

Topic Page: [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#)

Definition: **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** from *Dictionary of Information Science and Technology*

a military alliance established by the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1949. The NATO headquarters are in Brussels, Belgium, and the organization constitutes a system of collective defense whereby its member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party. (Katerinsky, Pantaleev, & Rao, 2011)



Image from: [U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson signs the... in *Encyclopedia of Intelligence & Counterintelligence*](#)

Summary Article: **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

From *Encyclopedia of Governance*

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military alliance of twenty-six countries from Europe and North America that is based on the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty. Its role is to ensure the freedom and security of its members by both political and military means. NATO members offer each other a mutual security guarantee (Article 5), meaning an attack on one is treated as an attack on all. Its tasks are to ensure security within the NATO area based on the growth of democratic institutions and a commitment to peaceful resolution to conflict, to act as a transatlantic forum for discussion of issues affecting the vital interests of members, to provide defense and deterrence against attacks

from outside, and to enhance the security and stability of the wider Euro-Atlantic area through partnership with nonmembers and contributing to crisis management. Moreover, NATO is seen as more than just an international organization, it is also viewed as a security community and as a transatlantic community of states with shared values.

During the Cold War, with Europe split into two opposing security blocs—NATO and the Warsaw Pact—NATO's mission was clear cut: territorial defense. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has sought a new role in crisis management as the transformation of the security situation in Europe made its original purpose seem dated. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, and the NATO-Ukraine Commission, not to mention successive enlargements to include former-Warsaw Pact and even Soviet states as NATO members, have meant that NATO members are now working closely with their former common enemy. After it agreed on a new strategic concept in 1991, NATO also accepted that security has nonmilitary dimensions and has moved to incorporate these into its policy formulation with initiatives, like the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, aiming to enhance stability in its neighborhood through dialogue and cooperation. NATO forces have also engaged in out-of-area military interventions, notably in Kosovo in 1998.

However, despite reform and enlargement efforts, NATO's long-term role remains unclear. While there is little threatening the NATO, or indeed the notion of a transatlantic security community, the sense of a transatlantic community based on shared values is receding. While transatlantic cooperation on international terrorism and other security issues remains strong, the European Union is now developing its own security capabilities with its Common European Security and Defense Policy, and, notably since the election of U.S. President George W. Bush in 2000, European and American thinking on some aspects of security policy seems to have diverged. In particular, the American-led invasion of Iraq in

2003 was divisive for NATO and has led to further calls for a recasting of the transatlantic relationship.

See also

Baltic State Cooperation; Regional Governance; Security; Security Community

Further Readings and References

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