

NATO Nuclear Deterrence

Nuclear deterrence has been at the core of NATO’s collective defence for 70 years. In an uncertain world, nuclear weapons continue to play a critical role in NATO’s deterrence and defence. The purpose of NATO’s nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression.

Nuclear weapons are unique, and the circumstances in which NATO might contemplate the use of them are extremely remote. However, if the fundamental security of any Ally were to be threatened, NATO has the capabilities and resolve to defend itself – including with nuclear weapons.

NATO is committed to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in line with Allies’ commitments to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Since the end of the Cold War, the number of nuclear weapons available to NATO in Europe has been reduced dramatically, by around 90 percent.

However, as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance and Allies will continue to take all steps necessary to ensure NATO’s nuclear deterrent remains safe, secure and effective.



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Nuclear Forces

Three NATO members - the United States, France and the United Kingdom – have nuclear weapons.

The strategic forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the Alliance’s security. The independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France have a deterrent role of their own and contribute significantly to the overall security of the Alliance.

NATO’s nuclear deterrence also relies on US nuclear weapons deployed in Europe and supporting capabilities and infrastructure provided by Allies. A number of European NATO members have dual-capable aircraft dedicated to the delivery of these US nuclear weapons. The United States maintains full custody of these weapons at all times. These “nuclear-sharing arrangements” predate and are fully consistent with the Non-Proliferation Treaty.



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Decision-Making

NATO Allies retain political control of all aspects of nuclear decision-making. The Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), founded in 1966, is the main forum to discuss nuclear issues within NATO.

While the North Atlantic Council is the ultimate authority within NATO, the NPG acts as the senior body on nuclear matters.

The NPG reviews the Alliance’s nuclear policy, including the safety, security and survivability of nuclear weapons, and communications and information systems.

Irrespective of whether or not they have nuclear weapons, all Allies are members of the NPG with the exception of France, which has decided not to participate.



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