The International Military Staff (IMS)

The IMS supports the Military Committee, with about 500 dedicated military and civilian personnel working in an international capacity for the common interest of the Alliance, rather than on behalf of their country of origin. Under the direction of the Director General, Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper, the staff prepares assessments, evaluations and reports on all issues that form the basis of discussion and decisions in the Military Committee.

The IMS is also responsible for planning, assessing and recommending policy on military matters for consideration by the Military Committee, and for ensuring their policies and decisions are implemented as directed. This staff is the essential link between the decision-making bodies of the Alliance, the two Strategic Commanders, national military delegations from NATO and Partner countries working in Brussels, and the civilian International Staff that support the Secretary General and the North Atlantic Council.

NATO’s Military Committee

focused on operations, capabilities, cooperation, and transformation

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Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR is NATO’s maritime surveillance and escort operation in the fight against terrorism. Based in the Mediterranean Sea, the force, which is provided by several Nations, including for a while by Russia and Ukraine, has hailed more than 7,100 vessels.

The Military Committee oversees several operations and missions including:

- International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF).
  Since NATO took command of ISAF in 2003, its responsibilities have moved from forward-leaning roles such as protecting the Afghan people and degrading the insurgency toward supporting roles such as training, advising and assisting the Afghan National Security Forces who, in turn, are steadily taking the lead for security in more and more areas of Afghanistan. By mid-2013, the Afghan National Security Forces entered the final stage of taking the lead for security across the entire country, and ISAF entered the final stage in its shift from a combat to a support role. NATO will remain committed to Afghanistan beyond 2014. The post-2014, NATO-led mission in Afghanistan will be different than the ISAF mission, and the force will be significantly smaller in size. Its main focus will be to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Security Forces.
- Kosovo Force (KFOR). Since June 1999, NATO has led a peacekeeping operation in Kosovo. Initially composed of 50,000 troops following the March 1999 air campaign, the force now numbers about 5,100 consisting of NATO member and Partner Nations contributions.
- Operation OCEAN SHIELD. The Alliance’s counter piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin is being conducted with several ships and air assets, in close coordination with many international actors.
- Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR (OAE). The Alliance’s only Article V mission, conducts counter terrorism operations in the Mediterranean with the participation of Partner Nations and the increasing involvement of the Mediterranean Dialogue countries.
- NATO deployment of Patriot Missiles to Turkey. Six Patriot missile batteries are currently operating under NATO command and control in Southern Turkey in order to augment Turkey’s air defence capabilities to defend its population and territory.
- NATO also provides assistance to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and capacity building support to its long term peacekeeping capabilities, in particular the African Standby Force.
- NATO Air Policing missions in the Baltic States and the Balkans contribute to the air space management by scramble at short notice and take deterrent actions against trespassers.
- About 50 NATO military personnel in Sarajevo, Skopje and Belgrade also assist with defence and security reform.

International Military Staff

Six functional areas of the IMS

Plans and Policy

Responsible for strategic level plans and policy advice on alliance planning, including working with NATO to determine national military levels of ambition regarding long term goals and contributions to NATO.

Operations

Closely tracks current operations, staffs operational planning, follows NATO exercises and training, and is responsible for issues involving NATO air defence.

Cooperation and Regional Security

Main military contact with the 22 Partners in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC), the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC), the 7 Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) Nations, the 4 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) Nations, and with other non-member, non-Partner countries with whom NATO has relations or contact.

Logistics and Resources

All matters concerning logistics, armaments, procurement, development, medical, civil emergency planning, and management of Alliance military financial resources and personnel.

Intelligence

Provides strategic intelligence support, including gathering, assessing and distributing intelligence received from member countries and NATO Commands.

NATO Consultation, Command and Control

Gives advice on communications and information systems, standards, products, and analysis.
The NATO Military Decision-Making Process

The NATO Military Committee (MC) is the most senior authority in the Alliance. It provides the highest political and military advice to the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on military matters and recommendations forward for political consideration. In turn, it gives clear military direction to the Strategic Commanders based on NATO’s highest political authority, with consensus-based military advice that can be agreed by all 30 NATO Chiefs of Defence.

The overall planning and direction of all NATO operations rests with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who works from Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) Headquarters in Mons, Belgium. Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT), working from Norfolk, U.S., is responsible for enhancing NATO’s military capabilities, developing concepts, policies, and joint NATO training.

The Chairman of the Military Committee (MC) is elected by the NATO Chiefs of Defence, normally for a three-year term. He represents the consensus-based views of the Ministers of Defence of all Member States and the Secretary General. The role is to guide the Military Committee’s agenda and deliberations, listening to views and working to reconcile divergent national positions or policy differences to fashion advice that all can agree to. Each Nation has an equal voice in discussions and decisions, as all Member Nations provide the personnel and the financial resources needed to conduct NATO operations and other activities.

As the Alliance’s top officer and most senior military spokesperson, General Knud Bartels (Danish Army), the current Chairman, regularly visits operations and Allied and Partner countries to explain NATO’s role and military work, and to maximize NATO military capabilities and efficiencies. He is assisted by the Deputy Chairman, Lt. General Mark O. Schuster (U.S. Air Force).

The Military Committee provides the North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO’s highest political authority, with consensus-based military advice - that is, advice agreed by all Chiefs of Defence. It works closely with the two Strategic Commanders’ to bring plans, issues and recommendations forward for political consideration. In turn, it gives clear military direction to the Strategic Commanders based on national positions or policy differences to fashion advice that all member nations agree to, comes from its military authorities. The North Atlantic Council receives regular briefings and reports, and at each key stage the Military Committee is called on to give advice, and to provide direction to NATO Military Authorities.

The Chairman of the Military Committee is elected by the NAC, NATO’s highest political authority, with consensus-based military advice. He is assisted by the Deputy Chairman, Lt. General Knud Bartels (Danish Army), the current Chairman, regularly visits operations and Allied and Partner countries to explain NATO’s role and military work, and to maximize NATO military capabilities and efficiencies. He is assisted by the Deputy Chairman, Lt. General Mark O. Schuster (U.S. Air Force).

General Knud Bartels, the current chairman of the Military Committee, is the most senior military authority of the Alliance. Nominated by NATO’s Chiefs of Defence, he chairs all the meetings of the Military Committee and acts in an international capacity. NATO’s Chiefs of Defence meet at least three times a year, and on a day-to-day basis work through permanent Military Representatives in NATO HQ in Brussels.

Six steps to agreed military advice

When NATO political authorities are considering military action, such as the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, a critical part of the information needed to reach informed decisions is that all Nations can agree to, comes from its military authorities. The North Atlantic Council receives regular briefings and reports, and at each key stage the Military Committee is called on to give advice, and to provide direction to NATO Military Authorities.

Step 1. The North Atlantic Council tasks the Military Committee with the challenge that can be agreed by all 30 NATO Chiefs of Defence.

Step 2. The International Military Staff, in support of this Military Committee, translates the political guidance into military direction and tasks one or both Strategic Commanders for their best military advice on how to organize and conduct what has been asked for, including an assessment of the personnel and financial resources required.

Step 3. The input from the Strategic Command(s) is provided to the Military Committee (i.e. to the NAC) for consideration, usually with an initial assessment by the International Military Staff.

Step 4. The Military Representatives provide their response and advice from a national standpoint. 28 views need to converge into consensus advice that can be passed on to the North Atlantic Council.

Step 5. Consensus is rarely achieved immediately on complex undertakings, and working groups meet regularly to troubleshoot and work through issues. Staff from national military delegations work with subject matter experts under an IMS Chairman.

Step 6. The final agreed product, together with the initial advice from the Strategic Command(s), is then sent to the North Atlantic Council to inform their deliberations, consultations and decision-making. This is a continuous process for every activity, be it in operational planning, a conceptual paper or a policy proposal.