

**TRANSFORMING THE
ALBANIAN ARMED FORCES,
OVERCOMING THE
CHALLENGES**

BY

COLONEL NAZMI CAHANI
Albanian Armed Forces

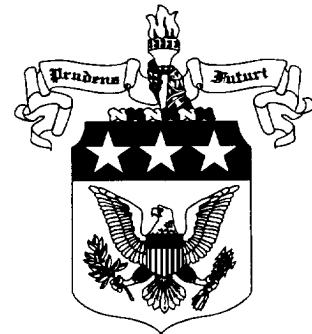
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**TRANSFORMING THE ALBANIAN ARMED FORCES, OVERCOMING THE
CHALLENGES**

by

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Albanian Armed Forces

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ABSTRACT

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Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) are currently undergoing an extensive defense reform process, which consists in the transformation of the strategic concept, doctrine, organizational structure, personnel management, military infrastructure, training and education, and the transformation of its systems and equipment. The transformation process, which started with regime change in 1990, and continues today, is not easy. The collapse of the communist regime left Albania not only with decayed infrastructure, impassable roads, extremely poor communication networks, and severe economic depression, but at the same time with large Armed Forces compared with the size of the country and the number of population. But the possibility of becoming a member of the NATO Alliance has served as a great incentive for Albania to transform defense, ensuring civilian control over the armed forces, establish and consolidate a democratic political system, create a market based economy while fostering good neighbourly relations. This paper addresses the transformation process that the AAF has undergone, and then analyzes the reforms that are needed as Albania becomes a full NATO member.

TRANSFORMING THE ALBANIAN ARMED FORCES, OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

The context of Albania's transition away from a command economy, a one-party political system, and a strategic paradigm of defense against a large-scale invasion by enemy forces explains the challenges Albania has encountered in the past years. Albania considers the partnership and the integration in NATO as a priority of its foreign policy and a strategic objective in the security and defense fields.¹ This consideration about NATO integration has always been an unchangeable priority of all Albanian government officials, both legislative and executive, since the collapse of the communist regime in 1991.

With the launch of the of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative, the President of the Republic of Albania signed Albania's Partnership Document on February 23, 1994, and on September 22nd of that year, the Government submitted the *Document of the Presentation of Albania* to NATO. This date marks the membership of Albania as a partner of the Alliance. Since then Albania has embarked on extensive reforms involving not only military but also political and economic affairs in order to merit an invitation for NATO membership. The ultimate decision on its invitation was made outside of Albania, but success is reliant on the seriousness of Albania's reforms and the success of Albania in making those reforms known.

Background

Regional Cooperation. Albania has continued to use regional cooperation as a way to attain strategic, economic, and foreign policy objectives. When the Balkans became engulfed in conflict, Albania did not directly become involved, even when the

situation came to involve large numbers of ethnic Albanian civilians and insurgents in neighboring countries. The government leaders have maintained their support to the resolution of Kosovo issue in the framework of the international community.² Further, Albania has refrained from interfering in the domestic affairs of its neighbors with regard to ethnic Albanians.³

The establishment of a regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) allowed Albania to develop formal relationships with many of its regional neighbors. Albania actively participates in numerous regional initiatives and frameworks, including the South-East Europe Cooperation Process (SEEC), the Stability Pact, the South East European Initiative (SEEI), the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the South East Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI), the Southeastern Defense Ministerial (SEDM),⁴ and the Border Security Initiative. All of these cooperation agreements emphasize partnership, regional cooperation, conflict resolution, economic ties, and collective security.

Economic Overview. Defense reform and a healthy economy go hand in hand. Security and its enforcement are required for long-term economic stability in Albania. Without a growing economy, resources devoted to defense reform will be severely limited. With the exception of 1997, Albania's annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has been positive since the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. From 1990 to 1992 significant structural changes, such as land reform, privatization of state-owned enterprises, trade liberalization, and the dismantling of price controls resulted in a more efficient allocation of resources, while productivity in industry, agriculture, and services boosted growth.⁵ Between 2000 and 2007, annual growth averaged six

percent. Albania has pursued prudent monetary policies, beginning with the implementation of successful stabilization programs in the early 1990s. The Bank of Albania remained well within the informal inflation target range of 2-4 percent as bank lending and public trust in the banks are slowly increasing. Confidence in the national currency is improving,⁶ and the stockpile of international reserves continues to grow at a steady rate.

Defense Reform. Albania continues its efforts to reorganize and reform its armed forces and to improve their ability to contribute to regional stability and the Euro-Atlantic defense structures. The NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) and Planning and Review Process (PARP) have served as the main tools and processes that have driven the defense reform in the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF).⁷

In its path to defense reform Albania has been closely helped by the United States, United Kingdom, Italy and other NATO countries. In the year 2006, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and General Staff (GS) conducted a comprehensive Defense Assessment in close assistance and cooperation with both the United States and NATO's Alliance Command for Transformation (ACT). As a result of this assessment, emphasis is being placed on development of a time-phased, resource-constrained plan to guide and facilitate the continued transformation from a primarily defensive-based military to a Western model military – especially in the areas of national defense strategies, force structures, personnel systems, equipment acquisition, and infrastructure. Furthermore, the defense reforms aim to improve the potential contribution of the AAF to the roles and missions of NATO. To this end Albania adopted

an interim force structure in January 2007, which will promote the joint operational ability of the AAF.

The AAF has developed key specialized units, such as the Rapid Reaction Brigade, (specifically its 2nd Battalion), and units within the Commando Regiment, that are trained to NATO standards. These leading units are supplied with relatively modern equipment, have effective command and control, can function in a domestic national defense role, and can also be effectively deployed abroad to support NATO (International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan (ISAF)) and U.S. (OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF)) -led missions. Albania contributed 340 personnel to NATO-led and other international operations; about 6 percent of its total Land Forces component. Albania's participation in international operations has provided valuable lessons learned, practical experience, and consistent exposure to Western standards.

Substantial progress has been made in efforts to improve the MOD Staff's expertise in budget and procurement planning, and execution. Implementation of the MOD's Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES), and its integration with the Government's Integrated Planning System (IPS) has been the centre piece of better managing the defense resources. The defense budget has been increased from 1.75 percent to 2 percent of GDP in 2008.⁸ The Government plans to maintain the 2 percent of GDP commitment to the defense budget through 2020.

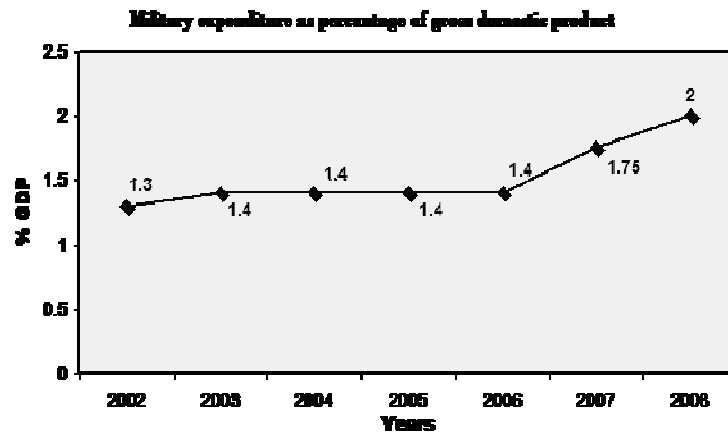


Figure 1:

The Transformation Process

Being the most autarkic country in the Eastern Europe, without any friend or ally, made the Albanian communist regime to feel threatened from both NATO and Warsaw Pact. The concept of the Peoples Armed Forces led to a huge military structure and a crazy strategy to build a fortified defense system all over the territory. As a result of this strategy more than 750,000 bunkers and tunnels were build in 1980s, depleting the already weak economy of the country.

Since 1990 the AAF has undergone a long and difficult downsizing and transformation process. The radical restructuring from a 22-division Cold War-era military to a small structure has been a critical development that stretched the planning, imagination, and vision of the AAF leadership. In 1990 Albania had around 600,000 personnel in its armed forces (120,000 active, and 500,000 reserve and territorial forces), which were consuming more than 20 percent of the country's GDP. Today the AAF has around 14,000 active personnel with a budget about 2 percent of the GDP⁹. When the transformation process started, the AAF faced many difficulties and challenges to include a lack of legal framework and social programs to deal with the

personnel leaving the Armed Forces, difficulty in managing excess ammunition and weapons, and closing of many military installations around the country. Among these challenges, there was considerable resistance to transformation, which exists to a lesser degree even today.

The First Transformation, 1992-1994. What were some of the major sources of resistance to the AAF transformation process in 1992-1994? *First*, there was a lack of the sense of urgency for change; or rather the strategic leadership of the military didn't establish or develop this sense of urgency. As Professor John P. Kotter, the world's foremost authority on leadership and organizational change,¹⁰ states: "Without a sense of urgency, people won't give that extra effort that is often essential... Instead they cling to the status quo and resist initiatives from above."¹¹ In 1990, Albania didn't have any allies and the Officer Corps, having the culture of an autarkic country afraid of being attacked from west and east, and at the same time having a better life than the other part of the society, didn't see any need to change. To make things worse, the communist regime had installed a parallel chain of command throughout the Armed Forces, using the so-called commissars (political appointees), to ensure communist ideology within the AAF, and these political commissars were using all their influence to block the transformation.

Second, at the beginning it was almost impossible to create a guiding coalition for two reasons: (1) the main leaders of the AAF were not willing to lead or support this transformation, and as John P. Kotter explained "major change is often said to be impossible unless the head of the organization is an active supporter;"¹² (2) the

existence of the commissars played a negative role sabotaging the establishment of any guiding coalition.

Finally, in 1992 the country in general and the AAF in particular lacked a strong, clear vision of the future. There was a question of why the AAF needed to be transformed, but as mentioned previously there was not a shared vision to address this question, and “at its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question...”¹³ Even the existed weak vision was not communicated well to the Armed Forces by the Albanian Government. In order to get support for a major change in a big organization, you need to get the members of the organization on your side, and “without credible communication, and a lot of it, employees’ hearts and minds are never captured.”¹⁴

How did the strategic leaders of the country finally deal with these sources of resistance? In 1992, the newly elected democratic government started to establish a sense of urgency. They identified the potential crises¹⁵ of the Albanian political and economic situations, evaluated the infrastructure of the country that had been totally destroyed, and examined the Albanian society which was suffering from the lack of basic needs. They determined that having a large Armed Force was too much of a luxury for such a poor country, and its population could no longer bear the heavy burden. The Albanian society began to understand the sense of urgency, and a large portion of the Armed Forces began to appreciate the need for change. In response they created the basis for support of the transformation process. In order to speed the transformation, the Albanian government had to conduct a difficult reform, starting with the replacement of the military leadership, outlawing communist ideology and the

commissars system within the AAF, and changing the education programs in the military academies.

During the first transformation in 1992-94, the new leaders of the Armed Forces began to lead the process, creating a compact guiding coalition with enough power to lead the change.¹⁶ They even established a drastic criterion that officers that opposed the transformation would be decommissioned without benefits from the service. For the others they developed a legal packet to support the early retirement, providing bonuses and training for them to be integrated into civil society. After the establishment of the proper legal framework, all officers older than 49 years were retired from the service, and the military service for the conscript soldiers was shortened from two to one year, bringing the active force from 120,000 down to 40,000 personnel.

The political leadership developed a vision for the country and so did the military leadership for the Armed Forces, giving the people an appealing cause to fight. The vision articulated in 1994 was that Albania and its Armed Forces were to be integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures, and this integration would better develop the country, and bring prosperity to the Albanian society. The Armed Forces' General Staff developed the appropriate strategy and plans needed to realize the vision, and started a communication campaign to introduce these to the military. In 1994 several working groups from GS Military Planning and Policy Directorate (J5), and Operations and Training Directorate (J3) visited every single unit in Albania, where they conducted meetings and briefings to explain to the active duty officers the vision and the strategy for the new force.

The Second Transformation, 2006-2008. In 2006, the Albanian Ministry of Defense (MOD) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) conducted a study entitled *Review of the Defense and Military Reforms of the Republic of Albania in the run-up to consideration for NATO membership.*¹⁷ After this review, the Albanian MOD launched a new reform to prepare the AAF for NATO membership. The General Staff developed a new vision for the AAF in order to have: “a fully professional force with interoperable capabilities reduced in number and increased in quality; a force needed for missions not a force desired in garrisons; and a force with joint concepts, capable of fulfilling its mission to the country as well as to contribute to the Alliance.”¹⁸

Joining NATO has been a strong inspiration for Albania, and it was believed that the new vision was understood and well accepted by all military personnel. But there were two major sources of resistance to this new reform.

First, although the AAF had a sense of urgency and a shared vision for change, it was very difficult for the military leadership to build a guiding coalition with the head of services. Many generals or flag officers who had high positions¹⁹ within the AAF opposed the structural changes for two reasons: (1) they didn't believe that Albania could get a NATO invitation, but questioned 'what if' almost every day; and (2) change would force them to retire because they had passed their maximum time in service, and they didn't want to lose the good positions they had in the AAF.

Second, because of the service culture in the AAF it was hard to bring the Army, Air Force and Navy under one command authority, the Joint Forces Command (JFC). For many years each service trained and operated alone, and the service commanders reported independently to the Minister of Defense and the Chief of Defense (CHOD).

Coming under the JFC authority meant, in their view giving up their working and training culture. Even today, several years after the JFC's establishment, they are having difficulty training and operating together.

The strategic leadership today is more experienced to deal with the above sources of resistance to change. In 2006, the MOD and GS established a working group, made up of representatives from all services, with enough power to develop and execute new concepts for the AAF reform. After active lobbying from MOD and the GS, the President of Albania (who is the Commander in Chief of the AAF), approved the retirement of the general and flag officers that had passed their time in service. To make things better, in 2007 Albania received an invitation for full NATO membership, and this made the change much easier.

The working group conducted several information briefings to explain the principles and criteria of the new reform with a very clear signal that the AAF leadership didn't want to destroy the single service culture, but rather integrate them into a new culture of training and operating applying joint concepts. The GS developed a Joint Doctrine and established a set of criteria to ensure the representation of all services in the JFC Headquarters (HQ), Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and General Staff. All military education institutions have adapted the education and training programs integrating joint and jointness concepts. Multiple joint exercises that bring service members together and help them to better understand and appreciate each other, are now conducted.

Joining NATO. Membership in NATO is currently Albania's first priority – a fact that drives the country's approach to defense reform, modernization, and

transformation. As Albanian political leadership has repeatedly expressed the country's willingness and commitment to undertake all necessary reforms, both military and otherwise, necessary to join the Alliance,²⁰ Albania has shown significant progress by implementing key changes, including establishing democratic control of the Armed Forces, developing and improving their capabilities, actively participating in NATO and PfP activities and exercises, and increasing the potential contribution to the NATO-led operations.

During the last NATO Summit, held in Bucharest on April 3, 2008, the North Atlantic Council decided to invite Albania to begin accession talks to join the Alliance.²¹ The Alliance considered this invitation as a historic achievement of Albania, earned through years of hard work and a demonstrated commitment to common security and NATO's shared values.²² At the same time the Albanian MOD considers it not only as a message of the appreciation for the multi-dimensional reforms that Albania has gone through and for its firm commitment to security, but first of all as a message of commitment for intensive work, actions, efforts, and obligations to be met.

The Albanian Armed Forces, Mission and Organizational Structure.

The Albanian Armed Forces today are established, trained and functioning based on the essential principles of military organizations within democratic societies.²³ The AAF will continue to develop their capabilities based on civilian democratic control over the military, and will be committed to accomplish its constitutional mission: "Protection of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, protection and assistance to the Albanian population in peace, crisis, and war time, as well as contribution to peace and security in the region and beyond."²⁴ Although the Albanian

Armed Forces are relatively small in comparison with other NATO members (actual force strength currently numbers 14,915 personnel²⁵ and includes active duty personnel, as well as cadets, professional soldiers, and civilians), the accomplishment of this constitutional mission will be conceived and completed through contributions to and benefits from Albania's collective defense obligations.

Albanian Armed Forces are composed of Land, Air and Navy Forces. The AAF is organized into three main commands: Joint Force Command (JFC), Support Command (SC), and Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). The Armed Forces General Staff (as the highest military structure at the strategic level) is established as a joint strategic staff with working procedures according to NATO standards. Its mission is: planning, development and direction of the AAF.

The JFC was established in 2007 and it includes: the Command and Staff; the Land Forces (Rapid Reaction Brigade, Commando Regiment and Area Support Brigade/Civil Protection Base); Navy and Air Force. The JFC is mainly focused on planning and conducting operations, as well as on the joint and collective training of its units. Its mission is to plan and conduct combat and non-combat operations to defend Albanian territorial integrity, as well as to participate in collective defense operations in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance.

The SC is composed of the Command and Staff, the Logistics Brigade, the General Staff Support Regiment, the Infrastructure Regiment, the Military Police Battalion, the Personnel Recruiting Center, the System Development Center, and the Central Military Hospital. Its mission is to provide support to the AAF with personnel,

logistic, infrastructure, health and other services in order to accomplish their constitutional mission.

TRADOC consists of the Command and Staff, the Defense Academy, the Military University, the NCO Academy, the Basic Training Brigade, the Troop Schools, the Defense Analysis Center, and the Training Support Center. Its mission is to provide individual education and training of the AAF personnel, and to develop the doctrinal concepts of the AAF.

Bearing in mind the small size of the AAF there is a question that is challenging the Albanian political and military leadership: how can the AAF fulfill its national mission and as well as actively contribute to the alliance? To address this issue, it is necessary to analyze the current capabilities of the main AAF services and units with the intention of providing some recommendations for the future reform process.

Land Forces. The Land Forces, whose staff organization follows the NATO model, contain the preponderance of combat power within the AAF. Two of the Land Forces units – the Rapid Reaction Brigade (RRB) and the Commando Regiment – are the most capable and modern forces within the AAF and both are currently supplying forces in support of international missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq, Afghanistan and Chad.

The core of the Land Forces is the RRB, which is tasked with carrying out offensive and defensive operations, as well as Peace Support Operations (PSO) and humanitarian assistance. The RRB is the most capable unit and the AAF's top priority for modernization in order to prepare it as a NATO/contingency-deployable force.²⁶ The RRB was the first unit to embrace and successfully apply the NATO Operational

Capability Concept (OCC) that provides the tools and the standards to evaluate the units' interoperability and capabilities. The RRB should become the centerpiece of the AAF as it develops into a modern, NATO-compatible force with an ability to take part in joint and combined operations. However, preparing the entire brigade for NATO deployments is an admirable goal, but it may divert limited resources from other more pressing force structure needs. Therefore this goal should be reassessed. NATO's force goals require each member to have 40 percent of its land forces deployable for international missions and up to 8 percent of a country's forces deployed at any one time.²⁷ To meet the recommended NATO force goals, the RRB should be able to provide one light infantry battalion size unit on a sustained basis. This will save resources that can be used to acquire modern armored personnel carriers and organize the RRB as a motorized infantry unit.

The Commando Regiment provides the AAF with an agile and well-trained force that can be used in Albania's varied terrain and environmental conditions. Given its weapons, communications equipment, and vehicle fleet, it is the only AAF unit that can almost fully self-deploy and react quickly to emerging situations. In that role it complements the capabilities of the RRB, which can follow with greater overall combat capability, but more slowly and currently only with transportation support from the Support Command. Additionally, the Regiment's Special Forces Battalion (co-located with the helicopter regiment) provides the most responsive, capacity within the AAF due to its air mobile capability. The Commando Regiment should continue to provide one company on a sustained basis for NATO missions, with the rest of its units accomplishing the national mission and tasks.

The Area Support Commands (ASCs), established in 2006, can provide the AAF with an important regional presence by maintaining a link to the separate or more remote regions of Albania and interacting with the population and civil authorities. The mission of providing support to civil authorities ensures that the AAF does not become isolated as it reduces, consolidates, and professionalizes. Maintaining a regional presence will also allow the ASCs to develop working relationships and crisis response procedures with local authorities, provide a communications link between AAF and the region, and facilitate deployment of AAF units in the event of a crisis. Critical to ensuring an effective joint crisis response, however, will be the creation of contingency plans and the staging of regular exercises in order to develop a coordinated response capability between the ASCs, the RRB, the Commando Regiment, and especially the Civil Protection Base (CPB).

The Civil Protection Base is a unique military organization and one that is designed to provide direct support to the Albanian population. With its military/civilian mixture of capabilities, this unit can support the Albanian government directly by reacting quickly to prevent a domestic crisis or respond to a national emergency. With a consistent crisis response and disaster mitigation mission, the CPB can be called upon at a moment's notice to support operations such as deep snow removal, emergency food distribution, emergency energy and water supply operations, and fire fighting. It has the capacity to shelter up to 15,000 people and provide support to refugees, as it did during the Kosovo crisis of 1998-99. In cooperation with the Central Military Hospital, the CPB can also deploy emergency hospital facilities in crisis locations. Despite these capabilities, the CPB is plagued by older equipment that is difficult to

deploy and maintain. It has a wide array of vehicles that require extensive maintenance while donor equipment is not always suited to the unit's unique mission requirements. The CPB's non-tactical mission lends itself to non-defense-related donor assistance, which it has occasionally received in the form of search and rescue boats, fire trucks, and various types of engineer equipment. The CPB also suffers from a lack of adequate command and control, and communication equipment.

The establishment of the new Area Support Commands and its subordination to the CPB in 2007 led to a marked increase in effectiveness and responsiveness of the CPB. Efforts should be made to link the capabilities of the CPB with those of the ASCs to develop compatible organizations, communications, procedures, and cooperative training/exercise programs. Albania should be prudent to look for non-military grant programs that could upgrade and modernize the capabilities of the CPB. Because of its unique nature and rich experience, the CPB can provide a very important niche capability for the NATO missions. The AAF should consider it as a priority unit and should continue to improve and standardize its equipments as part of the overall modernization program. The CPB should continue to provide a company size search and rescue unit available for NATO missions.

Navy. The Albanian Navy is a single force with two basic missions – the traditional naval mission of maritime security and the coast guard mission of law enforcement and rescue at sea. Because of its size, capability, and limited resources in both equipment and personnel, as well as the need for a unified command and control, the only sensible choice is to codify this dual mission requirement with the necessary legislation that is acceptable both within Albania and internationally, especially the

European Union. Norway, a NATO member, provides a useful example of a country with one naval force that fulfills both the naval and the Coast Guard requirements.

The new coastal surveillance system currently built by Lockheed Martin will be integrated into the Joint Operations Center and will provide Albania with all-weather coastal coverage and increase the effectiveness of the Navy's maritime security and interdiction efforts. Although most of the naval support vessels are obsolete, the Navy has maximized the capabilities of its current systems through the use of forward operating bases and an aggressive patrol and readiness schedule. The Navy has further increased the operational readiness of its patrol boats through good bilateral assistance programs and an increased emphasis on maintenance. As part of the approved and financially supported modernization program, the Navy started to procure new larger multi-role craft that will significantly increase its ability to control and protect the Albanian territorial waters.

Having these new capabilities, the Navy should increase its contribution to NATO's operation "ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR". As these larger multi-role patrol craft and the coastal surveillance radars come on line, the Navy should conduct an assessment of its basing requirements and reduce facilities, especially forward operating bases, where possible. The Albanian government should improve the required legislation to give the Navy the proper legal authority to conduct the coast guard mission. This legislation should clearly spell out a division of responsibilities and areas of operation at sea for the five agencies²⁸ involved in maritime issues.

Air Force. The Air Force is an AAF component with a proud tradition and a number of well-qualified and experienced pilots. Unfortunately, it is an organization that

has not aligned its mission within the AAF with its current capabilities. The stated AAF mission to protect Albania's airspace through air and anti-air operations either independently or in coordination with other services is a capability that the Air Force does not currently possess.

The MOD's decision in 2005 to dismantle the nation's fighter capability and eliminate all of the fixed wing aircraft was appropriate and necessary as it reduced a strain on resources and eliminated an unnecessary and ineffective capability. Due to the change in Albania's present security environment and the high costs of maintaining a Cold War-era fixed wing fleet, the AAF's air superiority capability was no longer affordable. Justifying reintroduction of such a capability in the future will also prove difficult due to the enormous acquisition and life-cycle costs of maintaining a modern air superiority fighter force. In addition, it will be hard to justify this capability given the likely availability of NATO's regional air superiority support and the lack of a modern air threat against Albania. The development of a helicopter fleet and an effective air mobility capability is appropriate for the AAF, given the country's terrain and the requirement to support the Land Forces. Keeping the AN-2s, as currently planned, is advisable, as these aircraft are inexpensive to maintain and operate, while providing the AAF with minimal fixed wing training and transport capability.

The maintenance of the obsolete air defense capability within the Air Defense Brigade makes little operational sense in the current threat environment. The capability of this unit is questionable due to a lack of live-fire training ranges and obsolete equipment that can easily be defeated by countermeasures on today's modern combat aircraft. The Brigade serves no viable role in the AAF structure and should be

disbanded to save resources and personnel. At the same time as a long-time goal, the AAF should consider to develop an effective modern short-range air defense capability if the security and threat situation requires it.

Future development of the National Integrated Surveillance System (NISS) and the inclusion of the NATO air picture through the Air Surveillance Data Exchange (ASDE) program in conjunction with the civilian air picture in the Joint Operations Center should rectify much of surveillance problem.²⁹ However, as Albania is becoming a NATO member, the control of its airspace will be dependent on the cooperation with other NATO countries, which could provide an air policing capability for Albania. The experience of the Baltic States provides a useful example of how countries without air control capabilities can be supported by the other Alliance members.

Support Command. The Support Command is a complex organization with a wide ranges of logistical and support responsibilities. The SC provides the basic combat service support for the AAF, including supply, procurement, maintenance, transportation, field services, and medical supply and services. A major responsibility of the Support Command is the storage and disposal of Albania's massive ordnance stockpiles, estimated at more than 96,000 tons of ammunition.³⁰ The SC uses substantial resources and the vast majority of its force, professional soldiers and NCOs, to guard 81 remaining depots and the obsolete ammunition they contain. The Albanian MOD should establish a temporary structure manned with retired military personnel, which have the necessary expertise to deal with excess weapons and ammunition. This could enable the Support Command to use the professional soldiers and NCOs in those areas where they are needed more.

When Albania joined the Partnership for Peace program, one of the five major areas of emphasis was the storage and handling of ammunition, explosive ordnance disposal, and the security of military depots. Through both NATO and bilateral assistance programs, Albania has made significant progress by developing an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) Group capability, training personnel, and eliminating large quantities of Cold War-era munitions through use, destruction, or sale. The EOD Group with its capabilities and rich experience is another NATO Niche capability that the AAF can provide for NATO missions. Today the EOD Group has deployed a team in support of the EU Operation "ALTHEA" in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Infrastructure Regiment, in its current form, brings specialized equipment and capabilities useful not only in times of national emergency, but also in support of AAF infrastructure improvement missions. Its units are unique in that they can train for wartime missions while conducting actual peacetime construction and infrastructure improvement tasks. Given sufficient resources, the Infrastructure Regiment could make significant improvement of the AAF infrastructure by improving roads, renovating buildings, and creating or improving training sites and ranges. The Albanian MOD should take the necessary actions to improve the current legislature and policy provisions in order to allow the use of the Infrastructure Regiment in this capacity.

Training and Doctrine Command. Through its various organizations, TRADOC is responsible for not only the entry-level education of enlisted soldiers and officers, but also for the continuing education and professional development of the entire force through the various courses taught at the Military and NCO Academies. TRADOC

courses are supplemented by international training courses for selected personnel. In addition, TRADOC coordinates or conducts all foreign language training within the AAF.

Significant progress has been made in both training and education within the AAF over the past five years. The consolidation of doctrine development, officer and NCO education, and soldier basic training under TRADOC provides the AAF with a focal point for the development of a uniform approach to military education and training. It also enables the AAF to consolidate expertise and lessons learned from operations, deployments, exercises, and regional initiatives, and, after careful analysis, infuse those lessons into the AAF training and educational program. Consolidation further allows for central oversight to ensure that training programs are consistently developed, adjusted, taught, and evaluated.

The consolidation of basic training under one brigade is the appropriate decision for a force the size of the AAF. The Basic Training Brigade capacity to train 2,800 soldiers per year should be sufficient to sustain the AAF once the number of conscripts is significantly reduced. The Basic Training Brigade should continue to provide basic training for the volunteers once that the AAF will eliminate conscription and become fully professional.

The NCO Academy trains soldiers to become non-commissioned officers through an NCO training and development program that provides courses ranging from the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) to the top-level Sergeants Major Course. The training and development of a professional NCO corps within the AAF is critical to the development of modern, NATO-compatible armed forces. The AAF have made a significant progress in developing a professional NCO corps given that it is a

relatively new concept for an armed forces that not long ago had no NCO corps. However, it is also critical that adequate time and resources are dedicated within the AAF to ensure NCOs are given not only the right professional development, but also the responsibility and authority to do their jobs. All officers must receive training during their professional military education curriculum that enables them to effectively leverage their NCOs.

Conclusions

The Albanian Armed Forces are currently undergoing an extensive defense reform process, which consists in the transformation of the strategic concept, doctrine, organizational structure, personnel management, military infrastructure, training and education, the transformation of the systems and equipments as well as that of many other elements. This is an analytical and continuous process based on the constant assessment of the security environment and lessons learned, and associated with the related reflections in the interest of a better execution of the AAF mission.³¹ This transformation process is not finished, but is an ongoing process. The strategic leadership still has to overcome several sources of resistance to the transformation. Establishing the sense of urgency for change, having a shared vision and finding the right way to communicate it, building consensus to develop and execute the change,³² and trying to adapt the single services' cultures and integrate them into a joint one is not an easy task. It takes a lot of courage and decisiveness from both political and military leadership to make it happen.

As Albania has now become a NATO member, the future missions and operations of the AAF will continue to be characterized by a more dynamic nature than

ever before. They will be further characterized by situations based upon the regional and global security environment, as well as on realities of transatlantic collective security and defense. In any case, the unchangeable objective of the defense reform should remain the improvement of the necessary capabilities of the AAF to ensure the defense and the security of Albania and its citizens, protection of the free institutions from any challenge, risk or threats, the development of a mature approach for enjoying both the benefits together with a balanced contribution to transatlantic security and collective defense.

NATO membership is not the end of the journey, but it is the start of a new phase of transformation for the AAF. In order to be fully integrated Albania should continue to fulfill its political, economical, and military obligations. The AAF should speed up the development and the consolidation of a fully “professional force” able to accomplish the present and the future missions, and its transformation into a force with joint capabilities and qualities. This means a “Joint” Force, with practical utility, smaller in number, but with more operational qualities for the successful accomplishment of the future broad range of missions.³³ This transformation process ensures that Albania, as a new NATO member, and its Armed Forces will continue to be an active contributor to regional and wider security.

The Albanian Armed Forces are moving forward in the right direction with confidence, acting as a role model for the other institutions and the Albanian society which need to change and reform as well.

Endnotes

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