

NATO and Nuclear Disarmament

NATO Allies are strongly committed to **arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation**, which play an important role in preserving peace in the Euro-Atlantic region. NATO actively contributes to **effective and verifiable nuclear disarmament efforts** through its policies and activities, and the commitments of its member countries. Allies recognise the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as well as their means of delivery, by state and non-state actors. NATO designs its partnership programmes to provide effective frameworks for dialogue, consultation, and coordination on a wide range of arms control-related issues, including nuclear disarmament.

NATO's Role in Nuclear Disarmament

Disarmament is the act of eliminating or abolishing weapons, either unilaterally or reciprocally. It may refer either to reducing and limiting the number and types of arms, or to eliminating entire categories of weapons. NATO's policies in this field support consultation and practical cooperation on nuclear policy issues, including arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation.

NATO supports and facilitates policy-making among members, and consultations with partners and other countries, and aids in the implementation of international obligations. All NATO Allies are parties to the most important of the global treaties on WMD, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

NATO consults and cooperates with relevant international organizations, including the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the European Union. NATO also organises, facilitates, and participates in relevant conferences on nuclear disarmament.

NATO's Enduring Commitment to Nuclear Disarmament

NATO has an enduring commitment to nuclear disarmament dating to the founding of the Alliance, including its first disarmament proposals submitted to the London UN Disarmament Conference in 1957. After the end of the Cold War, NATO dramatically reduced the number of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe and its reliance on nuclear weapons in NATO strategy. NATO remains committed to contribute to creating the conditions for further reductions in the future on the basis of reciprocity, recognising that progress on arms control and disarmament must take into account the prevailing international security environment. However, Allies regret that the conditions for achieving disarmament are not favourable today.¹

NATO Nuclear Sharing Arrangements²

A core principle of NATO's nuclear posture is that **the nuclear-weapon states of the Alliance maintain absolute control and custody of their nuclear weapons**. This principle fully conforms with Articles I and II of the NPT, which prohibit the transfer of control of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear weapons states. Allies note that the states that have assigned nuclear weapons to NATO apply to these weapons the assurances they have each offered on a national basis, including the separate conditions each state has attached to these assurances.³

Historically, NATO's nuclear arrangements were already in place when the United Nations Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee negotiated the Treaty, when the NPT was opened for signature, and when it entered into force. The negotiating record of the NPT shows that these arrangements, from the very start, were well-known and debated in public and parliaments, and were discussed extensively in the negotiations, forming an essential part of the *acquis* of the Treaty. The NATO nuclear sharing arrangements were intended to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons, and to maintain peace.

In the five decades following NPT entry-into-force, the state parties did not call into question NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements in the context of the Review process, and the three NATO nuclear-weapon states have signed protocols to the Nuclear Weapon Free Zones and joined in UN-mandated security assurances. The US and the Soviet Union continued to negotiate and sign bilateral nuclear treaties (e.g., SALT, INF, and START) to limit nuclear weapons without affecting NATO's nuclear arrangements, and the Russian Federation has continued to negotiate such agreements (SORT, New START).

1 [Warsaw Summit Communiqué, paragraph 65.](#)

2 See: [William Alberque "The NPT and the origins of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements", Etudes de l'IFRI, Proliferation papers 57, February 2017.](#)

3 [Deterrence and Defence Posture Review 2012, paragraph 10.](#)

The Non-Proliferation Treaty

The NPT is the cornerstone of the global effort to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, materials, and design knowledge, and to achieve our common goal of nuclear disarmament, and general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. The NPT remains the essential bulwark against the spread of nuclear weapons, the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, and the framework for international cooperation in sharing the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, science, and technology. Of key importance is the safeguards system established by the Treaty under the responsibility of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to verify compliance.

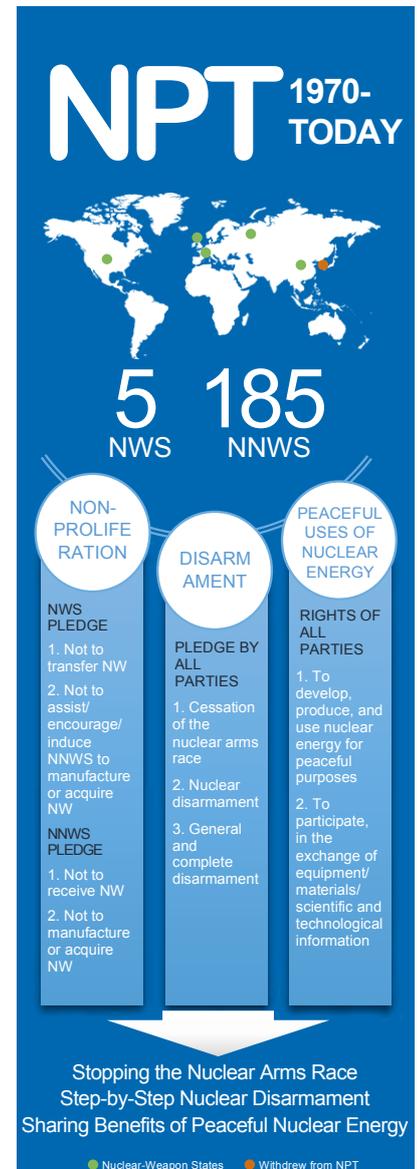
On 5 March 2020, the 50th Anniversary of the entry-into-force of the NPT, the North Atlantic Council celebrated the achievements of the Treaty and called on all State Parties to work together towards a successful Review Conference. It repeated NATO's longstanding support for the Treaty and the unwavering commitment of all Allies to the full implementation of the NPT Treaty in all of its aspects in the face of ongoing global proliferation challenges.

Allied nuclear-weapon states have contributed significantly to nuclear disarmament since the end of the Cold War. These contributions include observation of their Article VI commitments by radically reducing their stocks of nuclear weapons, de-targeting them, reducing their alert status, and reducing their roles and salience in defence. Allies have reduced the number of weapons available for NATO based in Europe by more than 85 percent since 1991, and by more than 95 percent since the height of the Cold War.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

NATO does not support the Nuclear Ban Treaty, which is at odds with the existing non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, is inconsistent with the Alliance's nuclear deterrence policy, and will not enhance any country's security. Unlike the NPT, the Ban Treaty lacks a verification mechanism. It is also at odds with the existing non-proliferation and disarmament architecture and risks undermining the NPT, which has been at the heart of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts for almost 50 years, and the IAEA Safeguards regime that supports it.⁴

The Ban Treaty will not create the global security conditions necessary to eliminate nuclear weapons. Indeed, it risks building unrealistic expectations. It will not strengthen the practical path to the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons. The NPT remains the only realistic route to Allies' shared goal of a nuclear weapons-free world. A world where only Russia, China, and North Korea possess nuclear weapons is not a safer world. Nuclear deterrence has made a major contribution to peace and stability in Europe and beyond for more than 70 years and has been at the heart of NATO's posture. The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression. Given the changes in the security environment, a credible and united nuclear Alliance is essential. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a **nuclear alliance**.⁵



⁴ North Atlantic Council Statement on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 20 September 2017.

⁵ NATO London Declaration, Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019.

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