

A NATO PERSPECTIVE ON CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE BULGARIAN AIR FORCE ¹

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Abstract: This article addresses the NATO perspective on the challenges and prospects for the Bulgarian Air Force. The general discussion is put in the context of one of NATO's main themes at the moment, Transformation.

Keywords: Transformation, NATO's Defence Planning Process, NATO Response Force (NRF), Air Force Modernisation.

Strategic Background

The current work on transformation largely stems from the Prague Summit in November 2002, commonly referred to as "*The Transformation Summit*." However, what is meant by "*Transformation*" in NATO?

To answer that question, we need to go back to the London Summit in 1990 where Alliance Transformation in its widest sense was initiated. The fundamental decision was taken to reorient from an Alliance of confrontation to one of cooperation with the then Soviet Union and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This was a 180 degree turn from the policy of the previous forty years, but with the understanding that collective defence remains the core of the Alliance. It resulted in two rounds of enlargement, bringing ten new members in total to the Alliance, a major transformation in itself.

The Washington Summit in 1999 was the next key landmark, with the approval of the Strategic Concept,² defining the Alliance's fundamental security tasks in terms of both collective defence and new activities in the fields of crisis management, partnership, and enlargement.

The concept articulated the overarching requirement for NATO forces to be able to operate in a constantly changing security environment that transgressed the traditional Article 5 environment of the Cold War years.

The Military Committee definition of transformation is found in the document describing NATO's Command Structure—MC 324—and is as follows: “Transformation is the pursuit of a continuous process of developing and integrating new and innovative concepts, doctrine and capabilities, in order to improve the effectiveness and interoperability of NATO and Partner forces.”³

The Prague Summit of 2002 was already mentioned above as the *Transformation Summit*. It had three main headlines.⁴

- *New Members*. NATO extended invitations to seven countries to begin accession talks to join the Alliance. This round of enlargement was arguably the climax of a transformation process in NATO, which began at the London summit in 1990.
- *New Relationships*. The Summit acknowledged that the security challenges of today are multi-faceted and cannot be handled by any single institution. In the wake of 9/11 the North Atlantic Council decided that Partnership for Peace mechanisms should be reviewed in order to maximise their potential in the context of the fight against terrorism.
- *New Capabilities*. The summit launched the following initiatives: the Prague Capabilities Commitment, the new NATO Command Structure, and last but not least, the NATO Response Force.

With regard to the NATO Response Force (NRF), the Heads of State and Government signed up to a “new type of Force” that will be: “a technologically advanced, flexible, deployable, interoperable and sustainable force, including land, sea and air elements, ready to react quickly wherever needed, as decided by Council.”

Since then, the NRF concept has matured as NATO's 21st century operational tool. But it also serves a second very important purpose: it is a tool for the transformation of NATO's and NATO Nations forces and capabilities. This issue will be discussed again later.

NATO Force Planning in a Nutshell

This section provides a brief introduction to the mechanism in NATO, under which the Alliance collectively challenges and influences the nations in their medium to long-term defence planning: NATO's Defence Planning Process.

The NATO's Defence Planning Process and more specifically the Force Planning Discipline, has been shaping the Alliance capabilities and influencing National plans, and will continue to do so. First, I will provide a glimpse into the process itself before elaborating on the challenges and prospects for the Bulgarian Air Force from a NATO perspective.

Simply put, the aim of NATO's force planning is to fill the NATO Force Structure by ensuring the availability of national forces and capabilities for the full range of Alliance missions. This is done by setting targets for implementation and assessing the degree to which these planning targets are being met.

The process begins with the identification of the Minimum Military Requirements, in terms of the capabilities needed to meet NATO's Level of Ambition in the predicted security environment. This is done mainly through a sophisticated *Operational Research* tool called Defence Requirements Review, or the DRR.⁵ Then, from the identified requirements NATO develops and assigns Force Goals that form collectively-agreed targets for individual nations. Finally, Nations take part in the Defence Review Cycle, in which NATO collectively assesses the national implementation of the Force Goals and the implications of that for the overall Force Structure: will NATO be able to meet the Minimum Military Requirements as set out in the first element of the process.

NATO Force Goals to Bulgaria for the Period 2006-2014

In this section, I focus on the present NATO Force Goals and the challenges and prospects they pose to the Bulgarian Air Force for the medium to long-term period.

Even before NATO accession, the Bulgarian Armed Forces embarked on a transformational phase. The development of its Strategic Defence Review⁶ in April 2003 is a case in point. To recall, one of its main goals is to correspond to the new conceptual views of NATO. The Bulgarian Long Term Vision for the Armed Forces 2015 underpins, and is guiding, the transformation of the armed forces by focusing on deployability, usability, interoperability and modernisation of the Armed Forces as a whole. This clearly shows that transformation is already in the heart and mind of the Bulgarian military.

The allocation of Force Goals to Bulgaria has been related to country's force structure and does take into account the principles of fair burden sharing and reasonable challenge.

Based upon the national responses of each nation, NATO conducts an assessment that includes evaluation of how national defence plans support NATO's operational requirements for the short to medium-term period. Now I will again focus on the Air Force.

The Bulgarian Air Force clearly aims to create a structure that is sustainable and more responsive to the new security challenges, in line with NATO's overall needs. The current plans call for modernisation of the Bulgarian Air Force fleet across the spectrum of roles and missions by 2015. If implemented, this will dramatically improve

the Bulgarian Air Forces' ability to contribute effectively to the Alliance needs. There will be a significant reduction in force numbers, but this will be compensated by re-investing in the modernisation of the remaining systems, along with the acquisition of new capabilities for multi-role fighter aircraft and helicopters. These are very ambitious plans that really need to be underpinned by adequate resources. Air Superiority is of vital importance to the overall success of a joint campaign but can only be achieved in a multinational environment if the Air Force units are well equipped and well trained under NATO standards. Similarly, the availability of In-Theatre aviation support in the Joint Operations Area, as all ongoing NATO operations have clearly demonstrated, is also of utmost importance. The near term acquisition of Cougar helicopters for the Bulgarian Air Force fits exactly in NATO's requirements in this particular area.

Irrespective of their type and role, NATO's Air Force units have to make use of common procedures and interoperable equipment, ensuring timely, safe and effective operations. As basic as these components of a capability may sound, their importance cannot be overemphasised. Furthermore, any Air Force Unit can only perform well if it is well supported from a logistics perspective (spare parts, fuel, ammunition) with the required conditions to ensure its survivability. The logistics perspective is even more relevant when taking into account that potential operations will most probably be executed Out of Area and from bases with limited or no host nation support. This effectively means two things. Firstly, that Nations have to make their forces really deployable and, secondly, that nations share a part of the burden to make those bare bases usable. Therefore, they should include in their plans the implementation of a number of Service Support functions for their contingents. It is not surprising that the provision of transportable, flexible, efficient and interoperable Communications and Information Systems (CIS) is mentioned as an essential element and an example of those requirements.

One of the eleven prioritised Major Modernisation Projects already adopted by the Bulgarian Government aims at the acquisition of a modern multi-role combat aircraft. This will undoubtedly increase the visibility of the Bulgarian Air Force and its ability to operate within the Alliance and with the Alliance Air Forces. Several important characteristics and generic capabilities of this particular project have to be highlighted. It is highly desirable that a combat aircraft offered to NATO has a beyond visual range and all weather capability. Furthermore, Nations need to contribute with flexible, multi-role combat aircraft, capable of sustained operations with multinational formations, under adverse environmental conditions, with increased accuracy of weapon systems and with adequate stocks of modern ammunitions. Finally, new aircraft should have an air-to-air refuelling capability in order to be capable of long deployments and long range sustained operations.

It is not within NATO's purview to point at specific platforms. This is a national decision, in which national interests and requirements will be balanced against other factors, NATO's requirements being just one of these. If NATO were to be asked for support in that process, it would always emphasise the necessity to meet NATO standards and criteria. NATO will not ask *every* nation to take a certain share in *all* the capability requirements NATO has, as the smaller nations certainly will not be able to implement all those requests. It is also not in the interest of NATO as a whole to see a nation overstressing its abilities and developing a capability in such a way that will *not* be relevant for NATO's operational demands. To be more specific: the national ambition must be tailored to the available resources. If a nation wants to acquire fighter aircraft, it should be in the position to bear the consequences. This includes: allowing for their pilots to fly the minimum required number of hours per year and allowing for a logistics organisation to produce and sustain those flying hours. And, given the fact that we are talking about *NATO* operations, it might also want to consider a multinational approach. The European Expeditionary Air Wing is just an example of how this can work.

The NRF as a Challenge and Opportunity for Bulgaria

This section turns the discussion back to the theme of transformation by expanding a bit upon the NRF as "the manifestation of the transformation of NATO and NATO Nations forces and capabilities" and the relevance of NRF to Bulgaria.

The NRF is a coherent, joint, trained, and certified force package, held at high readiness that will be tailored for an assigned mission. It is not a standing force but on a rotational stand-by. Forces participating in the NRF will be drawn from the entire NATO Force Structure, as well as from other forces offered by Alliance Nations, on the basis that *they meet the capability and readiness criteria* as set by the Operational Commander.

The envisaged missions assigned to the NRF, which have been endorsed by the Nations, cover a wide spectrum. To successfully conduct these NRF missions, there must be cohesion between national and collective training efforts and certification processes to maximise operational effectiveness. NRF roles and missions give the nations a focus for their deployable forces.

The NRF is filled by national force contributions through Force Generation against a Combined Joint Statement of Requirement, or CJSOR. This provides Nations with an indication of the type and scale of forces and the capabilities required.

The Air Component of the NRF comprises helicopters, UAV's and fixed wing aircraft, with appropriate command and control, support facilities, theatre missile defence, air defence and infrastructure for a number of deployed operating bases. This

only underlines my previous remarks on the importance of and the need for Alliance Nations to also share the burden in Combat Support and Combat Service Support areas.

Detailed Permanent and Evolutionary Criteria on NRF Standards have been developed. Work is underway with the NATO Strategic Commands to establish a yearly review and development cycle for Evolutionary Capability Criteria. These criteria will then also be taken into account in the development of capabilities through the Defence Planning Process described earlier.

Not all forces and capabilities assigned to the different NRF rotations will be able to comply with all the criteria from the very beginning of the rotation of the force. But as more and more forces are passing through the NRF training and certification process, they will progressively meet those criteria and spread them within the nations' forces.

As stated earlier, it is clear that the NRF will act as a main driver for Alliance transformation. Participating in the NRF will pose challenges for all nations and also for Bulgaria. But what is important to be stressed here is that it is a worthwhile effort, as it will also provide for prospects and opportunities. By being a regular contributor to NRF rotations, the Bulgarian Armed Forces and the Bulgarian Air Force will learn and evolve. It will motivate the players, the soldiers and airmen, and thereby contribute to their motivation. But it will equally motivate the national leadership to implement the ambitious national plans and underpin them with the necessary resources and thereby improving the relevance of the Bulgarian Armed Forces.

Conclusion

The Bulgarian Armed Forces in general and the Bulgarian Air Force in particular face multiple challenges in their national defence reform programme. However, Bulgaria is not the only nation facing the challenges of combining the necessary downsizing of the force structures with reorganising and modernising of the remaining parts, while at the same time ensuring that “the shop will not be closed” during the transition process: the country has to continue contributing to ongoing operations. This is not only an organisational and financial challenge but it will also put pressure on the personnel and will demand a lot of their flexibility. On the other hand, there is a range of prospects and opportunities!

Throughout history nations have always pursued innovation in increasing their military effectiveness. It is the acceleration of technological change combined with the associated operational and organisational transformation that altered the character of war over the last two hundred years and led to the so called revolution in military affairs. Such an analogy could almost apply to the Bulgarian Armed Forces. But the

other part of the analogy is that history also shows that most nations succeeded in this process.

Notes:

- ¹ This is a Briefing of Air Commodore Henk Emmens, Royal Netherlands Air Force, Deputy Assistant Director Plans & Policy Division, to the AFCEA Bulgarian Air Force Conference held on 14 March 2006.
- ² The Alliance's Strategic Concept, approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C. on 23rd and 24th April 1999, in *The Reader's Guide to the NATO Summit in Washington - 23-25 April 1999* (Brussels, 1999), pp. 47-60, <www.nato.int/docu/rdr-gde/rdrgrde-e.pdf>. The 1999 Strategic Concept superseded the 1991 concept – *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept*, agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Rome on 7th-8th Nov. 1991, <www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c911107a.htm>.

- ³ NATO Military Committee, “NATO Military Command Structure”, MC 324/1, dated 07 May 2004.
- ⁴ See <<http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2002/0211-prague/index.htm>> (21 May 2007).
- ⁵ See <<http://www.nc3a.nato.int/organization/or.html>> (12 June 2007).
- ⁶ <<http://www.md.government.bg/bg/strateg.html#>> (12 June 2007).

Air Commodore **HENK EMMENS** was born on 23rd of May 1951. He joined the Air Force as a conscript in 1970. Then he signed a short-term volunteer contract in 1972 and was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant. From 1972 till 1980, he was posted to AB Leeuwarden where he performed several jobs in the field of Survive-To-Operate (passive defence, active defence, training and active air defence/SHORAD). In 1975, Henk Emmens became regular officer. From 1980 to 1986, he was posted to RNLAf Logistics and Training Command. He was promoted to Captain in 1980. Jobs consisted of STO-affairs, basic military training affairs and operations. From 1986 until 1988 he was posted to AB Soesterberg as Head of Ground Operations Office. In 1986 he was promoted to Major. From 1988 till 1990 he followed the Advanced Staff Course at the RNLAf Staff College. In 1989 he was posted to HQ RNLAf where he performed several jobs in the Planning department of the Air Force. In 1991, he became Head of SAM/Ground Defence Policy and Requirements Section and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Then, in 1992, he became Head of Air Force Planning Section.

In 1994, Henk Emmens was posted to MOD/Defence Staff as Head of (interservice) Projects and Parliamentary Affairs and promoted to Colonel. On 1st of November 1995 he was appointed Chief International Planning Affairs, dealing with NATO and WEU policy matters, NATO Defence Planning, Internal (and external) adaptation of NATO. Then, in October 1997, he was appointed as Chief of Cabinet of CHOD NL. Later, in June 1998, he became Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for International Plans and Cooperation and was promoted to Air Commodore.

From May 2001 until August 2003, Air Commodore Henk Emmens was posted to SHAPE as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff Intelligence Division. On 2nd of September 2003, he was posted to IMS as Deputy Assistant Director, Plans & Policy Division. Air Commodore Emmens is married to Truus Bakker; they have four sons.