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NATO – HOW DOES THE ROYAL AIR FORCE INVEST MORE APPROPRIATELY?

Wing Commander S Cloke RAF

ADVANCED COMMAND AND STAFF COURSE
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ABSTRACT

NATO was formed in 1949 to provide collective defence to North American and Western European signatories against the threat of communist ideology, the UK’s strategic and defence planning has had NATO at its core since this inception. In the post-Cold War era the Alliance has evolved to remain relevant to the changing world and has broadened its operational commitments to encompass ‘out of area’ activity, yet still it faces challenges from financial constraints and wavering political will. To a degree the RAF has disinvested in NATO, this paper addresses those concerns by examining, how does the RAF invest more appropriately in NATO? Through the analysis of three case studies, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya, it draws lessons that support air powers significant role within NATO and contends that to invest more appropriately in NATO the RAF should utilise its ‘air-minded’ people.
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“A commitment to collective security via a rules-based international system and our key alliances… through effective and reformed international institutions including the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, as the anchor of transatlantic security…”  

“We may have to prioritise more ruthlessly now that we have fewer ships, men and planes but we will still be, in comparative terms, a front rank player in the NATO Alliance.” General Sir David Richards, Chief of the Defence Staff, UK Ministry of Defence.  

“It is important that we remember that it is our airmen and women who are at the heart of air power, not our equipment…” Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton, Chief of the Air Staff, Royal Air Force.  

The United Kingdom is committed to the defence of the country and its interests overseas through an acknowledgement that at its core is collective security and working with key partners. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), arguably the most successful military alliance, forms the military backbone of this commitment and has featured in the government’s strategic defence and security planning since the Treaty’s inception in 1949. Yet despite this success there has been almost continual tension between alliance members, both transatlantic and within Europe, regarding differing priorities, financial commitment and burden-sharing, or in plain English, ‘pulling your weight.’ This tension, which often stayed simmering below the surface in the Cold War era, has risen to the surface since the demise of the bipolar world as NATO adapts to remain relevant and is more significant now due to the context of the financial constraints that the majority of NATO member states find themselves facing. Faced with the requirement to evolve and to justify its existence, NATO has produced several new Strategic Concepts to address the changing security environment; has conducted ‘out-of-area’ missions in the interest of maintaining security and stability beyond the shores of Alliance members; and having recognised the financial constraints, domestic pressure and differing threat perceptions of Alliance members is addressing the context it faces through another round of restructuring and by encouraging members to burden share and make better use of capabilities through what it calls ‘Smart Defence.’

Acknowledging this and the UK’s political and military commitment to NATO, this paper examines the question of how does the Royal Air Force invest more appropriately in NATO when faced with this context.

To do this it initially analyses the formation and evolution of NATO from its inception through to the contemporary challenges before establishing the significance of NATO within UK policy and the importance of NATO with regard to the military and the RAF before analysing three case studies. The use of case studies in this research paper serves three purposes: firstly, they demonstrate the important role that NATO has taken on since the demise of the Cold War adding weight to the argument supporting NATO’s justification and long-term viability; secondly, they emphasise the UK’s military participation in air operations within an alliance context and serve to underline the commitment of the government to collective defence and security; and thirdly, they provide lessons for air power that can be taken forward to today’s contemporary environment. In this paper the lessons will form the basis to guide how the RAF should approach investing more appropriately in NATO. The case studies of Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya were chosen as although all three involved a significant air campaign they all offered significantly differing contexts in the form of a variety of geographical settings; with respect to time they occurred at unique junctures within NATO’s evolution and lasted for different durations; they were triggered by differing circumstances; and occurred at times that offered unique circumstances within the world order, Kosovo as the first major post-Cold War intervention, Afghanistan as the result of terrorism and strategic shock and Libya during a ‘new period’ of Arab uprising.

Despite these different contexts it is possible to draw some common lessons and themes that are relevant to air power and the RAF; these centre around ‘air-minded’ personnel. By considering the context NATO and the UK is faced with, the analysis of the three case studies and the identified lessons, this paper contends that the RAF must utilise and capitalise in its people to invest more appropriately in NATO. It suggests that this is not something new and has in fact been recognised and acknowledged for some time and to reap the rewards the RAF must simply act on its rhetoric.

**NATO’s History and Evolution**

The official foundations of NATO can be traced back to the formal signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington D.C. on 4 April 1949 by the UK, US, Canada, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. However, the groundwork for its establishment were set with the 1947 Dunkirk Treaty between Britain and France, the 1948 Treaty of Brussels and the subsequent formation of the Western Union in September 1948.7 The

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requirement for some form of collective security stemmed from the perceived threat of communism, aided by the Soviet Union, spreading across Europe with the threat becoming more apparent in February 1948 when the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia ousted the democratically elected government and was further accentuated in June 1948 with the commencement of the Soviet blockade of Berlin.8 There was also a need to respond to the possibility of a “revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent, and [to] encourage European political integration.”9 The result was a ‘pact’, not an organisation at this stage, which would “unite North America and Western Europe in a community of nations with common interests and values; serve as a forum for consultation and decision-making; and provide for the collective defence of member nations.”10 At its core was the belief that each member would maintain its national sovereignty, have an equal vote in decision-making and that decisions, once taken, underlined political solidarity between allies.11 The North Atlantic Treaty contains fourteen articles “founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.”12 However, it is Article 5 that is at the foundation of NATO’s principal of collective defence and security:

   The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them… will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking … such action as it deems necessary… to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.13

The formation of NATO as an organisation then followed in 1951 with the establishment of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Paris.14 The North Atlantic Treaty, what it was established for and the subsequent formation of NATO is significant for the UK for several reasons but perhaps the most noteworthy being the ‘founding’ role that the country played and the challenge faced by Ernest Bevin, the then British Foreign Secretary, in gaining US buy-in. Despite the considerable threat and the ‘successes’ of WWII, there was historical US reticence towards peacetime alliances and this was still very prominent throughout internal US politics post-WWII. Bevin was faced with the challenge of overcoming this and for Britain to gain what it was seeking

12 Sherwen, NATO Handbook, 371.
13 ibid., 372.
14 Francis Heller and John Gillingham, NATO: The Founding of the Atlantic Alliance and the Integration of Europe (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 1.
took considerable pragmatism, diplomatic skills and determination on behalf of Bevin and his staff.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite rhetoric from NATO still evident on its website today that it was not formed purely as a response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union\textsuperscript{16}, the end of the Cold War in 1991 nevertheless presented a stern challenge to the organisation. The result was the publishing at the November 1991 Rome Summit of a new post-Cold War Strategic Concept; it outlined the emergence of new threats, a requirement for a broader response to security based on cooperation, stressing crisis management and working toward an improved security situation for Europe while maintaining the basic tenet of security for member nations all set in the context of the end of the Cold War threat.\textsuperscript{17} This document is significant as it made the first step towards change and set the scene for the continued evolution of NATO. It set out the requirement for flexibility, mobility and smaller, multinational forces, thus underlining the importance of interoperability and what would eventually become the need for greater efficiency. The speed with which events happened in the early 1990s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and peace support operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina providing just 2 examples, meant that the concept soon needed revisiting.\textsuperscript{18}

On 24 April 1999 at the Washington Summit, the Alliance approved another ‘new’ Strategic Concept to address the changing strategic context and welcomed the full membership of 3 former communist countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, who had been offered the prospect of membership in 1997 following the successful completion of internal political and military reform. The emphasis of the Strategic Concept was on maintaining a stable and secure Euro-Atlantic security environment and would be based on the core tasks of security, consultation, deterrence and defence. However, there was also the acknowledgement of the need to grow partnerships with non-member states and also be prepared to address crisis management.\textsuperscript{19} Despite stating that, “since the end of the Cold War, the world had come to face complex new risks to Euro-Atlantic peace and security, including oppression, ethnic conflict, economic distress, the collapse of political order, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction,”\textsuperscript{20} it is noteworthy that there were only 2 references to terrorists or terrorism and demonstrates the inability to accurately predict the future security threats and context.

What was to follow severely challenged not only this new Strategic Concept but also the foundations of NATO itself. The terrorist attacks of September 2001 and the subsequent NATO

\textsuperscript{18} ibid., 24.
foray into Afghanistan, the 2003 Iraq war, the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the 2008 financial crisis and the continuing effects of an ever more globalised, interdependent world order where the threat may not emanate from a traditional state actor, all accumulated to drive forward a requirement to formulate a new narrative and mission for NATO.  

The seismic shift of events on the world stage added to the underlying difficulties that the Alliance faced. These included disagreement over the Afghanistan mission; lack of agreement on fundamental issues regarding NATO’s role, tasks and policies; the weakening of cohesion between previously strong allies; differing perceptions of what constituted a threat and what, already tight, defence budgets should be allocated to, this was even more so the case in a further expanded Alliance; and the view that the Muslim world held of NATO and that it was being used as a tool for ‘questionable’ US foreign policy. Although some of these issues had developed in the post-Cold War era others, namely defence spending, had been a factor for some time and became more pronounced in the years following the end of the threat that NATO’s formation was based on. However, with more relevancy to the modern era, a strong reluctance to increase defence spending can be tied to the view held by many European states that the threat was low in Europe and that other requirements, for example, spending on internal, social issues should take primacy. The short-term nature of modern politics, fuelled by globalisation and media coverage, results in defence rarely being a vote winner when compared to healthcare, education and social funding.

These significant drivers resulted in a far wider ranging, more consultative review of what was required for the new Strategic Concept scheduled for release in November 2010 at the Lisbon Summit. On publication the 2010 Strategic Concept, while still holding Article 5 at its core, aimed to rally Alliance members and build solidarity with a vision of, “an evolving Alliance that will remain able to defend its members against modern threats and commits NATO to become more agile, more capable and more effective.” Emphasising the disappearance of the bipolar world, it encourages open dialogue and cooperation with Russia, offers future membership to European democracies, urges greater cooperation with partners around the globe and asks Alliance members to develop capabilities to meet threats across the spectrum from ballistic missiles to cyber-attacks. This is all set in the context of remaining cost effective and cognisant of the need to maintain continual internal reform to remain relevant.

26 ibid.
There are arguments both for and against this new ‘mission statement’. The negative camp has stated that the concept lays out ambitious plans that disguise the fact that the US and its European allies have differing attitudes and interests. Those in favour have sighted the ability of the Alliance to adapt and evolve to remain relevant; the fact that many of today’s threats are of a non-military nature and that NATO is enlarging its ambition to react to these adds further weight to their argument. From a European perspective there are several concerns regarding the new Strategic Concept and the actions and motivations of the US since its publication. The emphasis by the US on a ‘pivot’ or re-balance towards the Asia-Pacific region raises the question of true US commitment to NATO; operations in Libya cast doubts over the US’ willingness to take the lead on operations, and the warnings from Washington towards European states about their lack of investment in defence spending all give rise to concern for European states.

Whichever way it is viewed, the evolution of NATO and the publication of the most recent Strategic Concept draws several conclusions. Firstly, it underlines the inability to fully predict future threats; secondly, that states’ threat perception can be different; thirdly, that inclusion through enlargement does not necessarily result in a larger consensus or agreement with regard to what and how the Alliance should conduct business; fourthly, that declarations of strategic direction and concept are only credible if there is the political will and resources to back up the intent; and finally, and perhaps most importantly for this paper, the spectre of the financial crisis and the requirement to be cost effective and organisationally efficient are important drivers not only for states but also for the military organisations contributing to NATO. The evolving nature of the security environment, something that NATO has attempted to match with continual adaptation, linked with the requirement for states to demonstrate efficiency and internal financial propriety means that Alliance members cannot rely on the strategy of using size, money and technology to deter and ensure security, instead to gain the advantage Alliance members will have to look to invest more efficiently and appropriately in NATO.

The warnings from Washington in June 2011 regarding defence spending within Europe required a response to appease US concerns and this came in the form of NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s ‘Smart Defence’ initiative. Smart defence is at the core of NATO Forces 2020 and follows-on from the 2010 Strategic Concept, it is about the “pooling and sharing [of] resources, 

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setting better priorities and encouraging countries to specialise in the things they are best at.”

However, a closer look at Smart defence establishes that it is in fact a ‘rebrand’ of a previous attempt at something similar in 1999, the Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI). The DCI was adopted following the success of the Kosovo campaign with the purpose of developing and where possible, improving NATO’s capabilities in 5 main areas. However, comments made at the time by US Defence Secretary Cohen alluded to the fact that the Kosovo intervention was not perfect and that improvements could be made, these included spending more money in some cases or in what is an earlier example of Rasmussen’s ‘Smart defence’, he suggested that improvements could be achieved through, “spending money smarter and more focused on things that are most relevant to the tasks the Alliance is going to have in the future.” This is significant and demonstrates that NATO has struggled for some time to achieve a balance between political priorities, defence spending and military capability. Moreover, if it didn’t work previously why is it going to work this time? Perhaps the answer is linked to the fact that European defence budgets cannot reduce much further than they already have without committing irreversible damage to their military forces and therefore Smart Defence will simply have to work especially for smaller Alliance members. It also presents a challenge for the UK who having given up a notable capability during the 2010 defence review, in the form of maritime patrol aircraft, are unlikely to want to sacrifice or share a sovereign capability with another nation as this may impinge on its desire to maintain its strategic influence. Furthermore, the prospect of relying on a coalition of smaller European states to provide specific capabilities, the essence of burden-sharing, seems far from palatable for the UK.

The UK Stance and Policy towards NATO

So what is the UK Government’s policy towards NATO and how does this devolve down to the RAF? Prior to the arrival of the current UK government in 2010, there had been 8 defence reviews including the Defence White Paper of 2003/4. An analysis of these earlier reviews draws some

36 Claire Taylor, A Brief Guide to Previous British Defence Reviews, Standard Note: SN/IA/5714 (United Kingdom: House of Commons Library, 2010), 2 www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05714.pdf (accessed May 15, 2013). Although ‘Statements on Defence’ had been issued by the government in the period following the end of World War II (WWII), it is agreed amongst most observers that the first comprehensive review, aiming to look forward at Britain’s strategic interests and the required military resources, was the Sandy Review of 1957. Although this may seem sometime after the cessation of WWII and the formation of NATO it allowed time for international order to be accurately assessed after what had been a tumultuous period, advances in technology to be fully understood, for example the strategic impact of the advancement in nuclear weapon capability, and for NATO to fully ‘bed-in’ and assess the threat from Communism.
common themes, with the most relevant to this paper being: a consistent, firm commitment to NATO; the economic challenge of maintaining defence spending in relation to Gross Domestic Product, especially when set against the military budgets of other European NATO allies; and the drive for efficiency and cost-savings within the individual services. Of particular note, and a continuation of one of the themes outlined from the evolution of NATO, the decisions made on where to allocate resource did not always align with the next security threat to occur; this was acutely apparent with the ‘shock’ of the Falklands conflict in 1982. The assumptions made by both the 1975 Mason and 1981 Nott Review had resulted in significant cuts to the Royal Navy in favour of following the NATO convention of relying on land and air capabilities, these assessments were inadequate when faced with a threat far away from the traditional NATO theatre.

The arrival of the new coalition government in May 2010, formed between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties and led by Prime Minister David Cameron, saw the first attempt in several years to redefine Britain’s place in the world, its approach to national security and the significance for the UK. The work resulted in the publication in October 2010 of the National Security Strategy, ‘A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty’ (NSS) and subsequently, Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). Working alongside each other, the documents frame the strategic context, outline what is trying to be achieved, ‘the Ends’, and how this will be achieved and with what resources, ‘the Ways and Means.’ At the time the significance of the documents was due not only to the absence of such a review for 6 years but also the stark reality of the precarious financial situation that the country, along with the majority of the world, found itself allied with substantial accumulated national debt.

Driving both documents is the desire for the UK to maintain its influential, some would argue overstated, position on the world stage, “The National Security Council has reached a clear conclusion that Britain’s national interest requires us to reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence.” This had previously been mentioned by the new Foreign Secretary, William Hague,

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40 Cameron, Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: National Security Strategy, 10.
43 The Government deficit for 2010 alone was estimated at £163 billion (11.1%), with the accumulated total debt estimated by some to be more than £1 trillion. HM Government, “The economic recovery and the budget deficit,” HMG, http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications (accessed May 8, 2010) and Hugo Duncan, “A trillion and rising: Britain’s £1,000,000,000,000 debt means we now pay as much in interest as we do for defence,” Daily Mail Online, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/ (accessed May 8, 2010).
on the 26 May 2010, when he stated, “The Government reject the idea of strategic shrinkage.”

The NSS outlined how this would be achieved using all the levers of power available to government, across the complete spectrum of soft to hard power, coined as a ‘whole of government approach’. However, as well as utilising internal levers there is a recognition that “the UK benefits from a tried and successful approach to collective security using a wide set of alliances and partnerships” and with this the NSS acknowledges a firm commitment to NATO. The SDSR emphasises this commitment with a guarantee that defence spending will meet the NATO target of 2% of GDP for the next 4 years and additionally, in Part 5 Alliances and Partnerships, confirms the importance of NATO to the UK military, "our obligations to our NATO Allies will continue to be among our highest priorities and we will continue to contribute to NATO’s operations and its Command and Force Structures, to ensure that the Alliance is able to deliver a robust and credible response to existing and new security challenges." In summary, these Government documents demonstrate that NATO remains at the core of the UK strategy and that the military obligation remains as extant as it did in the early days of NATO.

Following the confirmation of NATO’s place in UK government and military thinking, decisions taken at the 2010 Lisbon Summit and fuelled by events in Libya during the early part of 2011, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, wrote to the three Service Chiefs in June 2012 regarding UK manning levels in NATO. The letter highlighted the implementation of a new NATO Command Structure that would lead to a leaner more efficient and effective organisation and that the UK had positioned itself well with 19 stars across the appointments and approximately 700 other posts across all Services. However, it clearly stated that for this to work NATO must be manned 100%, with the tone of the letter acknowledging that this had not historically been the case. Furthermore, by asking the Service Chiefs to, ‘ensure that… posts are fully manned with appropriately qualified, high-calibre personnel,’ the letter also accepted that there had been a disinvestment that had manifested itself in either gapped posts or posts filled by individuals with the incorrect competencies. It also emphasised the importance that the UK placed on NATO stating, ‘[this] will allow the UK to remain at the forefront of NATO strategic and operational policy and planning.’ The letter finished by emphasising the work that needed to be done by the individual Services to quash the perception amongst personnel that NATO tours were an easy option and not generally good for career progression. This letter is significant as it sets the tone with regard to NATO and clearly articulates the UK military approach towards the Alliance. The perceptions alluded to by General Richards have been widespread amongst RAF personnel, but

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49 See Annex A, letter from CDS to CNS, CGS and CAS entitled, “UK Manning Levels in NATO.”
50 ibid.
51 ibid.
despite this direction it is important to note that arguably it will take several iterations of the yearly promotion process to implement his direction and for the investment to be recognised on a personal level by the majority of personnel. However, from an RAF viewpoint the direction came as an important reminder of the importance of NATO, as from January 2013 the RAF would take the lead of the Air Component of the NATO Response Force (NRF).52

In summary, the UK has confirmed its commitment towards working with partners and its military and political obligation to NATO through the publication of the NSS and SDSR; the first update to SDSR is scheduled in 2015 to, “take account of how the strategic environment develops.”53 Furthermore, while acknowledging previous under investment in NATO the direction from the UK’s most senior military officer is clear, investing quality personnel in a newly structured, leaner and more efficient NATO is an essential task for each Service.

CASE STUDIES

Kosovo

On 24 March 1999 NATO commenced Operation Allied Force to coerce Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslavian president, to stop his campaign of brutality and ethnic cleansing against the ethnic Albanian majority living in Kosovo; the Serb atrocities had attracted humanitarian concerns from the International Community due to the severity of the human rights abuses being inflicted on the population of Kosovo.54 The operation centred on a NATO air campaign and lasted for 78 days culminating on 9 June 1999 with Milosevic agreeing to NATO’s demands that he halt his action, immediately withdraw his Serbian forces from Kosovo, allow the positioning of an international military force within Kosovo, the unconditional return of those that had been forcibly removed from their homeland including the access of humanitarian aid organisations and the formation of a political agreement for Kosovo.55 The significance of the operation lies in the fact this was NATO’s first major operation since the end of the Cold War56, and that arguably there was no

52 The NRF is a highly ready and technologically advanced multinational force made up of land, air, maritime and SF components that the Alliance can deploy quickly to wherever it is needed. See http://www.jfcbs.nato.int/page11662718.aspx (accessed May 15, 2013).
54 Benjamin Lambeth, NATO’s Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001), 1.
56 Operation Allied Force was officially the second air operation for NATO in the region following Operation Deliberate Force, 29 August to 20 September 1995, the NATO mission to stop attacks by Bosnian Serbs and ensure the withdrawal of Serbian forces from safe areas around Sarajevo. This coercive use of air power resulted in 3315 missions being flown, 65% being flown by US forces. Although technically the 1st NATO military operation in the post-Cold War era it is generally accepted that Operation Allied Force is the 1st ‘major’ operation as it lasted 78 days compared to the former’s significantly shorter, 21 day period of operations, and the intensity of the air operations was far greater; at the time the operation was the 3rd
direct threat to a NATO member country that would invoke an Article 5 response; and through the debate regarding the legality of the NATO operation in light of the fact that the UN Security Council (UNSC) did not pass a resolution specifically authorising the use of force to implement previous resolutions condemning the situation; indeed it is felt by some that NATO deliberately avoided going via the UNSC as they assessed that Russia, a supporter of Milosevic, and China would veto any such resolution. The debate established a precedent with regard to humanitarian law and the ability to intervene to protect humanitarian rights without necessarily having the backing of a UNSC resolution. Consequently, it can be argued that this action added support to the establishment of the UN initiative, Responsibility to Protect, that was adopted in 2005. NATO’s intent and rationale had previously been made clear in a statement made by the North Atlantic Council on 5 March 1998 that stated, “NATO and the international community have a legitimate interest in developments in Kosovo… because of their impact on the stability of the whole region.”

In the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict there was significant debate and much was published about the efficacy of air power particularly in the US where both the USAF and the US Army commissioned reports by the RAND organisation to investigate lessons and, in the US Army report, the joint arena and the limited Land component involvement. Despite the orthodox view that NATO’s victory in Kosovo was due to the threat of a ground invasion following the penetrating air operation, this view is not held by some critics who claim that NATO planning was incomplete and lacked any contingency in the form of a land element should Milosevic not yield to the coercive effect of the air operation. Those who support this argument point to the inability of air power to quickly coerce the Serbian leader; speed of effort, in a similar vein to Operation Deliberate Force, was a fundamental part of NATO’s concept of operations. Yet despite this apparent inadequacy there were those that saw the Kosovo victory as significant for air power and as a continuation of the success following on from the opening phase of Operation Desert Storm and the rapid accomplishment of Operation Deliberate Force; of particular note were John Keegan’s comments,

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58 Lambeth, NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment, 14.
60 The Land component arrived later in the operation through Task Forces Hawk and Hunter, which saw the deployment of US Army Apache and EH-60 helicopters, counter-battery radar, the Multiple Launch Rocket System and the Hunter tactical UAV, although actual tactical employment was very limited. See Nardulli, Disjointed War: Military Operations in Kosovo 1999, 57-98. For the report commissioned by the USAF see Lambeth, NATO’s Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment.
the defence editor of the Daily Telegraph at the time and an admitted doubter of the virtues of air power, who proclaimed that, “a war can be won by air power alone.”

Analysis of the factors driving both sides of the debate and the subsequent drawing of lessons from the air operation, must take into account the context that NATO found itself in politically and the operating environment.

Politically, any military action taken by NATO was sensitive due to the importance of alliance cohesion. As the nature of the conflict did not directly affect alliance members there was much concern over maintaining domestic support for a campaign that appeared to have no direct impact on individual countries’ population. This point guided much of the thinking leading to a carefully guided decision-making process with regard to targeting with the aim of reducing collateral damage to a minimum, minimising the risk of civilian casualties and losing friendly aircrews; it was also one of the drivers behind not putting ‘troops on the ground’ as committing these would probably lead to casualties. An awkward dichotomy can be drawn from the political sensitivity to risk and the way it leaned on the execution of air operations; operating at medium to high altitude reduced the risk of detection and attack from Serbian air defences, in fact Serbia could claim no NATO casualties throughout the operation, however, the side effect was the increased probability of collateral damage to the inaccuracy associated with flying higher. Moreover, Milosevic proved to be a clever and resilient opponent on many counts, but in particular his use of the media to discredit the operation and display apparent civilian victims, became a real test for the cohesion of the alliance. It is important to note that following Operation Desert Storm, where the media had had significant access to both sides of the fighting in Kuwait and Iraq, the way campaigns were fought and subsequently shown to the world, sometimes in ‘real-time’, had changed forever and media access was not only something the industry strived for but was wanted by populations too.

The operating environment also proved to be problematic and is important to mention. Throughout the period of the operation the weather was poor, and although there had been advances in the technology of all-weather operations, the ability to employ munitions or to demonstrate the same degree of success as that achieved in Operation Desert Storm was not possible. Moreover, the topography and degree of forestation enabled the Serbian forces to evade detection more easily. Furthermore, the inability to identify targets, through both weather and the terrain, linked with the political imperative regarding targeting and alliance cohesion, resulted in an air campaign that

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67 Ibid., 25.
lasted longer than had been expected. In a similar vein to the other case studies, the use of Special Forces to facilitate target identification was reported on and emphasises two key points: the importance of air-land integration or cooperation and interoperability.

Looking at the operational to tactical level several lessons that are pertinent to the RAF’s investment in NATO can be drawn from Operation Allied Force. From an intelligence perspective the operation marked a new level in the collection, analysis and dissemination of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), now more formally known as ISTAR, however, most of the advances were made by the US which highlighted gaps in European alliance members capabilities. For those that did hold some capability the lack of interoperability between equipment, and to a certain degree, personnel and the inability to exploit and disseminate the data in a timely manner reduced the efficiency of the air campaign. This lesson highlights the importance of having properly trained personnel with a thorough knowledge of air power not only within the deployed units, but also within Combined Air Operations Centres (CAOC) and intelligence fusion cells.

The success of Milosevic’s media plan demonstrates the importance of information operations (IO) and in particular media operations. When working with the media it is important to be one step ahead of the game, and be ready to respond ‘openly, quickly and accurately’ when things don’t go to plan; in Operation Allied Force this was the case when the Chinese Embassy was targeted in error. Having air-minded, media-trained personnel available across the strategic to the tactical level is important if ground is not to be lost in the IO arena.

Operation Allied Force also demonstrated the importance of having personnel regularly trained, educated and exercised, so they are able to meet the challenges of the next conflict whatever or wherever that may be. Kosovo marked a dramatic change for many of the alliance members, who were trained and prepared for a major, typically Cold War, scenario; it was also a completely different environment for the majority of the USAF elements who had operated in Desert Storm so successfully. The RAF needs to be aware of the requirement to have its personnel regularly trained, educated and exercised. Moreover, having personnel assigned to CAOCs and staff posts within NATO will expose them to this element within a multinational environment.

69 ISTAR – Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance.
72 Lambeth, NATO’s Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment, 176.
The extended duration of the air campaign resulted in a high usage rate for precision-guided munitions and other munitions; if the air campaign had been extended a further 30 days US stocks would have been exhausted in some key areas; European alliance members also let themselves down with the stores of munitions they kept and ran worryingly low. This serves to highlight poor planning on behalf of NATO; the lesson that can be drawn from this is the requirement to not only have ‘air-minded’ and experienced personnel planning the operations, something that comes from having served, trained and exercise in that environment, but also having the same skilled individuals, i.e. air-minded personnel, in the logistic sphere too.

There is a danger that NATO’s positive outcome and the important lessons that can be gleaned from Operation allied Force are often overshadowed, even now, by the debate for and against the efficacy of air power in a military campaign and to contribute effectively to the debate the context must be taken into account. Arguably the neatest conclusion or argument, is that air power worked effectively alongside other levers of power, predominantly the diplomatic lever, reducing the risk of committing a large land component and hence achieving the aim whilst importantly maintaining NATO cohesion through a testing period. Leaving the debate to one side, for the purposes of this research some significant lessons have been drawn that focus around interoperability, of equipment and personnel, training, exercising, logistics and ISR. At the core of these lessons is the requirement for ‘air-minded’ personnel who have been exposed to both joint and multinational environments.

**Afghanistan**

The devastating terrorist attacks that took place on 11 September 2001 in New York City and Washington DC shocked not only the US but the entire world, arguably presented one of the largest strategic shocks of recent times and has defined the security environment for more than the past decade. The coordinated efforts of the terrorist group al-Qaeda resulted in the hijacking of four airliners for the use of suicide attacks against the nation’s largest city and the capital. The outcome was almost 3000 deaths and the question of how the world’s most powerful state would respond. What followed proved to be a test of leadership, political will and military capability, not only within the US but across many states and within NATO. For the first time in its history NATO members agreed to invoke Article 5, agreeing to support the US if it was proven that the attack had emanated from abroad. The UN was informed of the decision by Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary General, with the direction that individual allies would decide upon how exactly they would support

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73 Lamb, Operation Allied Force: Golden Nuggets for Future Campaigns, 16.
any action, whether it be militarily or otherwise.75 Following their experience in Kosovo, where the US discovered the limitations and frustration of working in an alliance where consensus was vital and risk was viewed many different ways; for example the military problems of interoperability and differing capabilities; the diplomatic issues regarding political sensitivity and national caveats in particular with regard to targeting; the economic issues of infighting through states not pulling their weight financially or contributing sufficiently; the US opted to proceed with what they would call Operation Enduring Freedom outside of the NATO planning and operational process. They did not reject the support of other states, but instead offered the opportunity of ‘following’ the US in what would be a US-led ‘coalition of the willing.’77 This is significant as it demonstrates the frustrations that NATO’s predominant contributor felt towards the Alliance in particular with regard to the perceived lack of investment in military capability and the differing political will linked closely with the appetite for military intervention; although Article 5 had been invoked and the support was there, to get the swift, decisive outcome it sought the US would have to take the operational lead.

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) commenced on 7 October 2001 with the aim of targeting and destroying al-Qaeda groups being given support by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Initial support to the US-led operation was principally provided by Canada, France, Germany, Italy and the UK with intra-country support coming from the Northern Alliance.78 Shortly following the commencement of operations the UNSC passed Resolution 1386 authorising the formation of ISAF, an international force to support the Afghan authorities with stabilisation and reconstruction which worked in tandem with the on-going independent US operation to destroy al-Qaeda and the Taliban; although multi-national in composition it was initially led by individual countries on a rotational basis. The significance of ISAF is that NATO took command of its mission in August 2003 in what was the alliance’s first ‘out of area’ operation beyond its traditional European domain and with it all the sensitivities and difficulties that it had encountered on previous operations, however, this time the size and scope of the task was far greater.80

What followed has been, and will continue to be, a well-documented insurgency battle against an adaptive and resilient enemy whilst attempting rebuild a country. There has been much criticism at a national, international and NATO level about the conduct of operations, the lack of strategy, the inability to clearly define an end state, as well as highlighting the underlying issues within the

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76 Benjamin Lambeth, Air Power Against Terror (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005), 61.
78 ibid., 501.
79 UNSC Resolution 1386 was passed on December 20, 2001 and authorised the formation of ISAF. See http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/708/55/PDF/N0170855.pdf?OpenElement (accessed May 30, 2013)
Alliance of military contribution and expenditure and commitment to the mission. This case study will not further the discussion or analysis of the what, how and why of NATO’s mission in Afghanistan and the difficult balancing act with OEF, but instead focus on 3 key lessons that can be drawn from both NATO and OEF operations in Afghanistan that are relevant to air power; a mission that has seen the utilisation of the full gamut of air power’s roles since the first days of OEF.

The first key lesson that can be taken from Afghanistan is the importance of integration and understanding between component forces and the personnel within them. Evidence to support this lesson can be seen during the early days of OEF in late 2001 when the success of precision air strikes was almost guaranteed through ground target designation undertaken by Special Forces integrated with the Northern Alliance, linked with the capability to upload inflight targeting to the loitering aircraft who could subsequently provide Close Air Support to the ground forces. This level of integration is achieved through an understanding and appreciation of what is required by both force elements. Its foundation is established through regular training and exercising resulting in familiarity and understanding between personnel leading to components, in this case land and air, that work together to produce the desired effect through joint action. This example of joint action did not only occur between US forces, but also included RAF planners and aircrew who provided the vital enabling functions of air refuelling and ISTAR. However, despite the successes of this example there are numerous accounts of integration between air and land forces failing or falling far short of expectations. Not only does this undermine previously good work but it also fuels inter-service rivalry that often surfaces when risk is being managed and culpability being attributed. Integration within UK forces, in particular air-land integration between the RAF and the British Army, has improved considerably since operations commenced in Afghanistan with air support to Brigades and Divisions evolving into what has become fully integrated air support cells able to provide air advice and expertise. This has been particularly evident within the ISTAR sphere where not only do Brigades integrate an ISTAR specialist with them from mission specific training throughout the deployment to mission exploitation and debrief on return, but also in the form of a theatre ISTAR team deployed within the RAF Expeditionary Air Wing to provide a further level of integration. This extra level is important for two reasons; firstly, it allows coverage during

periods of Brigade rotation when theatre knowledge is lower and throughout periods of R&R, and secondly, it demonstrates to the user genuine commitment and support from the RAF, this is vital in establishing mutual trust and building relationships. Two significant negatives arise from this analysis; firstly, that historically the success and degree of integration achieved through ALI has always suffered following the end of operations or conflict and despite strong rhetoric from within both the Army and the RAF this disinvestment may perhaps become evident again especially in light of the fiscally tight environment where the tendency will be to look inwards to preserve one’s own Service; and secondly, the positive level of integration within UK armed forces has not been as pronounced with NATO partners. Although operations within Afghanistan have been centred around a NATO context and partners there has been a tendency to not invest in integration to the same degree as within the UK’s own forces. This is an important point because as alliance members reduce the size of their forces the possibility of fighting future conflicts or interventions within an alliance or coalition increases, therefore, the ability to effectively integrate with partners’ land, air and maritime components during both the planning and conduct phases will be critical in achieving success.

Under a similar theme, but related more to integration between nations, is the enduring lesson of the importance of interoperability. Interoperability concerns were evident in the immediate response to the terror attacks of September 2001 as the US proposed its course of action. The plan was predominantly based on air power supporting Special Forces on the ground and although NATO had provided political and military support in the form of support for Article 5 intervention, as previously analysed, the US opted to forego a NATO framework for the operation having learnt from Kosovo the limitations with regard to interoperability. This was an attack against the US homeland and the US could ill-afford to have it hampered by European nations. Beyond the initial thrust of OEF, through to NATO-led operations under the ISAF banner being conducted to this day, interoperability concerns have been regularly mentioned in the media, after-action reports and identified in the lessons learned process. Although the latest rhetoric from NATO emphasises the improvements that have been achieved through years of operating closely as a coalition, there is an implied acknowledgement that interoperability was not great and there are concerns that it will suffer again following NATO’s drawdown from Afghanistan in late 2014. The latest meeting of NATO defence ministers in February 2013 recognised that there was a danger of losing any

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86 Rest and Recuperation – personnel are entitled to a 2 week period of R&R away from theatre during a standard 6 month rotation.
89 Lambeth, Air Power Against Terror, 61.
gains achieved through years of allied operations, supported NATO’s Connected Forces Initiative\textsuperscript{92} to maintain interoperability momentum and agreed to back a major Alliance live exercise in 2015 followed by a comprehensive training and exercise package over the period 2015-2020.\textsuperscript{93} This is admirable but as the limited success of NATO’s previous DCI has shown, strong words and emotion mean little if it is not supported by political will which with time, has a tendency to wane. Furthermore, as DCI morphed into the 2002 Prague Capability Commitment additional overlap, tension and confusion was created with the newly created European Union’s Headline Goal process, the aim of which was to improve interoperability and highlight capability gaps.\textsuperscript{94} This multitude of organisations and committees is important as it highlights the complexity and ambiguity that well intentioned plans have created, as the members differ within each overarching organisation and hence, political goals and strategy are often at odds.

The third key lesson to be taken from operations in Afghanistan is the importance of clearly defined Command and Control (C2) relationships linked with correctly trained and relevant personnel to fulfil the C2 and planning functions. During the early days of OEF there was often tension between CENTCOM\textsuperscript{95} that was running the overall campaign and the CAOC.\textsuperscript{96} These tensions manifested themselves in open disagreement between component commanders regarding the conduct and planning of the campaign and were fuelled by the rush to deploy ‘inadequately’ trained personnel from across the coalition to the CAOC.\textsuperscript{97} The command relationships are now more clearly defined and initial tensions that could be linked to a lack of overall strategy and the frantic nature of the early days of OEF have been eradicated. However, arguably this has occurred due to the duration of coalition operations that has bred a comfortable degree of familiarity, cooperation and understanding. Identifying the importance of effective C2 and the importance of having correctly trained ‘air-minded’ personnel to undertake the planning and conducting phase is a significant lesson for air power because, ‘it is essential to the delivery of air power’\textsuperscript{98} and is vital to achieving the balance between the principle of centralised command and decentralised execution which is at the core of the RAF’s \textit{modus operandi}.

\textsuperscript{92} NATO, “The Connected Forces Initiative,” NATO, \url{www.nato.int/} (accessed June 1, 2013).
\textsuperscript{94} Alistair Cameron and Jean-François Morel, \textit{European Defence Capabilities No Adaptability without Co-operation}, RUSI Occasional Paper (UK: Stephen Austin, 2010), 2.
\textsuperscript{95} US Central Command – based in Tampa, Florida and responsible for overall control of operations in Afghanistan.
\textsuperscript{96} Combined Air Operations Centre – originally situated at Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia this has now moved to Al Udeid, Qatar. The CAOC has responsibility for overseeing the planning and conducting of air operations at the operational level.
\textsuperscript{97} Lambeth, \textit{Air Power Against Terror}, 295-311.
\textsuperscript{98} UK. Royal Air Force. \textit{British Air and Space Power Doctrine: AP 3000. 4\textsuperscript{th} ed.} (London: MoD, 2009), 61.
There is little doubt that the ‘Arab Spring’ that commenced in late 2010 took the world, both populations and politicians, by surprise. Although uprisings in the Arab region are not necessarily a new event, with events being recorded back in the 1800s, historically these revolts were predominantly against the foreign ruler of the time rather than a revolution against the State itself. Therefore, the tumultuous series of events that led to NATO’s intervention in Libya in March 2011 could not have been accurately forecast or prepared for, moreover, with Afghanistan at the forefront of NATO strategy and operational capacity the prospect of committing to another conflict in a Muslim country was far from ideal.

What occurred proved to be a valuable exercise for NATO as a whole and alliance members on both sides of the Atlantic. This case study will look at the events leading up to NATO’s intervention and the operational side of the conflict, with specific lessons being drawn throughout the case study. Although there has been considerable debate that NATO overstepped the mark and went beyond the remit of the United Nations’ resolution, this case study will not examine or analyse the legality or legitimacy of NATO’s military actions on Libya.

Initial protests against the Qadhafi regime began on 15 February 2011, which within a couple of weeks had exploded into a vicious civil war across the country that took the regime forces by surprise. It did not take long for those loyal to Qadhafi to regroup from the shock and by the end of February 2011 there was widespread condemnation at the indiscriminate nature and brutality of their attacks on civilian population centres. During late February and early March 2011 the hotly debated topic of a No-Fly Zone (NFZ) over Libya to protect the civilian population, and how to enforce it, had reached the forefront of diplomatic debate. Not only was the international community split, with Russia and China staunchly arguing against a NFZ, but significantly within the US there was debate over how exactly one would go about enforcing such a NFZ and the ‘extremely complex operation’ that it would entail. It is important to note that the split in the US was not necessarily a ‘for and against’ argument, with the majority agreeing that ‘something’ needed to be done, rather it was more about the enforcement, what this would take militarily and arguably how much this was going to cost the US taxpayer, although it perhaps offered evidence

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104 RUSI, Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and Libya Operation, 3.
of the awareness of some within the Obama administration that getting heavily involved in another Muslim country would not be positive for the US; notably it gave the first indication that the US may not be at the front of any intervention.

On 26 February 2011 the UN passed Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1970 which referred the situation to the International Criminal Court, imposed an arms embargo, targeted sanctions on key elements of the Qadhafi regime and provided for Humanitarian assistance. With the apparent diplomatic split there was a feeling that this might be as far is it would get with regard to dealing with the situation. The African Union completely rejected any military reaction to the situation and Russia and China were adamant that they would not support a further UNSCR providing for a NFZ. With other NATO members also on the negative, notably Turkey who was sensitive to military operations in a Muslim state, there appeared to be little traction beyond UNSCR 1970. However, events changed on 12 March 2011 after the Arab League passed a vote in Cairo asking the UN to impose a NFZ, although Syria and Algeria opposed the proposal, the historic backing of the Arab League was enough to provide the final momentum required by those pushing for a further resolution, predominantly the UK, France and the US, to push the diplomatic channels further. After much deliberation UNSCR 1973, a ‘toughly’ worded NFZ resolution drafted by the UK and France, was passed on 17 March 2011. Military operations against the regime commenced almost immediately with President Sarkozy declaring French strikes on 19 March 2011. However, it is important to note that at this early stage only 3 NATO allies, the UK, US and France, were taking part in offensive military action and from a NATO diplomatic stance the UK and France had found themselves in the lead, something they were not particularly used to undertaking.

The key lesson for alliance members from this initial stage of the conflict is the requirement in the future to be prepared to take a far greater role in NATO interventions across all levers, diplomatically, militarily and economically. The US stance towards the Libyan intervention occurred due to several factors including the US economic situation; the financial and military burden felt from Afghanistan and the uncertainty over committing to another conflict in a Muslim state. To a certain degree, the US was also annoyed with many European states with regard to their defence spending and commitment to NATO, happy to take support via Article 5 but unwilling to get fully involved in the eyes of the US; this was clearly seen later in the year when US defence secretary Robert Gates made his damning remarks in June 2011. Allied with this, at the time

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unannounced, was the US Pivot, now known as ‘re-balance’, towards the Asia-Pacific region\textsuperscript{111}; arguably the Libyan intervention came at the right time for the US as they were able to lean back slightly, leading NATO from behind, whilst also preparing them for what was to be a significant strategic announcement later in the year. Moreover, in the ‘post, post-Cold War era’ the European theatre was not seen as a strategic threat by the US and the message was clear “the Europeans will shoulder more of the burden, particularly in their own strategic backyard… the US will not hesitate to lead ‘wars of necessity’ in defence of European allies but it will not take the lead in ‘wars of choice’ in or around Europe.”\textsuperscript{112}

The initial phase of the conflict saw the US take the lead, with the UK and France responsible for the bulk of the European effort, other nations included Norway, Denmark, Sweden and significantly the UAE, Qatar, Morocco and Jordan. However, on 28 March 2011 President Obama announced that the US would move to a supporting role that would be more acceptable militarily and financially, and on 31 March 2011 NATO took over complete command of the operation, now known as Operation Unified Protector (OUP).\textsuperscript{113} From a NATO perspective this could not have taken place any sooner due to internal diplomatic wrangling; France were concerned that a NATO lead would antagonise the Arab world; Germany and Poland completely disagreed with the operation and took no part; and Turkey was angered by the expediency of the UNSCR process and from being excluded from earlier talks in Paris.\textsuperscript{114}

From here on in the campaign was centred on an ‘air power’ approach providing precision strike, ISTAR mission coverage, air refuelling, air transport and an element of helicopter support predominantly in the attack role.\textsuperscript{115} Although the Libyan campaign is widely reported as having ‘no boots on the ground’\textsuperscript{116}, which is true to a certain degree due to the lack of large land forces, the contribution from coalition Special Forces, who assisted the rebel forces, was significant and cannot be ignored.\textsuperscript{117} What is noteworthy, and is an important lesson for NATO and consequently the UK and the RAF, is the decisive and vital role that air power played; put simply “a complex air and maritime operation was successfully conducted, based on precision weapons that effectively hobbled Qadhafi’s forces, leaving them isolated and without access to their heavy weapons.”\textsuperscript{118}


\textsuperscript{113} RUSI, \textit{Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and Libya Operation}, 5.


\textsuperscript{115} RUSI, \textit{Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and Libya Operation}, 5-7.


\textsuperscript{117} Hallams and Schreer. “Towards a ‘post-American’ alliance? NATO burden-sharing after Libya,” 323.

\textsuperscript{118} RUSI, \textit{Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and Libya Operation}, 13. The maritime contribution was important to air power as it included the launching of missiles, gathering intelligence, providing CSAR cover and delivering personnel to the land when required.
The evidence shows that without decisive air power the NATO intervention may have been prolonged or might have even migrated into a conflict involving NATO land forces; initial diplomatic talks amongst the main protagonists, favouring the enforcement of a NFZ, emphasises their unlikely appetite to commit land forces.

Focussing more at the operational level, OUP provided several other lessons for air power: the importance of precision strike; the acute shortages of air refuelling and ISTAR assets that European alliance members’ inventories; and the importance of joint air planning and effective C2. The importance of precision strike is due to the ability to minimise collateral damage and civilian casualties whilst also reducing the potential for blue-on-blue engagements. In Libya precision strike was successful; this was significant as it resulted in the continued domestic support of the contributing nations.\textsuperscript{119} Without this support the fragility of NATO could have been further exposed thus endangering the success of the campaign.

Shortages in Europe's ability to provide sufficient air refuelling and ISTAR assets were covered by the significant contribution from US in this area. The US provided the majority of ISTAR and AWACs aircraft as well as 30 of the 40 air refuelling aircraft involved in the campaign.\textsuperscript{120} Without this contribution NATO would not have succeeded as demonstrated by the words of Admiral James Stavridis, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (NATO), "top of my list is targeting, the ability to fuse intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and produce coherent, precision targeting that does not cause collateral damage. We did a reasonable job on that but I think we could do better."\textsuperscript{121} The lesson becomes more pertinent for the RAF in light of the fact that the Service is due to lose a significant amount of its ISTAR capability from 2015 onwards.\textsuperscript{122}

The final lesson relates to the importance of the joint air planning process and C2 structures. Air operations for OUP were tasked and planned at the operational level from the CAOC in Poggio Renatico, Italy, further support was provided by other NATO CAOCs in Germany, Turkey and Denmark. At the onset of the air campaign the RAF had a minimal number of officers posted to the CAOC in Italy, although not as bad throughout the rest of Europe, there was still evidence of a reduction in the numbers of ‘airmen’ posted to NATO; in effect there had been a ‘disinvestment’ in the C2 and air planning within NATO by the RAF.\textsuperscript{123} Although this was eventually addressed it had the potential for the RAF to lose influence and the initiative at an early stage of the operation. To gain the initiative when required and maintain influence within NATO, the RAF must be mindful of

\textsuperscript{119} ibid. Up until 9 September 2011, 22,342 air sorties had been conducted of which 8390 were strike missions: NATO source.
\textsuperscript{120} Hallams and Schreer. "Towards a ‘post-American’ alliance? NATO burden-sharing after Libya," 323.
\textsuperscript{122} RUSI, Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and Libya Operation, 13.
\textsuperscript{123} ibid., 7.
its previous disinvestment in the organisation and not let manning levels fall again. Moreover, when the predominant member decides it wants somebody else to lead, it is a lot more difficult if you are not manned, trained, exercised and familiar with the planning process and C2 of the organisation.

These lessons underline the significance of air power in NATO operations and the important contribution that the RAF makes to NATO and proposes some areas where it could invest more appropriately. However, whilst advocating air power and highlighting the lack of large NATO land elements it must be remembered that air power alone does not necessarily guarantee victory\textsuperscript{124}, and that without the involvement of what in the end became a credible rebel ground force events may have reached a stalemate or in campaigning parlance, ‘a culminating point’.\textsuperscript{125}

**Linkages and Common Themes within the Case Studies**

The three case studies have provided a number of lessons that are relevant to air power and the RAF’s future investment within NATO. Some of the lessons do not provide as clear an answer or suggestion as others, which highlights the main underlying issue with lessons this being that interpretation and analysis is often subjective. The challenge of interpretation has been identified in much of the literature and is clearly evident in the majority of the US-based articles and books where the authors quite often site a lack of ‘hard data’ and statistics to base their interpretation and analysis on.\textsuperscript{126} That said, by conducting a more subjective view of the identified lessons a common linkage or theme running throughout is the importance of personnel, and with respect to the RAF, ‘air-minded’ people. Whether the lesson is the importance of precision strike; the value of integration and understanding and the weakness generated through a lack of interoperability; the significance of ISTAR and the provision of a timely, analysed and fused ISR product; or the value of training and exercising alongside alliance members and partners; at the core of these lessons are people. Moreover, the lessons support the intent of the NSS and SDSR, by confirming that UK military action will predominantly occur within either an alliance or coalition construct.

The case studies also demonstrate the inability of states to be able to accurately predict where the next battle, conflict or intervention will occur, who the adversary will be and what type of warfare it will be. The poignant words of Sir Michael Howard who stated, “no matter how clearly one thinks,
it is impossible to anticipate precisely the character of future conflict,”127 are extremely pertinent to
the 3 case studies as they illustrate that firstly, his words have proven to be true; secondly, states
and multi-national security organisations, in these examples NATO, struggle to predict with any
degree of certainty and therefore have a challenge when adapting or updating force capabilities to
remain relevant to the contemporary environment; and thirdly, the challenge of providing a broad
spectrum of adaptive capability in an fiscally ‘strangled’ environment is ever more challenging while
trying to balance defence requirements against more ‘vote popular’ policies. This is significant as it
emphasises the challenge in procuring and maintaining equipment capability that will remain
relevant to the contemporary environment and interoperable with partners, therefore, an easier
route to maintaining relevance is to use the common denominator to all forces, their people, more
effectively.

Another linkage between the case studies is the lack of significant numbers of ‘boots on the
ground’ during the early stages of each of the operations. Admittedly, with both Kosovo and
Afghanistan, NATO and partner nations did ultimately commit significant numbers of ground forces
to the operation but this was after a considerable concentrated air campaign. This highlights one
of air power’s inherent strengths, the ability to provide political leaders and NATO the coercive
effects of a military force, without having to dedicate large numbers of ground troops at an early
stage when the possibility of large numbers of casualties is high. The fact that a land or maritime
component cannot operate with any degree of effectiveness without the enabling function of
control of the air128 linked with the ability to offer politicians choice supports the importance of air
power. Furthermore, the reputation of the RAF’s ability to conduct these operations underlines the
significance of its contribution towards UK military capability and NATO. In summary, the case
studies indicate that linked to the UK’s intent, operations in the future will most probably be
conducted as part of a coalition or alliance and most probably under a NATO framework.
Furthermore, the lessons offer evidence supporting the principle that people are at the core of air
power and that they reinforce the RAF’s effectiveness and must, therefore, be at the centre of the
RAF’s future investment in NATO.

How Could the RAF Invest in NATO?

The recognition that people are at the core of the RAF’s capability is evident in the comments
made by the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) at the beginning of this paper, “airmen and women… are
at the heart of air power, not our equipment.”129 Moreover, this is not something new with

127 United Kingdom. DCDC. The Future Character of Conflict. (Shrivenham: DCDC, 2010), 2.
128 David Jordan, “Air and space warfare,” in Understanding Modern Warfare, David Jordan, James Kiras,
David Lonsdale, Ian Speller, Christopher Tuck and C. Dale Walton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2008), 220.
evidence supporting the intellect and ‘air-minded’ ability of the RAF’s personnel available back to the early days not long after its inception. An example of their aptitude is demonstrated through the clever advancement in air-defence by the Air Ministry and the RAF during the inter-war period of 1923-1939 when, “they funnelled more money and thought to strategic air defence every year between 1923 and 1939 than did any other state on earth, and invested it in the world’s best system for that purpose.”130 This shows the application and ability of ‘air-minded’ individuals within the RAF to think ahead, see the bigger picture and maintain an ‘air-view’ on defence related strategic matters. Had the RAF not contained these professional air personnel then advancement would arguably not have been made with potentially catastrophic consequences come 1939. The RAF maintains this cadre and edge today when it comes to the ability to think ‘air’ and CAS’ comments acknowledge this. With an ever tightening defence budget tough decisions have already been made about maintaining certain capabilities and further difficult choices with regard to retaining or procuring capabilities are inevitable over the next decade as the military moves towards structuring itself for Future Force 2020. Despite the fact that the numbers of RAF personnel are planned to reduce to 31500 by 2020131, the capability that these personnel provide will remain a constant and the RAF must invest in this to maintain its edge.

Although there is general support for the ‘new’ Smart Defence, the military may not be able to rely on political leaders to follow through on promises of burden and capability sharing; the example of the agreement at the 1999 Washington Summit to commit to the DCI suggests this. However, criticism of this initiative must take into account the strategic shock of 9/11 and the willingness of the US to lead other nations along with it to Afghanistan, that both contributed to pushing this to the back of political priorities. Moreover, the strategic impact of the financial crisis that then followed in 2008 again focussed states more internally on national issues to maintain domestic support. The significance of this is that Smart Defence, DCI and new Strategic Concepts are admirable in theory but often hard to achieve in full due to the fluctuation of political will and the short-term nature of domestic ‘western’ politics where internal pressures manifest themselves in the media and further drive the immediacy of politics. By understanding this and accepting that defence budgets and equipment programmes will remain difficult political areas for the military to achieve success, unless shocked into action as in the case of 9/11, then an easier win or area to invest in without necessarily huge expense is in people. The UK’s intent with regard to collective security and working within NATO is clear, however, working with the Alliance framework, especially in an operational context, brings complexity and ambiguity. Resolving this and cutting through the friction created by multiple national objectives, differing military capabilities and

political outcomes, requires the human understanding that personnel are able to provide; this further supports the argument that people should be at the core of the RAF’s investment in NATO.

Using people effectively within NATO and for the RAF to achieve return on its investment relies on establishing three core principles, the importance of relationships, mutual trust and honesty. These principles are developed through integration, liaison, coordination and interoperability, something that is as vital with people as it is at the equipment level, which all develop and breed a higher level of understanding.

With regard to integration and liaison, the investment starts with career assignments and the RAF meeting its commitment to fill NATO posts with quality, air-minded personnel. To reap the benefits personnel should be assigned for tours of a meaningful length rather than allowing what has historically happened with personnel moving at 2 years sometimes sooner; Senior Allied Commander Europe currently serves a minimum of 3 years but it is not uncommon for them to be assigned for longer durations.\(^\text{132}\) Historic RAF disinvestment in NATO CAOCs arguably hindered the planning process during the early days of the Libyan intervention\(^\text{133}\), this should not be allowed to happen again. The success of integration with between the RAF and US forces, in the form of the reciprocal and one-way exchange programme, liaison officers and specific project teams\(^\text{134}\) highlights the rewards that can be gained from this approach. However, in a ‘zero-sum’ game where it is only possible to have a finite number of personnel overseas, this may require the RAF to make some difficult decisions with where it wants to maintain the most influence. An opportunity to maintain air-minded people in the Service and motivate them to want to take a tour within NATO is through better career management and as previously mentioned, a promotion system that recognises those that perform well and rise to the challenge and responsibility that working within a joint, multinational organisation entails. Better career management has already be alluded to, and as well as allowing for longer tour lengths within NATO should encompass a greater degree of long-term planning for the individual concerned as they are generally moving overseas which requires a greater level of planning with regard to families and other personal commitments. If NATO posts are to attract the best people then they must be managed in a more positive manner; this is significant as without it the RAF will not maintain its quality personnel.

At the foundation of NATO military success are Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), doctrine and understanding, these feed in to and facilitate effective coordination, integration and interoperability. Taking these individually, TTPs are developed and underpinned through training, education, exercises and rehearsals; this is the ‘\textit{sine qua non}’\(^\text{135}\) of coalition warfare. Doctrine is

\(^{133}\) RUSI, \textit{Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and Libya Operation}, 7.
\(^{134}\) The RAF has a total of 389 personnel filling these posts: source British Embassy, Washington, D.C.
\(^{135}\) An essential condition; a thing that is absolutely necessary – Oxford English Dictionary.
the ‘military glue’ that holds an alliance together, without it integration and interoperability are hindered. The UK’s armed forces and the RAF are in a slow transition to NATO doctrine, however, there is a lead time associated with any change of practice that must be appreciated; through front-loading the contribution of personnel to NATO, the RAF could perhaps overcome this knowledge gap. Finally, understanding allows the logical and sensible application of knowledge and facilitates integration and is formed through liaison, integration, building relationships, mutual trust and honesty.

Interoperability and coordination can be addressed through regularly training and exercising with Alliance members, this has been on the decline over the last decade due to commitments in Afghanistan and previously Iraq, although fortuitously interventions like Libya offer the opportunity to operate with Alliance members and evaluate interoperability. The government’s recent commitment to a major live exercise in 2015 is commendable but full participation will depend on the withdrawal from Afghanistan remaining on schedule and no additional operational commitment. Moreover, for the RAF it is likely that several force elements, in particular air transport, ISTAR and logistics, will remain committed until the very end of the UK’s complete withdrawal from theatre and may therefore reduce their ability to participate. One possibility to improve interoperability and integration, build relationships and perhaps provide a small amount of additional strategic lift capacity would be to invest in the NATO Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC).136 The RAF air transport force is facing a period of transition between old and new platforms with the inevitable delay to full operational capability that a new aircraft invariably encounters. Furthermore, some aircraft are exceeding their scheduled fatigue life through the operational commitment to Iraq and Afghanistan resulting in a shortage of airframe availability. This has resulted in a significant reduction in flying hours and a decrease in the number of crews across the force. This drawdown could possibly be managed by committing to the SAC and assigning personnel to this 18 nation initiative, however, the introduction to service of the A400M by seven NATO members will also go some way to improving interoperability.

One of the major issues regarding interoperability is the plethora of organizations established to improve and address concerns.137 Paradoxically these may serve to hinder interoperability by encroaching on each other’s work, adding a level of complexity and ambiguity, which could lead to confusion and cross-contamination with many of the audiences. The demand on the RAF to provide its acknowledged expertise and experience to these forums challenges the RAF in providing continuity of attendance to assist in a consistent narrative. Moreover, with reducing manpower the RAF may be faced with the dilemma of having to choose which forums to attend.

137 Interoperability organisations and forums that the RAF contributes to include, the Multinational Interoperability Council, All Partners Access Network (although the UK is not a strategic partner within this network), Air and Space Interoperability Council, European Air Group and NATO interoperability committees.
As the RAF faces the challenge of continuing to remain at the forefront of NATO air power it may have to make the decision of where it invests its manpower and if it is genuine about its commitment to NATO then some difficult decisions may need to be taken.

Conclusion

The threat from the spread of communist ideology linked to the concerns of the rise of national militarism led to the signing of the Washington Treaty in April 1949 by 12 nations from North America and Western Europe. Ensuring its political and strategic objectives were met, the UK was one of the driving forces behind its creation. This marked the beginning of NATO or the ‘Alliance’ and with it the foundations for what would arguably become the most successful and powerful collective defence alliance in the world. At its core was the mutual support that Article 5 gave its members; the principal behind Article 5 being, that an attack against one nation would be viewed as an attack against them all. Geopolitics and geo-economics are the drivers for what occurs in the world and have consequently shaped NATO since its formation. Taking geopolitics first, during the Cold War the Alliance was faced with a bipolar world-order and there was a sense of certainty or inevitability in what happened. The end of the Cold War, although momentous, challenged NATO forcing it to adapt to remain relevant and to justify its existence; this it did but the journey has not been without its detractors. Now there is uncertainty linked to strategic shocks, asymmetry and the introduction of new types of threat conducted by less traditional non-state actors; for example the proxy nature of cyber-warfare, and perhaps new environments, very few were able to predict accurately the tumultuous events of Libya in 2011. Turning to geo-economics, there is now a flow away from traditional markets with a gradual movement towards Asia and the Far-East, does this present an opportunity or a threat? The fiscally constrained environment is also causing traditional military heavyweights to look very closely at their force structures and spending and make difficult choices to maintain domestic support. Additionally, the perception of threat and managing the risk of that threat is interpreted differently by states making Alliance management and cohesion more of a challenge. Whichever way it is viewed, NATO has had to adapt and address these political and economic drivers. It has done this by modifying its mission statement or in Alliance parlance, its Strategic Concept and by asking member nations to conduct ‘Smart Defence’ in the face of reducing defence budgets and differing threat perceptions.

The UK government has remained steadfast in its commitment to collective defence and security and politically and militarily places NATO at the core of its strategic planning. This is confirmed through both the NSS and the output from the last defence review in October 2010. The commitment to NATO is acknowledged by the UK’s armed forces and is in evidence daily through its continued operational endeavours around the world. However, despite these promising overtures there has been an acknowledged disinvestment within NATO in particular from a
personnel perspective. For the RAF this became evident during the Libya intervention, that despite being a success, uncovered several areas for improvement. The Chief of the Defence Staff has written to the 3 Service Chiefs with his direction with regard to personnel in NATO; the intent is clear, NATO must be filled 100%.

In addition to the analysis of the Libyan intervention, 2 further case studies Kosovo and Afghanistan serve to demonstrate several key points. They emphasise the unpredictability of conflict, that NATO must remain alive to this and that the UK’s future operational commitments are likely to occur under an Alliance of coalition framework. They also highlight a definite shift towards a growing role for air power in all operations, this is clearly demonstrated in David Johnson’s remarks in *Learning Large Lessons*, where he states that, “across the cases examined… air power showed growing levels of effectiveness and robustness and played commensurately growing role.”138 The case studies also identified numerous lessons that were relevant to air power and the RAF relating to coordination, integration, interoperability and liaison. Identifying these is important as throughout there is a common theme of the significance of ‘air-minded’ professionals to underpin effective air power. Using these people more appropriately is important as it enables them to build relationships and mutual trust with others within the Alliance; the importance of managing relationships across defence is vital and creates a critical advantage, failure to manage them correctly will result in a significant disadvantage especially in light of the UK’s preference of working within an alliance or ad-hoc coalition under the umbrella of a NATO framework.

Air power provides government’s with political choice and is vital in allowing other components the freedom to perform joint action; effective air power is supported and underpinned by ‘air-minded’ professional people who ensure the delivery of the capability. Accepting that burden-sharing is unlikely, or at best, will be limited139 if the RAF is to invest more appropriately in NATO it must build on the acknowledgement that “airmen and airwomen are at the core of air power,”140 and gain immediate return on its investment through using its people.

LETTER FROM CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF TO SERVICE CHIEFS REGARDING UK MANNING LEVELS IN NATO

D/CDS/1/1/2

13 Jun 12

CNS
CGS
CAS

Copy to:
Service Secs
DS Sec

UK MANNING LEVELS IN NATO

1. The decision was taken at the Lisbon Summit to review and transform the NATO Command Structure (NCS) into a more effective, efficient and lean organisation that is able to respond and adapt to future global security challenges. Following months of negotiations, the implementation of the new NCS has begun, commencing with the agreement of the Flags-to-Post allocation at the Chiefs of Defence Conference on 26th April. This allocation has the UK well positioned with 19 stars in a broad spectrum of appointments.

2. As one of the key proponents of NATO transformation, and having been vocal in ensuring that efficiency of the new structure has primacy over political considerations, I have pushed for staff numbers to be driven down to an absolute minimum. Ministers have consequently signed up to the position that, to be effective, the new organisation must be 100% manned. For us that means approximately 700 posts and PR12 gives us the resource and liability to achieve this figure.

3. As our Armed Forces are been transformed in the wake of SDSR and other Allies adapt to the constraints of the global economy, NATO and collective defence will become increasingly relevant to the UK. We are now negotiating for positions of influence at every level of the NATO command structure that will allow the UK to remain at the forefront of NATO strategic and operational policy and planning.
4. I look to each of you to ensure that, once the NATO establishments have been finalised, the UK’s allocated posts are fully manned with appropriately qualified, high-calibre personnel. NATO is becoming an increasingly demanding and complex environment but perceptions still exist of NATO tours being the easy option for our less talented individuals. We need to work hard to change that perception and employ quality staff officers in appropriate and rewarding posts.

5. I understand that Air Marshal Harper, the UKMILREP, has already engaged with single Service Secretaries highlighting many of my concerns and has gained endorsement for a more comparable reporting structure with UK based personnel, ensuring that tours within NATO are seen as serious career development opportunities. For the good of our reputation and the future of the Alliance this is an approach that I fully endorse.

CDS
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