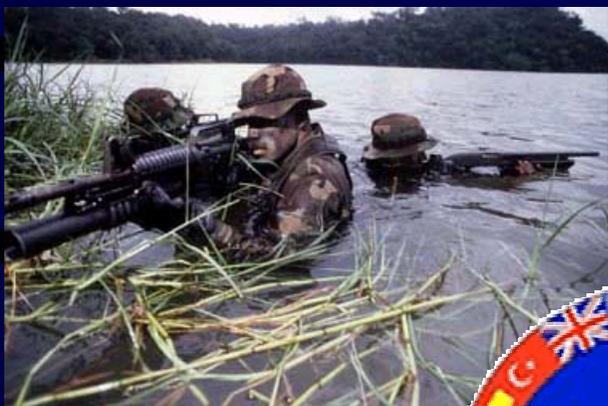


SHARPENING THE TIP OF THE SPEAR: The NATO Response Force



By: Daniel J. Mahaffee



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Dan Mahaffee's monograph is an outstanding summary of where NATO is today, the changes in the making, and opportunities for the future. It is well written and is filled with much detail, making it an excellent reference paper for those reading and writing about national security.

Mr. Mahaffee served with great distinction as an intern and research assistant with this Center in the summer of 2003. He selected NATO as his research project, due to the expanding transformations of the Alliance currently taking place.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Abshire".

David Abshire
President
Center for the Study of the Presidency
Former Ambassador to NATO

The NATO Response Force: Sharpening the Tip of the Spear

DANIEL J. MAHAFFEE

“Rapidity is the essence of war: take advantage of the enemy's unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack unguarded spots...Appear at points which the enemy must hasten to defend; march swiftly to places where you are not expected. ”

-Sun Tzu, The Art of War

“If NATO does not have a force that is quick and agile, that can deploy in days or weeks rather than months or years then it will not have capabilities to offer the world in the 21st Century. ”¹

-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

The greatest military alliance in modern history proved its greatness by never having to fight the war it was intended for. Formed as a response to Soviet expansion, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, has brought together the free nations of Europe and North America for mutual defense since 1947. Today, Western Europe no longer faces the specter of a Communist invasion and Eastern Europe no longer lives under the iron grip of totalitarian rule. The challenge NATO now faces is no longer across the Fulda Gap.² The threat of the 21st Century is much more uncertain. Terrorist groups and rogue nations do not use tanks, ships, or fighter jets to carry out their offensives. Anthrax, box cutters, and civilian airliners are their weapons, and the results have been catastrophic. Unstable nations are the petri dishes for terror, and the free nations of North America and Europe will soon be able to respond to the shadowy,

¹ Quoted from *The New York Times*, “Rumsfeld Urges NATO to Set Up Strike Force,” Steven Erlanger. September 25, 2002

² The geographic feature along the border between East and West Germany formed by the Fulda River that stretches westward towards Frankfurt. This was considered by many military planners to be the likely axis of a Soviet invasion into Western Europe.

ephemeral threat of international terror and instability. The NATO Response Force, a well equipped, easily deployable military force that can be ready in weeks if not days, for peacekeeping and anti-terror operations, will revolutionize the position of the alliance in world affairs because relevance in the 21st Century will not be found in the size of a force, but in the speed of a response.

TOO HEAVY FOR TODAY

NATO's military structure during the Cold War was one of rigidity. The objective was to repel a Soviet invasion of Western Europe through the use of technologically superior, pre-positioned units, and if the situation deteriorated beyond conventional responses, tactical nuclear weapons. Heavy armor, such as the American M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tank (MBT), the German Leopard 2 MBT, the French LeClerc MBT and the British Challenger MBT were the backbone for the defense of Europe. These tanks weigh an average of roughly 125,000 pounds.³ Transporting these tanks by air is an extremely inefficient process due to their large size. The largest cargo aircraft in the world is the Antonov An-124 "Condor." The largest cargo aircraft among NATO nations is the Lockheed C-5 Galaxy. These aircraft have cargo capacities of 330,700 pounds and 261,000 pounds, respectively.⁴ This allows for two tanks per aircraft, and since the average armored division has about two hundred to three hundred tanks, this makes airlift operations an extremely lethargic process. Also, the inventories of active C-5's number about seventy, with an additional twenty in reserve.⁵ The most plentiful NATO transports, the C-17 Globemaster III and the C-130 Hercules have cargo capacities of 169,000 pounds and 38,000 pounds, respectively.⁶ Thus, the aircraft with the greatest availability can only carry one tank or none at all. This does not include the fuel, ammunition, personnel, and support equipment that also must accompany a fighting force. Continuing the logistical problems, the range of a C-5 decreases by fifty percent

³ Averages are used because a NATO force would consist of equipment from various nations. Individual weights: Abrams = 120,251lbs., Challenger = 137,789 lbs., LeClerc = 120,152 lbs., Leopard 2 = 121,585 lbs. Christopher F. Foss. *Jane's Tanks and Combat Vehicles Recognition Guide* 2nd Edition 2000

⁴ Endres & Gething. *Jane's Aircraft Recognition Guide* 3rd Edition 2003. 29, 459

⁵ "C-5 Galaxy" <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/c-5-specs.htm>

⁶ Endres & Gething. *Jane's Aircraft Recognition Guide* 3rd Edition 2003. 434, 462

when fully laden. Therefore, more midair refueling is necessary, increasing the number of aircraft needed.

Sealift also proves inadequate for the conflicts of today. Situations arise rapidly around the world, far too rapidly for the slow pace of moving equipment by ship. Upon arrival, the forces are also hamstrung by the capacity of the port to handle cargo. In the 2003 Iraq War, the US Fourth Infantry Division (4ID), equipped with the most modern Abrams tanks and Apache helicopters, was not able to take part in the major combat operations of the war. Due to the diplomatic disaster with NATO ally Turkey, the 4ID had to sail from its planned theater of operations in Turkey and Northern Iraq to Kuwait and Southern Iraq. This roundabout route required passage through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and around the Arabian Peninsula. This detour took about ten days, but when the 4ID arrived, on April 2, 2003, it would take three weeks for the offloading and assembly of the helicopters and tanks.⁷ However, on April 2, 2003, the US Third Infantry Division (3ID) and the US First Marine Expeditionary Force (1st MEF) were on the outskirts of Baghdad. In one week, the world would watch as the statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down in the streets of Baghdad.⁸ The 4ID stayed on the sidelines during major combat because of sealift constraints. Heavy units have proven their lack of rapid mobility in wartime situations.

HISTORY OF RAPID RESPONSE

The NATO Response Force, or NRF, will reflect the need for rapid, self-supporting military force that can respond to threats around the world. The idea of such a force began in the 1960's when the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (AMF) was created. This unit was a multinational force at the disposal of the Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR) that could demonstrate the solidarity of the alliance. Following the end of the Cold War, there was tension between the "Atlanticists" and the "Europeanists" who made up the alliance. The "Atlanticists" wanted NATO to be transformed into a dominant security force that would go beyond a strictly defensive

⁷ "High-Tech 4th Infantry Weeks Away From War." Burt Herman, *Associated Press*. April 2, 2003

⁸ "Iraq War Timeline" http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_Iraq_war_timeline.

posture and operate around the world. The “Europeanists” wanted to maintain NATO, but push for an independent defense policy controlled by the European Union. Compromise was found in the creation of Combined Joint Task Forces in 1993, which allowed for military operations outside of the alliance defense strategy while also allowing the creation of a Western European military identity.⁹ The idea of rapid response was continued with the formation of the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) in 1992. This multinational force was deployed as the Implementation Force, or IFOR, in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was then used following the Kosovo Campaign to provide ground forces.

The Bush (43) Administration made the creation of the NATO Response Force a priority. The creation of such a force gained new impetus following the attacks of September 11th and the invocation of Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty, indicating that the attacks of September 11th were an attack on all NATO nations. The importance of a NATO Response Force to US strategy is found in the so-called “Bush Doctrine:”

NATO’s core mission—collective defense of the transatlantic alliance of democracies —remains, but NATO must develop new structures and capabilities to carry out that mission under new circumstances. NATO must build a capability to field, at short notice, highly mobile, specially trained forces whenever they are needed to respond to a threat against any member of the alliance. The alliance must be able to act wherever our interests are threatened, creating coalitions under NATO’s own mandate, as well as contributing to mission-based coalitions.¹⁰

Strategists on both sides of the Atlantic saw the need for a force that could respond to the threat of terrorist groups and rouge nations as well as the instability caused by civil war and humanitarian crises. The creation of the NATO Response Force began at the Prague Summit in September 2002 when NATO ministers unanimously voted for a rapid

⁹ NATO Fact Sheets. “The Combined Joint Task Forces Concept.”
<http://www.nato.int/docu/facts/2000/cjtf-con.htm>

¹⁰ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. September 2002. Sec. 8, Para. 3

response capability. They called for the force to “have its initial operational capability as soon as possible, but not later than October 2004.”¹¹ NATO has now set the framework for the NRF.

EUROPEAN SHORTFALLS

The creation of such a Rapid Reaction Force will be a challenge. European defense capabilities have declined rapidly since the end of the Cold War. From 1980 to 1984, Germany spent 3.3 percent of GDP on defense; in the same period, France spent four percent of GDP. In 2002, Germany spent 1.5 percent of GDP on defense, and France spent 2.5 percent.¹² The decline in European capabilities was seen in the Kosovo Campaign in 1999. The editorial staff of *The Financial Times* summed up their concerns as NATO leaders met in Washington during the Kosovo Campaign:

[NATO's] new strategic concept, to be unveiled at today's Washington summit, was supposed to declare Europe a fully-paid up member of the international defence community. Britain, France and Germany would stand ready to put out the fires in their own backyard.

Now look at what's happening in Kosovo. There are British Harriers and German Tornados in the skies over Belgrade. And there are French, even a few Belgian, troops in Macedonia. But the political purpose of these forces counts for infinitely more than any military capability. Once again, the US is fighting Europe's war.

The air campaign depends entirely on American fighters and cruise missiles, on Washington's command and communications facilities, and on its intelligence input. Take those assets away and no amount of moral outrage in London, Paris and Berlin would halt Mr Milosevic's terror. As for ground forces, Europe's leaders cannot whisper a word until Mr

¹¹ DeYoung and Richburg. “NATO Approves New Direction...” *The Washington Post*. November 22, 2002

¹² “Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence” NATO Press Release M-DPC-2 (2002) 139 December 20, 2002

Clinton is ready to send in the marines.¹³

During the Kosovo Campaign, American aircraft made up eighty percent of the combat force while almost the entire airlift and intelligence was American as well. Among the European nations, France and Great Britain contributed fifty percent of the combat aircraft, but French pilots flew only eight percent of all combat sorties.¹⁴ European forces are also hamstrung by their lack of stealth aircraft and precision-guided munitions (PGM). In the missions performed by the Royal Air Force during Kosovo, the accuracy rate for their bombing runs was forty percent.¹⁵ Most of the Europeans could not participate in missions that were considered high-risk or that required low collateral damage.¹⁶ The creation of the NATO Response Force must improve the PGM capabilities of the European members' air forces.

European airlift capabilities are sorely lacking as well. The European Union announced the creation of its Rapid Reaction Force, even though the United States provides fifty-five of the 144 capabilities European troops have to be transported using charter aircraft from Russia or other former Soviet states. Both the airworthiness of these aircraft and the training of their crews are questionable, as there have been several catastrophic crashes, the most recent being the death of sixty-two Spanish peacekeepers when their Ukrainian Yak-42 crashed in Turkey.¹⁷ Unfortunately, addressing the airlift shortfalls has been mired in budgetary constraints as well as the European desire for indigenous defense industries. Ian Duncan Smith, then Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, a member of the British House of Commons, testified before the House Committee on International Relations that:

The German Government has even suggested that a joint air transport command could be established so that European air transport assets could

¹³ "Dark Continent" *The Financial Times*. April 23, 1999

¹⁴ Jeffrey Gedmin, "A Yawning gap on defense: We should care about Europe's weapons," *The Washington Times*, December 8, 1999

¹⁵ Michael Smith. "EU Force 'Operational' Despite Relying on US." *The Daily Telegraph*. December 15, 2001

¹⁶ Ian Duncan Smith, M.P. Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, House of Commons. *Testimony Before the House Committee on International Relations*. November 10, 1999

¹⁷ "Turkey Air Crash Kills Spanish Troops." *BBC News*. May 26, 2003

be pooled. However these ideas seem to be driven by German recognition that its budget is failing. The German attitude seems to be not to spend more money on defence unless someone else does it for them. It was also interesting that the German government's announcement made no reference to possible acquisition of a US built aircraft. It was evident that Europeans preferred to talk about a not yet built European aircraft, or a Russian aircraft with limited capability, rather than consider turning to the US to meet this urgently needed heavy lift requirement. Germany's announcement came in the wake of an austerity package introduced by Hans Eichel, Germany's finance minister. This will cut about £6.2bn [\$9.9 billion] from the defense budget over the next four years. [1999-2003]¹⁸

Germany continues to starve its defense budget, which in turn hurts the overall European defense budget. Germany has cut its order of the Airbus A-400M, the first European airlift project, bringing into question the future of the already delayed program. German Defense Minister Peter Stuck justified the cuts by saying, "the scenario that our country will be attacked from beyond its borders is no longer realistic." Other European nations see the A-400M as being vital to their future defense as well as international standing, but Germany's order reduction has brought the total number ordered down to 180, with Airbus saying that 200 needed to be built for the program to be feasible. The Airbus A-400M is a step in the right direction for the European nations, but with the program delayed until 2009 and the plane only on the computer screen; its future is questionable.¹⁹

THE SHAPE OF THE NATO RESPONSE FORCE

The NRF plans call a strength of roughly 20,000 persons but if the plan for force rotation is implemented, it could have up to 60,000 persons (20,000 per rotation).

¹⁸ Ian Duncan Smith, M.P. Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, House of Commons. *Testimony Before the House Committee on International Relations*. November 10, 1999

¹⁹ Eaglesham and Simonian. "German Budget Pressure Hits EU Defence Projects." *The Financial Times*. December 6, 2002

Command and control of the NRF would probably fall under the existing Combined Joint Task Force (CJTS), a NATO command modeled on the US Joint Task Force concept. Unlike the current CJTS, a permanent structure with dedicated staff will be necessary to meet the requirement for a five-day response time. The NRF command structure would control three elements: land, air, and maritime.

LAND

Plans call for a brigade-sized formation, with logistical units that will allow it to operate in almost any situation, no matter what the geographic features. Lighter, more mobile units will probably make up the NRF, as opposed to the heavy armored divisions in the ARRC. The US Army's Stryker Combat vehicle provides an excellent example of the lighter, air-mobile armored force. Four Strykers can be carried in the C-17 and even the C-130 can carry one Stryker, allowing forces to arrive on the battlefield quicker than ever before.²⁰ European forces are also creating lighter units that would be part of the NRF. The Multi-Role Armored Vehicle, or MRAV, is being developed as a joint venture between France, Germany, and the Netherlands. It consists of a modular design, where mission oriented "packages," such as a command post, a combat ambulance, and a personnel carrier, are loaded onto a common vehicle and can be changed within an hour.²¹ The vehicle can operate independently of the package thus allowing for separate airlift and mobility. This highly mobile force is integral to a NRF. The most difficult part of creating a land force will be the balance between combat units (infantry and armor) and support units (air defense, artillery, Special Forces, etc.). Units with extensive peacekeeping experience will be important for any humanitarian or pacification operations that the NRF will conduct. Canadian and French forces have extensive peacekeeping experience around the world. Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons defense units, such as those operated by Czech and Polish units, will also be part of any

²⁰ "Stryker 8-Wheel Drive Armoured Combat Vehicles." *Army Technology*.
<http://www.army-technology.com/projects/stryker/>

²¹ "Boxer MRAV Wheeled Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle" *Army Technology*,
<http://www.army-technology.com/projects/mrav/index.html>

NRF, along with medical, civil affairs, and psychological operations units.²² These units have not yet developed the deployable capability that other forces have.

AIR

The air wing will consist of rapidly deployable fighter and strike aircraft. Close air support aircraft will be integral, considering the fact that the NRF will be using lighter armor and infantry units. A-10's, F-16's, AC-130's will provide battlefront close air support. The use of PGMs will be extremely important for the NRF operations as well as all weather capabilities. Modernization of the European air forces will be necessary to accommodate this requirement and will be a great leap forward for the NRF. American strategic bomber forces, such as the B-2 and B-52, will be important to the NRF to provide powerful aerial bombardment. E-3 Awacs units already deployed under joint NATO command will provide command and control for air sorties. Mid-air refueling will also be necessary to provide the range necessary to respond out of area. Strategic airlift and logistical units will transport and support the NRF, and calls are being made for a dedicated strategic airlift capability rapidly deploy the NRF, however this cannot be conducted using entirely American aircraft, thus addressing the European transport shortfalls will be necessary.²³

SEA

The naval capabilities of the NRF are by far the most interoperable, yet they have the farthest to go to meet planning expectations. The NRF plan calls for a force ranging up to a carrier battle group with surface, subsurface, and logistical vessels.²⁴ The carrier would most likely be an American *Nimitz*-class carrier, but for smaller operations the French *DeGaulle*-class or British *Invincible*-class carriers would be suitable. The carriers would be useful for constant close air support, particularly in regions where airbases or overflight rights are scarce. Amphibious operations would be extremely important for

²² Mariano and Wilson. "NATO Response Force." *Strategic Insight*. April, 2003.

²³ Ibid.

landing forces in a trouble spot. Amphibious aircraft carrier units, such as the *Wasp*-class landing craft, as well as the new Italian *Andria Doria*, an aircraft carrier that combines the capabilities of a fleet carrier with the capability for amphibious landings.²⁵ Strategic sealift would be useful if heavy units, but large amounts of pre-positioning would be necessary to provide the rapidity necessary for the NRF.

NATO planners are optimistic that the land aspects could come together in the not too distant future, probably by 2004-2005. The current SACEUR envisions not only a rapid implementation, but also a force beyond what is currently planned:

The NATO Response Force should have three parts to it. The first part, namely a truly expeditionary capability, should be put together quickly in response to the Prague decisions. Such a force could be formed out of units that already exist in the Alliance with niche capabilities. It should be an integrated force with air, land and sea capabilities, all of which already exist in the Alliance and are, in principle, already bought and paid for. It should have a headquarters. It should have a training centre and it should be credible, capable and sustainable, if and when we decide to use it. The good news is that it's not terribly difficult to put together such a force. We are hoping to be able to announce a framework under which that force will operate by the June meeting of NATO defence ministers and to have some operating capability by the fall of this year.

The second part of the NATO Response Force is for use in case the first part is not sufficient for a task. I characterise this force as being more deployable than expeditionary, a little more robust, a little slower to get in theatre, perhaps, but once it has arrived, it has the capability to take on a lot of tasks. The third part is for use in case of a major regional conflict where you need the totality of the force. The simple geometry of a triangular NATO Response Force with an expeditionary force at the top, a

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Robert Hutchinson. *Jane's Warships Recognition Guide*. 3rd Edition 2003

deployable force in the middle and a follow-on force at the bottom seems logical both in terms of effective use of resources and the readiness factors of each of the tiers. We'll have to make sure, above all, that the NATO Response Force is credible and that it is not just something that appears impressive on paper.²⁶

What kind of situation would the NRF play a roll in? The creation of the NRF calls for a force that can conduct traditional military missions, offensive and defensive deployments, as well as missions such as non-combatant evacuation operations or peacekeeping deployments. The following is a look at how the NRF would respond the mission of peacekeeping in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

SCENARIO: PEACE FOR THE HOLY LAND

The hopes for peace in the Middle East stand in tatters as groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad continue their attacks against Israel. The Palestinian security forces are unable to dismantle the terrorist structure and continued attacks by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) only result in terrorist reprisals. The calls grow louder each day for international peacekeepers as the news channels show images of bloody streets and dead civilians on both sides of the conflict. The UN Security Council meets in an emergency session to discuss the crisis and calls for international intervention. The UN force will be unable to respond until the various nations can provide the necessary equipment. It will take at least a month before the force can even start. The North Atlantic Council meets and unanimously votes to deploy the NATO Response Force to pave the way for a larger UN peacekeeping force.

American C-17s and European A-400Ms take off from bases throughout Europe to deploy in the Middle East. The *USS John C. Stennis*, part of the US Sixth Fleet is tasked, along with its carrier battle group to serve as the offshore command center. The *HMS Invincible*, with her FA-2 Sea Harriers will provide the close air support as the NATO teams will enter the Palestinian cities and refugee camps to take out the terrorist

²⁶ "Interview: Gen. James L. Jones, SACEUR" *NATO Review*. Spring 2003

infrastructure. The French *Jeanne d'Arc*, a helicopter carrier, will ferry peacekeepers and strike units throughout the theater of operations. The British Special Air Service, with extensive counterterror experience in Northern Ireland, Delta Force, the elite US Army force, and GSG-9 the German counterterror force are tasked to apprehend or kill the leaders of the terrorist groups. Canada, with peacekeeping knowledge dating back to the Suez Crisis of the 1950's, will provide the majority of the ground forces along with major contribution from the United States, France, and Great Britain.

Styker combat teams are used to provide a show of force as they are offloaded at Gaza International Airport. These armored units will provide cover as the peacekeepers enter the refugee camps as well as serving as patrol vehicles along the border between Israel and Palestine. Light armored units and military police would work to restore order in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Civil affairs units and engineering battalions would work to improve life in the Palestinian cities as well. The initial force would pave the way for a larger peacekeeping and reconstruction force, one that could create a viable Palestinian state.

CONCLUSION: AN ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Alliances throughout history could never react to changes in the geopolitical landscape, thus dooming themselves to irrelevance, or worse yet forcing themselves towards war. However, NATO now shaking off the dust from the Cold War and moving towards relevance for the 21st Century. NATO has the opportunity to prove that effective, multilateral institutions can still find a role in the age of terrorism and instability. The NATO alliance will allow America to work with its history allies, partners in democracy, who share the same values and principles. NATO will help bring European military capabilities that will allow America to truly work with a coalition, not simply a charter. Regardless of our differences on certain issues, peace and prosperity are in the interest of both sides of the Atlantic. NATO has maintained both for the past fifty years. NATO will maintain both for the next fifty years.

RESOURCES:

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