Can Europe Project Air Power without the Support of the United States?

'NATO cannot go to war in the air against a competent enemy without the United States'[1]

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, both the United Kingdom (UK) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) have attempted to reconfigure their forces to meet the challenges offered by President Bush's 'new world order'.[2] The defence of this 'new order' will require balanced forces, probably joint or multinational in nature,[3] able to project power in a wide range of scenarios from warfighting to peace support operations. Central to the ability to project force will be air power, of which the United States (US) is the prime exponent. Europe, while possessing limited organic capabilities, has, since the formation of NATO, always looked to the US to provide the vast bulk of air assets, either for regional defence or for out-of-area conflicts. This dependence on US assistance allowed Europe to 'punch above its weight' in the international arena without the financial burden of developing and operating fully balanced forces. However, European complacency and reliance on the US has been challenged by recent operations and by a number of political initiatives, both European and American. There is a movement within Europe to develop independent 'European' armed forces for operations that could, in some circumstances, exclude US participation. This proposal, when coupled with a perceived US discontentment with the European contribution to NATO following recent conflicts, has highlighted the possibility of the US becoming more isolationist and possibly questioning its transatlantic commitment.

Concentrating primarily on the UK, this paper will discuss the implications of reduced US support to Europe and NATO while reviewing European aspirations for an independent military capability. The paper will first determine the nature of air power and its main tenets before providing a short resume on the background to current UK and NATO force structures. The implications of a reduction in capabilities, including the impact of diminishing levels of US support, will be discussed before considering how NATO is moving to configure itself to meet the new strategic environment, including comment on current European initiatives. The paper will then examine shortfalls in European force structures including: political aspects; command and control (C2) issues; equipment deficits; and the technological implications of developing an independent capability before offering suggestions on how any potential imbalance of forces might be best resolved. These discussions will lead to the conclusion that fundamental shortfalls in European defence capabilities currently preclude Europe projecting effective air power without US support.

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BACKGROUND

The accepted British definition of air power is: ‘The ability to project military force in air or space by or from a platform or missile operating above the surface of the earth’.[4] Air power operates over a wide environment and is inherently joint, combined and multinational in nature.[5] A broad range of core capabilities are required to meet all potential air power roles; these can be broken down into 7 areas: Information Exploitation; Control of the Air; Strategic Effect; Joint Force Employment; Combat Air Support Operations; Force Protection; and Sustainability.[6] A fully autonomous force must be able to meet all these requirements. Unfortunately, while the UK and its European neighbours are able to meet some of the core capabilities as will be seen, achieving full effectiveness in all areas is, and will almost certainly remain, beyond affordable reach.

The RAF has always acknowledged that it should be structured to undertake the full range of air power roles and the need for a developed force structure has been one of its doctrinal foundations. Up to and including the Cold War, the maintenance of balanced forces fitted well with Britain’s NATO policy where, in effect, it tried to take on the appearance of an American force in miniature, boasting that it ‘contributed to all NATO regions with all types of capability’.[7] This expansion of roles had the

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secondary advantage of allowing Britain to meet its NATO commitments while permitting the use of UK NATO assigned forces for national out-of-area contingencies and to support dependent territories and wider treaty commitments.[8] However, in trying to fill such a wide range of roles, the UK was playing a dangerous game by, in effect, 'double counting' its forces and hiding shortfalls. It was fortunate that the requirement for the UK to meet concurrent NATO and National operational tasks never occurred which might have exposed how thinly Britain's forces were spread. Nevertheless, despite the lack of a full capability during the Cold War, Britain could still project power unilaterally. This was demonstrated during the 1982 Falklands campaign which, while successful, provided an early glimpse of problems that would face those nations or alliances which operated with limited air assets. The conflict identified dangerous gaps in Britain's military capabilities such as Airborne Early Warning (AEW)[9] and the vulnerability of the Royal Navy to air attack.[10] Moreover, while the Falklands was ostensibly a national operation, even then it could be argued that its success owed much to US support.[11]

Notwithstanding its capability shortfalls, the UK attempted to maintain a sensible force mix. The converse applied to the majority of other European NATO nations which were content to assume the role of niche providers, perceiving a major NATO conflict as a 'come-as-you-are party' rather than needing to maintain full and current capabilities. Effectively, the burden of providing support fell on the US which, with its massive military machine, backed by its strong economic, industrial and technological base, was the only nation fielding forces capable of meeting all the air power roles. Outside the full NATO structure, but remaining within Europe, France was the only other Western country with comparable capabilities to the UK. With the majority of other Western European nations being only concerned with the defence of their homelands,[12] no consideration was given to operating out-of-area or for the need for forces with wider roles. By 1990, this parochial, but understandable, stance led to the situation where Western Europe had become reliant on the US to plug European capability gaps and had emasculated any vestige of an independent ability to project air power.

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While there were a number of reasons for the varying mix of forces within NATO, one of the major drivers for the different capability levels was cost. Air power is an expensive commodity and it was beyond the financial means of most NATO nations to be able to compete at the same level as the UK, let alone the US. Therefore, by developing affordable specialist roles within the Alliance, smaller countries were able to justify their contribution to NATO.[13] Unfortunately, the end of the Cold War, and the political expectations of a peace dividend, exacerbated financial concerns for defence planners.

The requirement to spend relatively large sums to provide forces to counter undefined threats appeared less urgent to Western populations,[14] especially while the 'free' US defence umbrella continued to offer protection. This allowed the peace divided to be taken by a number of countries with massive cuts in funding giving 'an imperative to defence officials to structure forces precisely; allocating funding to air power capabilities that they considered their countries needed rather than those their air forces might like'.[15]

CURRENT FORCE STRUCTURES

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, Western airforces have found themselves exposed, both doctrinally and militarily, having to operate with plans and equipment specifically designed for the European theatre. However, while the era of opposing bipolar monolithic forces may have passed, new quarrels have occurred that require many of the air power capabilities originally developed for a major war. The Gulf conflict in 1991 and recent events in the Former Yugoslavia demonstrate that while the chances of inter-state war may have reduced, the risks of intra-state conflict, in which the West may become involved, have increased. This resurgence of potential threats and conflicts has highlighted the collective weakness of European defence, confirming that many European countries were, and are, not fully equipped to meet the challenge of emerging threats and continue to rely on US patronage to underwrite their defence requirements.[16] The UK seemed cognisant of this issue when, following the change of UK Government in 1997, the structure and composition of UK military forces underwent a comprehensive review to 'reshape the UK's Armed Forces to meet the challenges of the 21st Century'.[17] The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) gave a strong commitment to maintaining forces that could be successful in conventional warfighting,[18] with a similar broad range of capabilities to be available for peace support and humanitarian operations.[19] However, it effectively committed the UK to coalition operations in its Supporting Essays when it stated: 'Britain will usually be working as part of a NATO, UN or Western European Union (WEU) force, or an ad hoc 'coalition of the willing'. This means that we [the UK] do not need to hold sufficient national (*their emphasis*) capabilities for every eventuality'.[20]

With the apparent rescinding of the requirement to hold sufficient 'national' capabilities the UK must now look to meet these in coalition with other allies such as the US or other NATO partners. The question that now needs to be answered is: which nations will comprise future coalitions? Should the UK and Europe concentrate on continuing to support traditional alliances

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such as NATO or should they move to develop a European capability, possibly using the European Union (EU), the WEU, or the European Air Group (EAG) as a framework? Paradoxically, if Europe does move towards developing an autonomous capability, while reducing the US's burden of support, they may discover that such a move may not be welcomed by the US Government and could be detrimental to Europe's defence interests.

US-EUROPE RELATIONSHIP

The US-Europe relationship is at the heart of NATO with its continued existence as a credible organisation being dependent on US participation. This relationship has its roots in the Cold War when the West looked towards the US for leadership. The US was able to assume a dominant role as 'life was simpler, you knew who friends and enemies were and the weaker allies mostly shut-up and obeyed the major powers'.[21] However, changes in the political make-up of Europe post-1990 have seen a resurgence of a desire to project greater European influence in world affairs and an increase in what might be termed European 'nationalism'. The formation of an independent defence capability is but one facet of this new, self-confident, European identity.

Unfortunately, in seeking to develop its own capability, Europe has again raised the spectre of an independent European force weakening the US links with Europe. This is not a new issue, but one that started to gain prominence following the collapse of the Communist Bloc when European discussions concerning an independent European army, based on the Franco-German Euro-Corps, developed into the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI). While initially on the periphery of strategic planning, ESDI increased in stature following the 1994 NATO decision to grant, in principle, the ESDI 'access to the Alliance's military capabilities'.[22] Although stalling in the intervening years, further calls, notably from France, for an independent European defence capability and a redefining of the transatlantic relationship, has again brought the ESDI issue to the fore. This has led members of the US political and military establishment to question Europe's commitment to NATO. US worries were exacerbated following the recent operations in the Former Yugoslavia where a perceived reluctance to deploy US forces, on what are seen by some as European missions, began to cause concern. Like all Western nations, the US had instigated massive force cuts at the end of the Cold War but had retained the mantle of 'World Policeman' which led to their forces being stretched by continuous operations. As a result, American politicians have questioned the requirement for the US to bear the brunt of peacekeeping operations and why Europeans 'always look to the US when they want serious military business undertaken on their own continent'.[23] The following statements from the July 1998 US Department of Defense Appropriations Act debate on US involvement in Bosnia demonstrate the depth of feeling: 'There should be a better distribution and sharing of responsibilities among our allies…..This [Bosnia] is a European security issue…..our contribution should be reduced and our allies in NATO

should share more of the burden'.[24] Or more telling: 'Does the Senate wish the US to be led by the reluctance of others? Must the US continue to provide a substantially greater number of troops than any of the other NATO allies…The US cannot continue to pick up the burden of every NATO mission'.[25]

The 1999 Kosovo conflict compounded the problem by reconfirming, both politically and militarily, that European air forces are dependent on US support. As an example, during the air war in Kosovo 85% of the weapons expended by NATO were delivered by US assets[26] leading to feelings within the US that Europe was unable to deliver its promised capabilities.

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The lack of financial commitment by Europe to defence was also used by elements in the US to castigate the Europeans. EU countries spend $140 billion a year on defence compared with $290 billion by the US, yet Europe only possesses about 10% of the US capability to deploy and support troops outside of the NATO area.[27] This evident imbalance between the US and other NATO nations is likely to lead to further disillusionment within the US on NATO's ability to provide a commensurate share of military assets in future conflicts or operations.

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The Clinton Administration, while concerned, seems to be taking a relaxed stance on the issue with the US government continuing to offer its full support to NATO. However, in light of the possible change of US government in 2000 and a 'harder line' on European involvement by a Republican Administration, the sentiments expressed in the US Senate may be the tip of the iceberg. It is not inconceivable that long-term US public opinion may become more isolationist in outlook thereby reducing support for both NATO and Europe or, in the worst case, removing it in its entirety.

EUROPEAN INITIATIVES

While the current discontent within the US does not mean that a US withdrawal from Europe is imminent, NATO's glue could be thinning. Consequently, NATO's European members should consider the potential changes to the political and strategic environments and the implications of reduced US support. There are 2 schools of thought on how Europe should progress such changes. Some analysts perceive ESDI, and NATO's recent moves to reflect the evolving strategic situation through its new Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI),[28] as having the potential to drive a wedge between the US and NATO. However, there are others who view such moves as long overdue. They suggest that while such initiatives would give Europe a much-needed degree of independence they would also allow it to remain a useful security partner to the US. The NATO Secretary General endorsed this view by stating: 'A Europe capable of coherent military action is a precondition for the Alliance's [NATO] long term health'.[29] Unfortunately, such initiatives, based on ESDI, have every indication of being slow and very long-term and, more importantly, will continue to rely on access to NATO [US] assets which may not be forthcoming if there is any disagreement between US and European objectives. Nevertheless, the fact that NATO is attempting to ensure that it is correctly configured to meet new political and military challenges is a positive step. NATO has woken from its Cold War deterrent posture and is attempting to identify and meet potential roles outside Alliance territory while continuing to retain capabilities to deal with large-scale aggression against one or more members.[30] This is not an easy task as other issues such as the enlargement of NATO from 16 to 19 nations and political changes within Europe continue to detract from defence. However, now that the requirement

for a more robust defence capability has been acknowledged, the issue must be progressed to determine its feasibility.

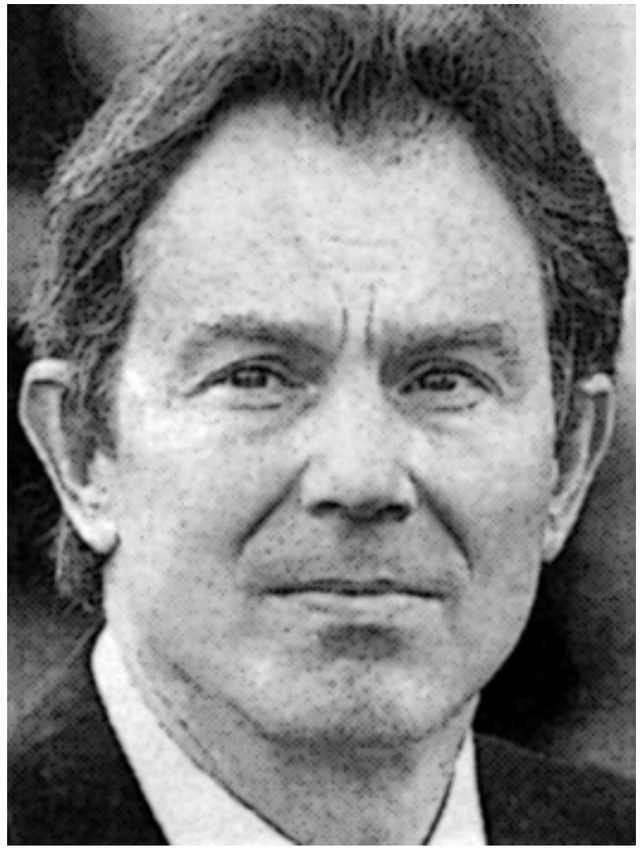
The recent moves by the EU discussing the possibility of developing an independent defence capability outside of NATO seem to be based on this ideal. Following the 1999 Cologne European Council, the EU published a declaration stating: 'the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action backed up by credible military forces.....and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO'.[31] This declaration, coupled with its Anglo-French predecessor, the St Malo Agreement, in which the British Prime Minister and French President called for 'an EU military capability outside of NATO'[32] clearly indicates that European leaders are considering the possibility of operating with reduced US support. However, the UK position is not clear[33]. A number of aspects, especially capability shortfalls, must be resolved before the prospect of a European defence force becomes viable.

SHORTFALLS IN EUROPEAN CAPABILITIES

The major shortfalls that Europe needs to redress have been highlighted by the performance of European forces in recent conflicts. They include: political constraints; C^2 and doctrine; equipment shortfalls; and technological issues, all of which must be fully considered if the Europeans wish to operate not just autonomously but even as part of a US led coalition in the future. In isolation, many of these issues do not appear unachievable. However, when evaluated as integral parts of a total force concept, they present massive challenges for European political and military leaders; challenges that must be resolved if a truly independent European capability to project air power is to become a reality and not just a paper tiger.

POLITICAL ASPECTS

The political aspects are pre-eminent, having both national and international implications. The question of how coalition partners define their national interests has the potential to become one of the major stumbling blocks in the formation of a European air capability. If the UK and its European allies agree that an independent European force is required, strong



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guarantees will be needed to confirm a nation's commitment and its reliability to provide necessary forces and capabilities. Clausewitz observed that 'the goal of War is a political objective from which military goals are determined'.[34] This is a difficult proposition for a single state, when transposed to encompass coalition operations, experience indicates that there will be disagreement, driven by national interests, on how the political and military objectives should be defined. This sits uneasily with the coalition approach which is only effective if all players turn up to the game, know the rules, and are willing to allow others to use their ball. Recent conflicts in the Gulf and Former Yugoslavia, in which European forces have been involved, have highlighted significant shortfalls in the conduct of coalition operations.

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During the early phases of the 1990-91 Gulf War, France deployed substantial forces into theatre, but insisted on retaining C^2 at a national level rather then delegating it to the Joint Force Commander.[35] As a result, France was marginalised during initial planning and was prevented from participating fully in the alliance until it accepted the extant coalition command structure.[36] This issue is a recurring theme in recent operations and one to which a solution must be found. If 'less capable' nations are required to combine to project air power, a single dissenter can preclude effective operations. Nevertheless, despite problems within the Gulf coalition, strong US leadership prevented national disagreements undermining the cohesion of allied forces and most participating nations were content with the conduct of the operation. Recent Yugoslavian experiences have not been so consensual.

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Bosnia was NATO's first combat experience as an organisation and, understandably, teething problems were experienced. Despite the appearance of a common objective, nations expressed sentiments that conflicted with stated goals and, on more than one occasion, the differing political objectives of one NATO member had a direct effect on allied air power capability. Disagreements included basing policy, targeting, and force composition. This resulted in less capable aircraft being utilised on missions to sustain coalition cohesion. Moreover, there appeared to be a dual planning and tasking system with, on one hand, NATO attempting to use its organic assets to plan and task missions and, on the other, the US, who provided 65% of the air assets, using national tasking chains.[37] Four years later, during operations over Kosovo, a number of these problems recurred. Although NATO presented a united front, no mean task considering some of the 'collateral' damage incidents, alliance cohesion was severely stretched and came close to breaking. As with the Gulf and Bosnia, the US, as the major force provider, led the coalition and helped unite the alliance. However, they had the advantage in that they possessed

sufficient capabilities to cover the potential withdrawal of any of the other participating nations without detriment to overall political and military aims. If future European alliances consist of 'more equal' partners, each with a specialist capability, the withdrawal or non-participation of a single nation could severely compromise coalition operations by removing a vital piece of any future 'European military jigsaw.'[38]

This implied interdependence on the support of individual European nations' questions if the EU is cohesive enough to be classed as an international actor capable of projecting military force. It also asks if EU countries have enough in common in their national and international defence interests to develop a unified defence policy. The UK Government gave a clear and reasonably coherent outline of its future defence policy in the SDR; other nations have been less lucid. While the NATO DCI outlined a vision for the future, further confirmation from NATO partners is required to ensure that the political will, and more importantly, funding will be provided. If the required capabilities are not met as part of an overarching defence strategy, the UK or other participating nations could find themselves exposed. Nations could address capability shortfalls in their specific area of responsibility or capability but discover that they are not being supported in other areas. Furthermore, the UK, through its 'special relationship' with the US, has potentially more to lose if Europe moves away from US support. The ties between the US and UK are, arguably, stronger than those between the US and other European nations. While it might be suggested that the relationship only remains 'special' while it meets US interests, any weakening or breaking of this link could remove UK access to this invaluable support. Therefore, prior to the UK Government committing itself to any European grouping which might have the potential to weaken UK/US ties it must receive a clear and unambiguous statement on what European alliances will comprise in terms of air power capability and how this might affect transatlantic relations.

COMMAND AND CONTROL AND DOCTRINE

Moving on from the higher political aspects, but remaining within the sphere of the civil/military relationship, the next area of concern is C^2. The ESDI indicates that a European alliance may be able to utilise existing NATO C^2 structures to support future missions.[39] However, operations in both the Gulf and Yugoslavia have been notable for the reliance on US C^2 facilities and the predominance of US personnel in key command positions. During Bosnia, the 3 major commanders were all US generals, with the majority of other key positions also filled by US staffs, causing other European NATO nations to view the operation as a US rather than a NATO mission.[40] From a US perspective, as the major supplier of air power to the campaign, it was only fitting that they should fill key positions. If a European force was involved in similar operations the question of who would fill key command positions has the potential, both at higher governmental level and percolating down to military commanders, to become a controversial and politically sensitive issue. Working on the premise that the major capability supplier, or more experienced nations, would be pre-eminent, then the UK and French Governments and military should be to the fore. However, *realpolitick* may be a driving factor with contributing nations, while content for the US to lead in NATO, being less willing to allow other

European neighbours to have a dominant role in a European coalition. Therefore, along with capability issues, serious consideration must be given to the C^2 aspects of coalition air power and the possibility of more developed nations being required to devolve command of their forces to less capable countries to promote alliance cohesion.

Allied with the respective C^2 issues, the doctrine for European forces also requires further consideration. Although NATO espouses a common doctrine, in reality both the UK and US have developed national doctrine that, while generally in line with that of NATO, has subtle differences, reflecting national interests outside NATO. UK doctrine has changed much over the past decade and is constantly evolving to reflect current UK foreign and defence policy. However, the situation within Europe is less clear. Currently most NATO nations still pay homage to ageing NATO publications and have little national doctrine. Unfortunately, most NATO documentation is Cold War centric,[41] is predicated on US support, and would not be viable if US assets were unavailable. Therefore, along with the C^2 issue, the doctrinal implications of a non-US operation must be considered and new doctrine developed to support European operations. This will not be a swift or easy task as it is a constantly changing and developing field that requires clearly articulated statements of national interests and policy, issues that are not easy to define within Europe.

CAPABILITY SHORTFALLS

While political aspects cover wide-ranging and diverse issues, even if agreement is reached on the political make-up of future alliances, Europe will still be a long way from projecting effective air power. European political aspirations must be supported by a capable and credible military. Unfortunately, years of relying on US support has resulted in numerous deficits in European force structures. Shortfalls are not constrained to one particular facet of operations but encompass the full spectrum including many combat and support roles. Clearly the US has an unassailable lead in areas such as space, where it would be foolish or impossible for NATO to attempt to obtain a fully independent capability. However, there may be scope to complement, rather than compete, by developing limited autonomous capabilities. Nevertheless, there are certain areas where improvements must be made if countries wish to be taken seriously as modern and effective air power providers.

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Kosovo brought capability shortfalls into sharp focus, highlighting the gaping chasms in European force structures.[42] The following paragraphs detail some of the problems. The list is not exhaustive or prioritised, but is used to give an indication of the scale of the challenge facing Europe.

The first issue is one that must be resolved if Europe wishes to project air power in a hostile air environment, namely the procurement of an effective Electronic Warfare (EW) capability. EW is an integral part of air operations in both high-intensity war and peace support operations. Control and use of the electromagnetic spectrum is not the preserve of technologically advanced nations; a modern fighter is just as susceptible to a *mujahadeen* tribesman in Afghanistan holding a man-portable Surface to Air Missile (SAM) as it is to the latest ex-Soviet SAM over Bosnia. The need to dominate the EW battle was emphasised 'in the first hours of DESERT STORM, when Iraqi air defences were blinded, paralysed and decimated by an electronic and firepower offensive unparalleled for scale and intensity in the history of warfare, rendering Baghdad's attempts at counter-EW totally ineffectual'.[43] Fortunately for the allies, the US provided the vast majority of EW expertise with the RAF offering the token European effort of 100 ALARM missiles and a reduced ELINT capability.[44] This European shortfall can be traced to the Cold War, when EW was the 'poor relation' of air power. While time and money was spent procuring new aircraft and weapons systems, EW, despite its acknowledged importance, was under-funded and resourced.[45] Post-Gulf, it seemed that EW would be accorded greater priority. However, 10 years on, the UK still lacks a Stand-off Jamming capability, has no reactive Anti-Radiation Missiles (ARM) and a only a limited ELINT system. Europe is also in a weak position. While there is a Spanish, German and Italian ARM capability, NATO continues to rely on the US to provide sufficient EW assets to ensure adequate force protection. Recent events in the Former Yugoslavia[46] have emphasised that EW supremacy is essential to ensure air superiority. This shortfall in capability is acknowledged at the highest levels,[47] and is clearly articulated in the UK Air Operations Manual

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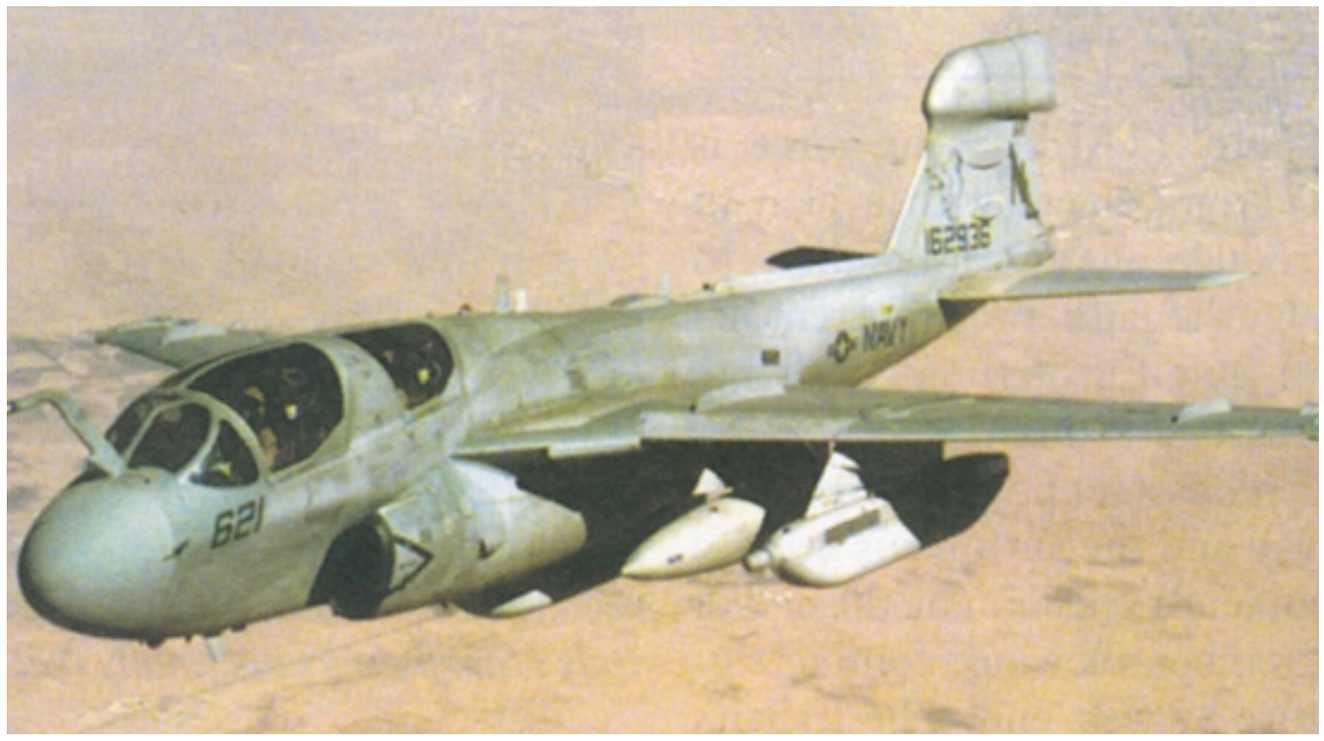

Within NATO, while the requirement has been acknowledged through conceptual programmes such as the Future Large Aircraft Project, nations have yet to commit themselves to acquiring the new capabilities and, again, it seems it will be left to the US to supply the required support

which states: 'The paucity of UK SEAD assets could prove to be a serious deficiency in any unilateral action, or joint action should other partners be similarly ill-equipped'.[48] Nevertheless, there remains a remarkable reluctance by European nations to develop a full EW capability which could leave Europe seriously exposed in the future.

Another valuable lesson from recent conflicts is the need for robust airlift to move personnel and *matériel*.[49] While the UK has a limited tactical and strategic lift capability, the non-availability of platforms such as the US C5, C17 and C141 aircraft highlights the capability gap within Europe. This is a particular problem as the one area where the European military is not short of resources is manpower. However, the lack of suitable airlift precludes Europe's ability to optimise the deployment of troops and equipment. During Kosovo the problem was resolved by the use of specialist charter firms including ex-Soviet heavylift aircraft under contract. While the use of contract has advantages in that countries are not committed to purchasing and supporting specialist aircraft when there is no requirement to deploy forces, problems occur if contractors are reluctant to meet the contract or are restricted by government embargoes. Operating in a threat area, or political constraints such as those placed by Russia and Ukraine on the use of their strategic lift aircraft operators during Kosovo, can preclude the effectiveness of charter aircraft. Both SDR[50] and the NATO DCI[51] acknowledged that there was a need to improve strategic lift capability to meet future deployed operations and to 'project power,'[52] but progress in this area has been slow. Although the UK stated that it would obtain an airborne heavylift capability by 2001, it is not yet certain if it will meet the SDR commitment. Within NATO, while the requirement has been acknowledged through conceptual programmes, such as the Future Large Aircraft Project,[53] nations have yet to commit themselves to acquiring the new capabilities and, again, it seems it will be left to the US to supply the required support.

One capability 'gap' which the US will almost certainly remain responsible for is space. For European defence this really is the 'final frontier' and one that is unlikely to be crossed in the foreseeable future. While the US was an early convert to the potential of space,[54] the UK appears to have had superficial interest. Apart from its Skynet Programme, the UK did little to develop a national space programme, being content for the US to provide relevant space based capabilities. This willingness by the UK to rely on the US seemed to be a sound policy. The US was happy to lead and, in many cases, shared the benefits throughout the world; GPS and satellite photography being 2 examples. Furthermore, this US largesse proved extremely beneficial to the UK which, once again through its 'special relationship' with the US, is a prime beneficiary of space intelligence data. However, the high cost of a space programme may make the US reluctant to continue to provide support unless other nations are willing to contribute.[55] Therefore, European nations, in particular France, took a different approach. The inherent distrust between France and the US, compounded by restricted French access to US space based intelligence and in some cases misleading products, led France to develop its own satellite capability.[56] The SPOT series of satellites provided an initial capability which was followed by the European Helios system used over Bosnia in 1995.[57] If funded and developed correctly, Franco-European satellites could provide Europe with a reduced, but independent, space capability thereby decreasing the reliance on US space products. It is not feasible to suggest that Europe will be able to keep pace with the US in space in the near-to-medium term. However, a well-developed, limited space capability would allow Europe to remain a player in this field with a potential capability that could be progressed further over time.

Finally, the increasing use of air power to resolve conflicts or to project power has occasioned increased enthusiasm for a Combat Search And Rescue (CSAR) capability to ensure the swift recovery of downed aircrew from hostile territory.[58] The UK and Europe, with the possible exception of France, have always lacked an effective CSAR force. Conversely, since pre-Vietnam, the US approach demanded that CSAR must be an integral part of all US operations where aircrew lives may be at risk. AP 3000 acknowledges the CSAR contribution to an air campaign as 'denying the enemy a potential source of intelligence and to promote high morale amongst aircrew'.[59] CSAR offers more than this as demonstrated during recent operations in Bosnia and Kosovo where US CSAR assets rescued the crews of at least 4 downed aircraft. Opponents of CSAR suggest that the cost of providing a not inconsiderable capability[60] – in the rescue of one F-16 pilot 75 aircraft were involved[61] – as well as the risks involved for the CSAR force, outweighs the benefits of rescuing a very small number of personnel. However, with growing political casualty intolerance and, in some cases, over responsiveness to media pressure, this premise is unsound. The recovery of crews helps promote cohesion within an alliance. This is especially true in the current, risk-averse, climate. Captured military aircrew have never been so highly prized by belligerent nations for political leverage and public relations value.[62] If nations are aware that every effort will made to ensure that their personnel are recovered they may be more willing to commit forces. Nevertheless, despite the importance of CSAR, both UK and European CSAR capabilities are still at an embryonic stage and it may be some time before a realistic capability is available. Unfortunately, it appears that, once again, the burden of support will remain with the US until other nations decide on the priority they should place on recovering downed personnel.

The 4 areas listed give only a taste of the current air power shortfalls within Europe. There are other issues, such as the limited number of nations with a PGM capability – a vital requirement if a country wishes to participate in current operations where precision and minimal casualties and collateral damage are demanded by both governments and the media – and missile defence, both strategic and operational, where action is required to rebalance forces. Europe now faces the challenge of updating its airforces commensurate with its desire to participate in future operations. If it can be assumed that a restructuring will occur, the next question will be who will develop the technology to ensure that forces are capable of meeting emerging threats?

TECHNOLOGICAL ISSUES

The technology issue is complex but it is one that could be developed to become a primary driver to apply additional pressure on European governments to improve their air power capabilities. There is much to be gained by developing a robust, and technologically advanced, defence industry. Although costs can appear high, there are many benefits. The British Government has long believed that it is essential to maintain a 'strong indigenous defence industrial base'[63] through maintaining a wide range of military capabilities. By encouraging British industry to compete for respective projects, the UK has tried to retain expertise within national industries. By taking this stance, it has gone some way in helping maintain parity with the widening technological gap between the US and the rest of the world. The importance of this has been recognised for some time. Michael Heseltine, during his tenure as Secretary of State for Defence, stated: 'If we [the UK] want to cut down Britain's industrial capability all we have to do is buy from the United States ...products will be cheaper ...and satisfy most of our demands....however, because of the consequences in the acceleration of the brain drain, the loss of jobs, the destruction of the high technology base and the civil implications this would be wholly unacceptable'.[64]

The Labour Government echoed this view when George Robertson, former Labour Secretary of State for Defence, stated: 'We [the UK] believe that a strong defence industrial base is fundamental to our security.'[65] Therefore, by trying to retain a full range of capabilities, and looking towards national industry to provide them, benefits accrue to both industry and, if the equipment meets their requirements, the military. France also recognises the benefits of a strong industrial base and has developed its air force around its own defence industry. However, France has experienced problems with this approach 'With the French Air Force having to accept Dassault's latest product, aimed at the export market, rather than one that fully meets a military operational requirement'.[66]

Procurement problems are not a French prerogative. Excluding notable exceptions like Tornado and the EFA programme which, after political teething problems,[67] looks like producing a first-rate product, the ability of the British and, indeed, European defence industries to compete as a cohesive industrial grouping with the US in terms of both cost and quality is questionable. This was highlighted by an ex-MoD Director of Contracts who drew attention to the inadequacy of most British

produced weapon systems when compared to US products. He also questioned the need to preserve a 'British' defence industry which 'serves our Armed Forces so badly when protecting jobs seems to take precedence over the safety of our [UK] troops'.[68] While this may be an extreme view, projects such as the aborted AEW Nimrod aircraft and the political interference during the procurement of the EH 101 helicopter[69] have, on occasion, induced a degree of cynicism within the UK's Armed Forces. Therefore, unless the UK and other European nations realise that it is in their interests to establish a strong and effective defence industry, capable of producing credible products, there is a strong possibility that the US could become a monopoly supplier. The implications of this can be seen from the preponderance of US designed aircraft within NATO. The F-16 aircraft forms the backbone of a number of NATO forces with only Germany, Italy and the UK relying on European designed and built equipment.[70]

The F-16 aircraft forms the backbone of a number of NATO forces with only Germany, Italy and the UK relying on European designed and built equipment

European reliance on the US to supply equipment has major implications including the potential to artificially constrain European access to evolving technologies and, in the worst scenario, could prevent access if national polices do not reflect those of the US. There are lessons to be learnt from Iran and Pakistan who procured US systems only to see support being withdrawn when their national policies did not meet with US approval. Therefore, if the UK and Europe wish to remain at the cutting edge of air power, but still retain a degree of independence, they should take heed of one of Meilinger's Propositions Regarding Air Power which states: 'Technology and Air Power are synergistically related'.[71] Meilinger goes on to develop the argument that air power is the result of technology and depends on the most advanced developments in the respective aviation fields to achieve dominance using the size, sophistication and technological lead of US forces as an example. As with many of the capability shortfalls discussed in this paper, failure to develop and maintain credible national and European defence industries could leave the UK and Europe as bit-players in the air power game facing the problems outlined by Air Chief

It is advanced technology which confers a seat at the coalition table

Marshal Sir John Allison: 'It is advanced technology which confers a seat at the coalition table'.[72] Moreover, having an indigenous aerospace industry directly related to a country's force structure allows nations the flexibility to modify equipment at relatively short notice without the problems of protracted discussions with foreign (US?) manufacturers and governments.[73] The advantages of a national industry were evident in the Falklands Conflict when the UK was able modify the Nimrod MPA to carry heat-seeking missiles and update the Vulcan and C130 aircraft with an AAR capability. Therefore, while it may be argued that it is in Europe's interest to continue to rely on US support, over-reliance comes at a cost to national industries in both economical and technological terms that the major European nations might not afford. Every effort should be made to develop and retain an independent technological capability with advantages for both national and alliance operations.

Whichever direction the UK and Europe procurement process decides to travel, when developing technology, the most important factor is interoperability. This issue, when combined with the benefits of joint training, is amongst all others, a force multiplier in coalition operations. Interoperability has been a touchstone of NATO policy for many years. However, with new allies such as France wishing to form coalitions, to be effective all members should strive for common standards. The benefits of interoperability in coalition operations were clearly expressed by the Commander Allied Air Forces Central Europe, General Jumper, who stated post-Kosovo: 'In future conflicts we [NATO] will need to stand together inseparably as an alliance for political solidarity and military expediency as well as for economic burden sharing. Without interoperability we are not an effective alliance – we are no more then a collection of like-minded nations, not a cohesive military force. As an alliance we are only as strong as our weakest link. There has never been a greater need for working together'.[74]

Both the European military and defence industries should heed General Jumper's comments. In particular, industry, while making much play about collaboration and cohesiveness, must ensure that they can produce the required equipment to meet, at least, common European equipment standards. Ideally Europe should aspire to conform to US standards thereby allowing it to maintain or reduce the capability gap and to enable it to operate with the US in the future. This should be seen as the minimum level of requirement to prevent European assets being excluded from future operations or relegated to supporting roles.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Unfortunately, the general prognosis for European air power is bleak and, until there are stronger moves to develop an independent capability, a supporting role may be the best Europe can hope for. To be effective, both the UK and Europe must address a plethora of deficits before they should even consider operating in a non-permissive air environment without adequate US support. Pooling of capabilities is an obvious way forward. The major European NATO members, or those of an evolving alliance, such as the WEU or EAG, could provide the nucleus of a coalition force and, as well as providing a European capability, could help rebalance European and American roles within NATO. A strong proponent of a European air force is Air Marshal Sir Timothy Garden, an ex Assistant Chief of Defence Staff, who called for the creation of a European air arm.[75] He argues for a force of up to 400 Eurofighters, complemented by up to 5 European aircraft carriers. His proposition is based on the fact that 5 EU nations are buying Eurofighter and each will require the relevant command, logistics and training infrastructure to support individual force elements. Sir Timothy argues that nations will each develop the capabilities in different ways 'so that the ability of the Eurofighter forces to operate together deteriorates…..What is needed is a single headquarters managing a mixed force of perhaps 400 aircraft subject to a common operational doctrine'.[76] This proposal has much to offer and could be expanded to encompass all air power capabilities. The idea of a joint force is not new; such an organisation has been operating within NATO, with much success, for many years. The NATO Airborne Warning and Control (AWAC) force has provided NATO with a AEW capability since the mid-1990's using a common fleet of aircraft crewed and funded by NATO. The joint force principle, based on the NATO AWAC's concept, could be transposed

What is needed is a single headquarters managing a mixed force of perhaps 400 aircraft subject to a common operational doctrine

to other areas as part of a European capability programme. European nations, either under the auspices of NATO, or, as the way forward for European defence becomes clearer, through other European alliances, could procure specialist capabilities such as strategic lift, air-to-air refuelling, or EW platforms. The requirement to collaborate with other niche providers could help improve international co-operation and strengthen current and future alliances.

From a British viewpoint, becoming a specialist provider within a pool system could permit the UK to rationalise its resources, allowing it to concentrate on roles where it has a developed or an emerging capability. Such areas might include Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA), Force Protection, AEW and offensive operations using PGMs. Furthermore, once Eurofighter becomes operational, the list might be expanded to include Air Defence. Becoming a specialist rather than 'jack of all trades' could help to reduce the 'overstretch' problems that currently bedevil the RAF and allow it to rebrigade its forces into more cohesive units. In addition, if forces were rationalised, less training units, aircraft and personnel would be required producing financial savings. These savings could be used to develop existing capabilities and thereby have the potential to make the coalition package more affordable.

However, as indicated earlier, money is the prime driver for many nations' defence policies and any additional costs occasioned by procuring new systems would need a very strong case to obtain the requisite political support. This will be problematical as many nations do not want to 'project power' as they are embroiled in domestic issues, both political and financial, that require resolving. This is especially true of the new NATO members who joined NATO for the promise of collective security rather than the potential to become involved in out-of-area conflicts which pose no direct threat. Therefore, it seems that any European force would comprise a small cadre of the more developed nations with a commensurate increase in costs as the 'pool' of participants is reduced. This questions whether the political and financial support is available to ensure that a credible 'pooled' capability could be developed. If such a system is not feasible or affordable there may be other solutions.

Firstly, from a UK perspective, if European nations are unwilling to provide the additional funding and support that would be required to establish a European force, but are also reluctant to continue to rely on the US, another option for the UK might be to move away from Europe on defence and align itself more closely with the US. This approach would revisit earlier reservations[77] and traditional concerns over the ability of European nations to meet their defence requirements while cementing strong UK ties with the US. The close military links in areas such as intelligence and training would be maintained as would the UK's access to new technology – although this might be at a cost to the UK's own industrial base. The UK would not be able to offer balanced forces but could continue to develop and offer specialist capabilities such as MPA and AEW but, more importantly, would provide the US with political support by making a limited contribution. On the debit side this approach would not be well received by the UK's European partners, especially at a time when the UK Government is trying to enhance its 'European' credentials and take a fuller role within the EU. Moreover, this approach would not solve the long term issue if the US did not wish to participate in operations where the UK or Europe felt that intervention was required.

Alternatively, the *status quo* could be maintained by supporting and developing the current NATO structure and applying leverage on the US to ensure that America remains fully committed to the Alliance. This would require Europe to retreat from its unseemly haste to establish a truly independent European force and accept US military and, possibly, a degree of political domination with the subsequent constraint that US support will only be forthcoming if the operation meets with American national interests. In parallel, European nations could, if an independent capability was still an objective, continue to develop alliances with nations looking to provide niche capabilities as part of a cohesive force. As discussed earlier, notwithstanding military issues, this would require European defence research, development, and procurement to be merged to produce the required systems. Such an approach might also have the additional benefit of integrating the European aerospace industries that could, in the longer-term, result in a collaboration that may eventually challenge the US dominance in this field. Taking this route would still allow a European air power capability to be developed while allowing links to be retained with the US through NATO. If a European capability does mature to become a realistic force then the issue of a fully independent capability can be revisited.

A clear deduction to emerge from the discussion above is that there are 2 kinds of air force: the US, and everyone else.[78] While this fact must not be allowed to engender a defeatist attitude within Europe, resulting in an unwillingness by nations to continue to develop force structures and a total reliance on the US for support, a degree of realism must be applied. There are benefits in procuring a European air power capability. However, if the UK and Europe wish to move towards an independent capability there must be a drastic change in the attitude towards defence, especially military spending by the relevant nations. The Cold War structures must be replaced by new organisations capable of meeting new challenges and emerging threats. NATO's adoption of ESDI, and the recent DCI, indicates that the Alliance is considering the possibility of a more independent Europe. However, such moves are, at this stage, more of an aspiration than a strong commitment to progress the relevant issues. What is now required is the reversal of the trend of reducing defence budgets with additional funding being made available to develop and procure the new technologies required to allow European forces to fully participate in expeditionary operations. The shortcomings highlighted in this paper must be addressed to ensure that a European alliance can either integrate fully with advancing US military technology or, in the event of a European only operation, provide credible forces that can operate in a hostile air environment without US support. As discussed, such a force will not just require new equipment but will necessitate the development of a total force concept to include all aspects of air power from C^2 and doctrine to the procurement of new technologies. Such capabilities can only be achieved through collaboration as no individual European nation has the wherewithal to be able to provide all the requirements of a balanced force. Collective security is cheaper and has benefits but the right partners must be selected. A coalition operation, by its very nature, will require alliance members to work together towards a common goal. Unfortunately, experience indicates that this cannot always be achieved as national interests have often taken precedence over coalition aims. Therefore, Europe will need to ensure that it can agree and sustain common

political objectives in parallel with the development of the military forces needed to support such aims. This is an area that will become increasingly difficult to resolve as the direct threat to European nations fades and is replaced by a desire by some nations to participate in humanitarian intervention operations while others remain solely concerned with their national security.

The question of how can Europe develop a effective capability to project air power without US support will not be easy to resolve as the possible military solutions for Europe are limited. Pooling of forces is an option as is the niche provider approach with individual nations contributing to a composite force. Unfortunately, the perceived lack of cohesiveness within Europe, when coupled with reduced defence spending, indicates that the portents for an effective independent European air power capability are not good. When examining all the actions, both political and military, that will be required to allow the UK and Europe to construct and maintain air forces capable of projecting air power, the possibility of such forces being developed in the short-to-medium term appears extremely remote unless governments are prepared to turn rhetoric into reality. There must be political commitment to develop the desired capabilities or an acceptance by Europe that US dominance of the air will be allowed to remain unchallenged. Politicians cannot afford to linger on this issue as recent conflicts have demonstrated that Europe must restructure its forces if it wishes to take a leading role in future operations. While both the EU and the UK can argue convincingly that they are members of the world's economic vanguard, their aspirations to project power through the use of their air forces are less cogent. Until Europe is able to rationalise its air power requirements, it seems that the US will continue to remain the dominant power both in economic and military terms.

The UK and Europe must now choose which path they wish to follow. Currently, Europe cannot afford to allow the US to become disengaged as it does not have the collective ability to project effective air power without American support. While European nations may balk at the costs of obtaining such capabilities, they must realise that if they wish to have influence though the use of military force, air power will be a vital component of future coalition operations. If doubt still remains in the minds of European leaders on the need to develop the required air power capabilities, they should perhaps consider the words of General Kenney, the US Air Commander in the South Pacific during World War 2 who stated:

'Having a second-best air force is like having the second-best poker hand fine for bluffing but no good at the call'.[79]

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5 *Ibid.* p2.2.
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