_Di_Paola) of Italy, since 2008.

Like the Council, from time to time the Military Committee also meets at a higher level, namely at the level of Chiefs of Defence, the most senior military officer in each nation's armed forces. Until 2008 the Military Committee excluded France, due to that country's 1966 decision to remove itself from NATO's integrated military structure, which it rejoined in 1995. Until France rejoined NATO, it was not represented on the Defence Planning Committee, and this led to conflicts between it and NATO members. Such was the case in the lead up to [Operation Iraqi Freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War). The operational work of the Committee is supported by the International Military Staff.

NATO's military operations are directed by the [Chairman of the NATO Military Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman_of_the_NATO_Military_Committee), and split into two Strategic Commands commanded by a senior US officer and a senior French officer assisted by a staff drawn from across NATO. The Strategic Commanders are responsible to the [Military Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman_of_the_NATO_Military_Committee) for the overall direction and conduct of all Alliance military matters within their areas of command.

The Military Committee in turn directs two principal NATO organizations: the [Allied Command Operations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Headquarters_Allied_Powers_Europe) responsible for the strategic, operational and tactical management of combat and combat support forces of the NATO members, and the [Allied Command Transformation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_Command_Transformation) organization responsible for the induction of the new member states' forces into NATO, and NATO forces' research and training capability.

* This page was last modified on 11 April 2012 at 00:27.