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EUROPE'S NEW CARPETBAGGERS:

THE FUTURE FOR NATO

SPECIAL OPERATIONS AVIATION

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Matthew A. Powell is a U.S. Air Force aviator assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He graduated from the Pennsylvania State University in 1989 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics, and from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 2005 with a Masters of Military Art and Science. He earned his pilot wings in 1992 and has over 4,000 flying hours in the T-37, T-38, C-130E, and MC-130H. He has served on the staff at Air Force Special Operations Command and U.S. Special Operations Command; he served two tours in the European Command Area of Responsibility and is a graduated squadron commander and former deputy special operations group commander.



Abstract

Sixty years after twelve nations pledged themselves to collective defense in the North Atlantic Treaty, an attack on one member state resulted in the formation and deployment of a response from the alliance. This was not, as envisioned, an attack by the Soviet Union on Western Europe, but a terrorist attack on the United States. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was sent to Afghanistan in December, 2001, and now has the lead for military actions. This coalition includes special operations forces (SOF) from several nations, but their effectiveness is hampered by the lack of dedicated special operations aviation assets. The recent expansion from three SOF units to ten has only exacerbated the situation.

To address this deficiency, this paper analyzes three courses of action: NATO can maintain the status quo, it can establish a permanent SOF air wing, or it can adopt a “modular” concept of a centralized command and control structure augmented by affiliated air and ground SOF units comprised and based by member nations. Each of these options has advantages and disadvantages with respect to budgetary requirements (both to the alliance and to individual member nations), time to implement, logistical support and military effectiveness.

Given the current global economic crisis and the exigent need for special operations aviation to support ISAF in Afghanistan, this paper recommends the modular concept. By bolstering the NATO SOF Headquarters staff, one creates a strong, centralized structure to employ special operations aviation. Furthermore, by exploiting the flexibility of NATO’s Security Investment Program, the alliance can more quickly modernize and train aviation units. Finally, by affiliating those units with other nation’s ground SOF units, the alliance would foster habitual operating relationships which could quickly be translated to special operations capability on the battlefield.

Introduction

“...I contend that all of the National Air Forces [of NATO countries] should recognize that Special Air Warfare is indeed a unique discipline that requires a specific emphasis and advocacy within your respective defense establishments – and rests on the tenet...the core ethos of airman is [that] we strive to exploit airpower for the benefit of our Nations, our Treaty Alliances, and to maximize Mission Success.”

Lt Gen Frank Kisner, Commander, NSHQ
NATO Air Summit remarks, 18 Nov 2011

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the rise of the Soviet Union led the countries of Western Europe to form an alliance focused on the collective defense of the region. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) sought to thwart aggression against a single country by the threat of retaliation from the entire alliance. As the Cold War ended, many questioned the need for the alliance; the subsequent increase in regional conflicts in the new multipolar world provided a new mission for NATO. The concept of collective defense gave way to that of collective security. This shift from a reactive mindset to a proactive one is intended to prevent instability within the member nations by addressing conflicts outside the alliance boundaries and it requires a projection of power to a forward operating area vice defending national borders. The attacks of September 11, 2001, brought the very real threat of violence by extremist non-state actors home to the alliance members and they honored the precepts of the alliance by providing men and materiel in support of the United States' response. As the conflict in Afghanistan evolved, the inherent flaws of the military structure within the alliance manifested themselves; among these was the lack of dedicated aviation assets to special operations forces (SOF). As national air forces modernize to develop an indigenous SOF aviation capability, it has been proposed by NATO SOF Headquarters (NSHQ) that, in the interim, a SOF Air Wing be formed comprised of units from nations with a more mature SOF Aviation capability. The

purpose of this paper is to recommend a framework within which NSHQ can create such an entity; in order to do so, we will review the pertinent historical precedents, analyze the current requirements and capabilities, and develop alternate courses of action. This paper will then analyze the costs and benefits associated with each of these courses of action and make a final recommendation. The intent of that recommendation is not simply a solution for the current context, but should be adaptable in order to satisfy future SOF employment considerations.

The North Atlantic Treaty

Following the culmination of the Second World War, Great Britain and France sought to formalize a mutual defense agreement in an effort to thwart the threat of a resurgent Germany. The *Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance* was signed on March 4, 1947, and it was expanded a year later to include Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. As the Soviet Union began an aggressive campaign of forcibly integrating Eastern European countries into its sphere of influence, manifested by the Berlin Blockade which began in June 1948, the nations of the alliance began to acknowledge that the threat of a resurgent Germany had been superseded by that of communist expansion. However, in order to offset the military might of the Soviet Union, the alliance needed to dramatically expand the scope of their military capability.

The North Atlantic Treaty was signed on 4 April, 1949, and included the original five nations and added the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Within the treaty was Article 5, which stated: “The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all...”¹ As tensions began to rise, NATO continued to expand to include Greece and Turkey in 1952 and West Germany in 1955. In response, the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact and gave rise to the Cold War.

The Cold War: Collective Defense

The invasion of South Korea by communist North Korea in 1950 provided impetus for major military exercises to enhance interoperability and demonstrate resolve. These exercises began modestly and focused on easily deployable maritime assets but expanded rapidly to include land warfare simulating a Soviet invasion and even a nuclear exchange. Although these exercises were massive in scale, little was done to enhance interoperability. Individual units still relied on their nation's governments to train, organize and equip and these programs were conducted with national interests foremost and NATO's intentions as a secondary consideration. Command and control of NATO forces during exercises was similar to that of World War II; tasks were assigned to individual units and phase lines drawn to delineate areas of responsibility. Within those areas, units could expect a measure of support from other nations' assets in theory, but requests for support were vetted at the strategic level and could be delayed significantly or entirely non-existent. In order to satisfy possible taskings, individual nations built organic air, land and maritime capabilities, but these capabilities often left much to be desired and could not be leveraged to support other national units. More often than not, the onus for support fell upon the United States, specifically in terms of air and logistical support.

It is difficult to assess when the concept of Special Operations Forces (SOF) began, but it came to fruition for the United States during the Vietnam War. As the idea took hold in other nations, the command and control of SOF remained within the respective nation's span of control. NATO's Allied Command Operations directorate included air, land and maritime components, but did not include special operations. Those forces often participated in NATO exercises, but only within purview of national command and control structures. In addition, NATO SOF would conduct Joint Combined Exercise Training (JCET) to enhance operability,

establish habitual relationships and exchange tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), but these training exercises were generally coordinated bilaterally between nations and not within the NATO framework.

Post-Cold War: Collective Security

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, many began to question the requirement for a collective defense treaty. However, the fragmentation of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia gave rise to ethnic conflict in Bosnia. Recognizing that strife in Bosnia would lead to an influx in refugees into Europe and promote greater instability on the borders of the alliance, NATO embarked on an evolution from collective defense to collective security wherein allied members maintain peace when a “breach of the peace is declared to be of concern to all participating states.”² With this change in focus from a reactive defensive posture to a proactive offensive one, NATO was able to project power outside of its geographic borders and into areas of global instability. Furthermore, in an effort to enhance its military capability while simultaneously expanding its sphere of influence, NATO began an “Open Door” program of accepting former Warsaw Pact member nations into the alliance. In 1999, NATO officially invited the first new members to the alliance in nearly twenty years: Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. The alliance continued to expand and currently includes twenty-eight members, with the continued support of its original twelve members. However, this expansion faced new difficulties; former Warsaw Pact member nations had standardized to a Soviet model and required substantial modification to integrate within NATO’s military structure. Furthermore, those states no longer enjoyed the Soviet subsidy on arms and their newly-democratized economies struggled to maintain standing military forces and weaponry. NATO divided itself into Framework Nations (FN) and Troop Contributing Nations (TCN), with the former providing

command and control, logistics support and financial aid, and the latter supplying manpower, albeit within certain requirements.³ This expansion was enjoying a measure of success when the alliance was faced with the most serious threat in its fifty-two year existence.

International Security Assistance Force

The attack by Al Qaeda on the United States on September 11, 2001, paled in comparison to the envisioned Soviet invasion of Western Europe that never came to fruition. Still, the end of the Cold War brought a peace and prosperity which the terrorists shattered dramatically. The NATO ruling body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC), ruled that “since it had been determined that the attacks had been directed from abroad, they were regarded as an action covered by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty,” the first such decision in NATO history.⁴ This first activation of the alliance for the purpose of collective defense signaled the complete transformation of NATO from a Europe-centered reactive focus to one where the organization has come to “view its security in terms of global presence and influence necessary to mitigate the possibility of a terrorist act upon [its] members.”⁵

The United States embarked on combat operations in Afghanistan within weeks of the terrorist attack and international support for the endeavor was widespread. The United Nations Security Council authorized the establishment and deployment of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) on December 20, 2001, and charged it with assisting the Afghan Interim Authority in maintaining security.⁶ This effort was initially led by the United States and focused its efforts on Kabul and the surrounding area, but in 2003 the command of ISAF passed officially to NATO and began to expand throughout Afghanistan. The mission of ISAF focused on nation-building through the improvement of governance and infrastructure, but in order to ensure security for those activities, ISAF needed to pursue combat operations as part of a

traditional counterinsurgency strategy. The requirement to pursue full-spectrum operations necessitated an assessment of SOF capabilities throughout the alliance.

By 2006, it was apparent to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) that SOF was being ineffectively employed in Afghanistan. At the NATO Summit in Riga, Latvia, in November, the Heads of State within NATO approved the NATO SOF Transformation Initiative which was charged with establishing a headquarters for NATO SOF which would, in turn, provide oversight on the training, organization and equipping of special operations-designated forces in NATO.⁷ A NATO SOF Coordinate Center (NSCC) was created within U.S. Special Operations Command Europe in December and then moved as a separate entity to Mons, Belgium, with six months. The NSCC was to provide a direct link from the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) to individual national SOF units. This capability grew to become the NATO SOF Headquarters in March, 2010. To date, NSHQ has made tremendous strides in creating doctrine, assessing national capabilities, establishing training, and coordinating for operational support in Afghanistan, but much needs still to be done, especially within the realm of Special Operations Aviation.

Current Requirements and Capabilities

At the General Alfredo Kindelán International Seminar in November, 2011, Lt Gen Frank J. Kisner, NSHQ commander, addressed the gathering of NATO aviation senior leaders and presented his vision for NATO SOF aviation. “One of the key lessons learned from [the failure of Operation RICE BOWL, the attempted rescue of Americans held hostage in Iran] is that the operational packaging of SOF requires organic, dedicated, or habitually-associated air assets and capabilities specifically tailored and embedded in the force structure to perform or support special air

operations.”⁸ In order to establish the standards by which a Special Operations Air Task Unit (SOATU) should be defined:

- Support at least one of the three, and strive to support all of the three principal tasks of NATO SOF (Special Reconnaissance, Direct Action and Military Assistance) across the spectrum of conflict.
- Maintain a habitual relationship with national special operations ground and maritime units for training and operations.
- Support special operations principal tasks in multiple environments, e.g., mountain, desert, jungle, urban, or maritime.
- Insert or extract up to 16 special operations personnel and their equipment in a low to medium threat environment, to a precise location at least 100 nautical miles or 160 kilometers from the starting point, using low prominence flight techniques, at day or night, using night vision devices, to a precise location, with a time-on-target within ± 1 minute. [The threat environment also mandates that Aircraft Survivability Equipment in terms of Countermeasures and ballistic protection be incorporated into the platforms.]
- Fixed-wing SOATUs will also be qualified to conduct landings and takeoffs from short, unimproved airfields, at night, using night vision devices.⁹

The current capability of NATO SOATUs is classified but the author’s personal experience revealed several tiers of capability within the alliance. The nations with the most capable SOATUs were the United States and the United Kingdom, and these units are heavily tasked in support of operations in Afghanistan. The Western European nations maintain outstanding conventional capabilities, but the transition to special operations has been

incremental. The Eastern European nations, specifically the Czech Republic and Croatia, have demonstrated enthusiasm for developing a special operations aviation capability, but they are limited by national financial constraints.

There is a tremendous demand for NATO special operations aviation in Afghanistan. According to Lt Gen Kisner, more than 75% of ISAF special operations air support requests (ASRs) are unfilled and the remainder constitutes a tremendous loss of special operations ground capability within Afghanistan.¹⁰ Furthermore, the 2006 Comprehensive Political Guidance document, which drives NATO's intent for military capacity, establishes an intention to be able to simultaneously conduct two major joint operations and six small joint operations (the "2+6" level of ambition).¹¹ This has led to an explosive growth in NATO ground SOF capability: In the past few years, the number of NATO SOF task groups supporting ISAF has mushroomed from three to ten (350 personnel to over 2,000), but NATO SOF aviation capability has remained unchanged.

Proposed Solutions

Given the current capabilities of the NATO member nations and the stated requirements of NSHQ, this paper proposes three possible courses of action which would satisfy, in varying degrees, the operational need for special operations aviation. The alliance can maintain the status quo; by continuing to rely upon individual nations to acquire or improve aircraft and training with the help of nations with greater experience, but by continuing the practice of nominating lead nations responsible for planning, coordinating and command and control. Another alternative is to enhance member nation special operations aviation capability by affiliating air units with SOF ground forces to foster habitual relationships and establish a permanent expeditionary headquarters within NSHQ; these units could then be task-organized

and deployed with the NSHQ staff quickly in a modular concept that could be replenished with other units and personnel. Finally, NATO could pursue the establishment of a permanent, organic special operations Air Wing of member nation personnel which would acquire aircraft, establish and maintain training and deploy as an all-inclusive organization. This paper will now examine each of these concepts in greater detail

Status Quo

At this time within NATO, only two member nations maintain a dedicated special operations aviation capability: the United States and the United Kingdom. The permanently assigned capabilities include three C-130 variant squadrons and one MH-47 squadron. During operations in Afghanistan, the U.S. assets will remain under the operational control of U.S. Central Command, but these aircraft are rarely released from the U.S. European Command area of responsibility (AOR). When tasked to support ISAF, the U.K. C-130s and MH-47s are spread thinly across the command. Although SOCEUR and NATO continue to train special operations aviators in Poland, the Czech Republic and Croatia to meet the minimum requirements established by NSHQ, limited funding has hampered aircraft modernization, equipment procurement, and sustained training. Currently, NSHQ estimates that Poland and the Czech Republic will meet the Level II threshold by 2015. However, this timeline and the timelines of other member nations have been jeopardized by the truncation of national defense budgets in reaction to the global economic crisis. Less-capable members rely heavily upon the alliance in general and more-capable countries in particular to augment their budgets. However, the advantage to this approach is the ability of less-capable countries to train on aircraft they have operated in the past. By modernizing equipment on existing aircraft and focusing on the improvement of TTPs, nations enjoy a degree of savings by not acquiring new weapons systems.

Furthermore, nation members that employ similar aircraft, such as the Mi-17 can cooperate on modernization programs, thus mitigating their financial constraints. By maintaining the current program, less-capable member states can proceed at a rate that their own contexts dictate with respect to financial wherewithal, aircraft modernization and training progression. Although this may place less demand upon those nations, the stress on current special operations aviation providers remains, and the less effective NATO is in employing ground SOF.

At this time, lead nations continue to provide the bulk of the staff at the headquarters level. Experience and commonality may provide a degree of stability within the headquarters processes, but lack of national integration places additional constraints upon lead nations, inhibits the growth of less-capable nations, leads to ineffective apportionment and allocation, and contributes to friction within the alliance. Furthermore, the shortened rotation cycle of staff members maintains these ineffective conditions. Although this could be offset by placing more experienced aviators from less-capable nations on the staff, this could have a profound negative impact on the operations of that nation's units by effectively decapitating operational capability. Despite the fact that NSHQ is increasing manning to meet the increased demands of ISAF and NATO, that manning still falls short of overall staffing requirements.

Although there is a high degree in commonality amongst less-capable nations with respect to aircraft type, there is currently no coordinated logistics effort on the part of NATO to ensure individual units are provided with the supplies they need to keep aircraft mission ready. Instead, member nations are required to maintain individual logistics capabilities, although they may leverage other nations' or even commercial strategic airlift capability. This requirement obviates NATO of the cost and responsibility of equipping supporting units, but places a tremendous burden on less-capable nations and results in late-to-need logistics and risks negative

impacts to mission accomplishment. As a result, the US bears the majority of the burden of logistical support.

The advantages to maintaining the status quo are evident; less-capable member nations continue to bear a relatively low cost and the concept is already in effect, thereby reducing the time required to put into effect. However, the disadvantages of continued late-to-need tactical employment and logistics, combined with a continued heavy burden on larger member states may totally negate any advantages. The next concept involves much greater involvement and financial burden on the part of NATO.

Modular Concept

As NATO continues to expand member nations' special operations aviation capabilities, one can expand upon the previous proposal to incorporate a "modular" approach. In this concept, nations with a more mature special operations aviation capability continue to provide aircraft modernization and training support, but with greater investment from NATO. Currently, NSHQ, along with "out-of-area" military operations, receives budgetary support from NATO's Security Investment Program (NSIP), not the Military Budget.¹² The flexibility of the NSIP along with the stated intent of the Riga Summit to transform NATO SOF affords NSHQ an opportunity to leverage greater support, but that support has caveats. The NSIP has a higher degree of political sensitivity, so disbursement requires greater forethought. By affiliating a nascent special operations aviation capability of one nation with a ground SOF unit of another member nation, NSHQ can overcome political sensitivities while creating a habitual relationship between units. That relationship can synergize capability, potentially resulting in more rapid development of capability and earlier attainment of NSHQ thresholds for special operations aviation. These training relationships could motivate other member nations to develop

capabilities, pooling resources to enhance aircraft modernization; newly-certified special operations aviation units could relieve the previously over-extended experienced nations both in the battlespace and in the training environment at a much faster rate.

Simultaneously, NSHQ would need to expand its staff in order to create an expeditionary headquarters capability. This staff would be comprised of both experienced and less-capable nations' personnel, but would not necessarily draw from aviation community. By taking advantage of the extant training opportunities at NSHQ, even conventional aviators could acquaint themselves with the mission specifics of their own nation's units, as well as those of other nations. As this process matured, those specifics should, ideally, converge making the task even easier. By drawing from the NSHQ staff, the expeditionary headquarters would have greater commonality with respect to tasks, functions, and interoperability, but it would also have the benefit of establishing a standard methodology of command and control across NATO special operations aviation units. In an effort to maintain as small a staff as possible within NSHQ, augmentation would still be required of member nations but the majority of the expeditionary staff would be permanent party NSHQ personnel.

As capability expanded, future operational level commanders could select from a variety of capabilities resident in the affiliated pairings of newly-certified special operations aviation units with more well-established ground SOF units. This "modular" approach provides greater flexibility and timeliness in deployment and employment, and provides for sustainment, as well. Furthermore, the costs are borne by NATO; member states maintain their current spending as their capabilities mature. Although not as timely as the previous proposal, this concept could potentially accelerate the current rate of capability development and provide for a greater capability at a point in the near future. Unfortunately, the costs borne by NATO both in terms of

budgetary support, manpower and footprint must be approved by the NAC and subsequent contributions of member nations will increase proportionate to their Gross National Product. There is still no solution to logistical support; enhanced special operations aviation capability does not provide organic logistics while deployed. That responsibility would still fall on the NATO member nations with established strategic airlift capability, which could result in delays to support and lost tactical capability. The final proposal will address those problems.

Permanent Air Wing

Throughout its history, NATO has relied on member nations to provide military units to support its aims. However, in 1978, NATO established an aviation wing to provide airborne command and control. The NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force (NAEW&CF) is currently comprised of 17 aircraft and 3,000 military and civilian personnel from 16 NATO nations permanently assigned to Geilenkirchen AB, Germany.¹³ The unit has participated in numerous exercises around the world and supported combat operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. Personnel are drawn from NATO member states, receive training, if required, at the unit, and remain as permanent party on a fixed tour, not as part of temporary duty. This unit comprises a significant fraction of NATO's Military Budget, which is the largest of their three budgets. As a third proposal to NATO special operations aviation development, this paper proposes the establishment of a similar permanent NATO SOF Air Wing which would acquire and maintain aircraft, train and employ personnel, and provide an expeditionary headquarters capability. Although this would take substantial time to fully organize, train and equip, a permanent SOF air wing would provide dedicated full-time staff and on-demand operational and logistical support to rapidly and effectively satisfy NATO mission requirements. Furthermore,

personnel trained at NATO would provide a wealth of operational knowledge to their nations upon their return.

The establishment of a permanent NATO SOF Air Wing would present the lowest up-front costs to member nations, although the NATO budget and subsequent contributions from member nations would increase substantially. A permanent air wing would enable greater interoperability by providing identical aircraft types modernized in similar manners operated by aircrews with matching equipment and training. That continuity affords operational commanders a better understanding of capabilities and expected results. The proposed NATO SOF air wing could not completely satisfy all mission requirements; augmentation from NATO member nations would still be necessary. However, the development of member nations' capability would be directly enhanced by personnel rotating in and out of the permanent air wing and during the conduct of regular training exercises. Unlike the previous proposal, however, there would be less opportunity for habitual cross-national relationships due to the limited size of the air wing and the lack of financial incentive to member nations to conduct such training.

In addition to costs associated with aircraft procurement and modernization, other costs like regular maintenance, operating, training, and increased personnel costs would place tremendous financial demands on NATO and member nations. Furthermore, all of these assets would need a permanent basing site which would require military construction, maintenance, and force protection costs.

In terms of mission effectiveness, the establishment of a permanent SOF air wing would provide the highest degree of support to satisfy NATO mission requirements, both in terms of timeliness and tactical efficacy. In addition, although a strategic airlift capability would not be considered as a component of the SOF air wing, overall reliance on member nations to provide

logistical support would be lessened somewhat by the presence of organic tactical airlift. However, the establishment of a NATO SOF Air Wing places the highest burden of cost, albeit vicariously, on member states and greatly amplifies NATO's manpower and footprint requirements and requires the longest time of all three proposals to implement.

Recommendations

The three proposed courses of action, maintaining the status quo, developing a modular capability, and establishing a permanent air wing, each satisfy the requirements of the alliance, to varying degrees. In order to determine which course of action represents the most appropriate avenue for NATO, this paper will present a cost versus benefit analysis. The variables to consider in this cost-benefit analysis are overall military capacity, time required to achieve that capacity, logistical support required to sustain that capacity, and budgetary requirements (both national and NATO) associated with that capacity.

With respect to overall military capacity, the permanent air wing represents the best approach. By establishing and maintaining standards, and requiring augmenting units to meet those standards, the permanent air wing will ensure mission capability meets mission requirement most effectively. The modular concept would struggle to accomplish this level of capacity; the establishment of standards would be relatively simple to implement, but the enforcement of those standards would face challenges as individual nations attempted to enhance their equipment and improve their capacity. Maintaining the status quo is the least satisfactory, due to the inability to establish and enforce standards.

The current method of employing SOF aviation assets takes no additional time to implement; it is already in place and in practice. Conversely, the establishment of a permanent air wing would require the most time to implement. A suitable location for the basing of the

wing, one which accommodated both the daily activities of the wing and also supported aviation training (airfields, training ranges, low-level flight training), would require much planning and negotiation. After deciding upon a location, extant infrastructure must be modified or augmented to suit, aircraft must be procured, personnel must be assigned, and a myriad of other considerations must be satisfied. Although undetermined, this could take several years to implement. In contrast, the modular approach only requires basing for the permanent staff; NSHQ already maintains sufficient basing. All other requirements are spread among member nations and augmented by NSIP. Relative to the permanent air wing, the modular concept could be implemented quickly.

With respect to logistical support, virtually all aspects of the current course of action have been borne by the United States and United Kingdom. Without an organic strategic logistical capability, supporting member nations cannot support their deployed forces. This would continue to be a challenge with the modular concept; however, the establishment of a robust staff entity would more easily synchronize disparate logistical requirements and coordinate them with strategic airlift providers. The permanent air wing would not maintain organic strategic airlift capability, but organic tactical airlift assets could greatly facilitate logistical support, as USAF and RAF C-130s do today.

None of this can be accomplished without sufficient budgetary support. NATO currently employs SOF aviation in the piecemeal manner that it does due to lack of sufficient financial support. The difference then lies in the manner in which the other two courses of action would be implemented. The establishment of a permanent air wing would draw from NATO's Military Budget which would represent the lowest up-front costs to member nations. This budget, however, is drawn from contributions of alliance member contributions. The modular concept

would draw from the NSIP, a smaller program than the NATO Military Budget, but one with more capacity and political flexibility. The augmentation of national military budgets with NSIP would constitute a lower burden to individual member states.

Overall, the modular concept represents the best value for money. It would provide suitable, sustainable capability in a relatively short period of time for less money than the establishment of a permanent air wing. Furthermore, it provides a foundation from which total NATO SOF aviation capacity can continue to grow.

Conclusion

In a period of unprecedented military activity, and with the lofty “2+6” ambitions of the Comprehensive Political Guidance, NATO suddenly has a severe shortfall in SOF aviation capability. This shortfall is further complicated by the global economic downturn which began in 2008 and which now presents challenges to national military budgets throughout the alliance. Despite the success of NATO’s organic Airborne Early Warning and Control Force, the alliance does not have the financial wherewithal or time to create and maintain a similar organic SOF aviation wing. Yet the current situation must change, if the alliance is to maintain viability. By adopting a modular concept of a strong, permanent centralized staff supported by national Special Operations Air Task Units, each affiliated with a NATO SOF ground unit, the alliance can more quickly and effectively develop, employ and sustain special operations aviation capability.

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Notes

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- ¹ The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949.
 - ² Wight, *Systems of States*, 149.
 - ³ Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations, AJP-3.5, 1-6.
 - ⁴ NATO Public Diplomacy Division, *Invocation of Article 5 Confirmed*.
 - ⁵ Mouer, *NATO, SOF and the Future of the Alliance*, 14.
 - ⁶ NATO Information and Resources, *About ISAF*.
 - ⁷ NATO SOF Coordination Centre, “NATO SOF Transformation Initiative.”
 - ⁸ Kisner, “Special Air Warfare and a Coherent Framework for NATO SOF Aviation.”
 - ⁹ Ibid.
 - ¹⁰ Ibid.
 - ¹¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Comprehensive Political Guidance*.
 - ¹² Ek, *NATO Common Funds Burdensharing: Background and Current Issues*, 3.
 - ¹³ NATO Public Diplomacy Division, “NATO Airborne Early Warning & Control Force: The History.”

