

'Central Enterprise' proves crucial function of NATO's air defense

by Michael Liebig and Dean Andromidas

On June 7-14, NATO held its annual air force exercise, Central Enterprise '89, in Central Europe, for NATO's Central Region participants. The exercise included the air forces of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and the West Germany-based air forces of the United States and United Kingdom. The French air force also participated, although France is not a part of the NATO integrated military command. With over 800 sorties flown, the main purpose of Central Enterprise '89 was the exercise of the interoperability of NATO's national tactical air forces on the Central Front.

This year's exercise took place within days of President Bush's proposals for a 15% cut in American troops and NATO aircraft, whose implementation could devastate Western European defense. The shadow of "Gorbymania" that has darkened the West was accentuated when the NATO-organized press tour that *EIR* joined had to be inexplicably rerouted from one air base to another. To our surprise, we read in the newspaper the following day that the purpose of our little detour was to facilitate the arrival of Gen. B.V. Snetkov, the Commander of the Group of Soviet Forces in the West, to land at Heidelberg Military Airfield for a surprise meeting with Gen. Crosbie E. Saint, Commander of U.S. Army-Europe based in Heidelberg, the first such meeting held in 12 years. The Soviet general was met with the kind of pomp usually reserved for returning heroes or movie stars, complete with brass bands and little girls throwing bouquets of flowers.

Central Enterprise is this year's first large-scale NATO exercise and could very well be the only one, now that President Bush has called off the Autumn Reforger exercise as well as the large American corps-level exercises. *EIR* had the opportunity to join a press tour organized by the press office of NATO's Second and Fourth Allied Tactical Air Forces. Our observation of this year's Central Enterprise forced us to take a closer look at the implications of President Bush's proposals for a 15% cut in NATO aircraft for the defense of Europe's Central Region. The proposals promise to accomplish what many military policymakers had feared, that is, applying the "bean count" methodology of strategic missile talks to theater and tactical forces. According to *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, the proposals would envision a 15% cut in NATO's current levels of aircraft and would cut

Warsaw Pact forces to the reduced level of NATO's. In other words, the Warsaw Pact would have to cut 3,400 more aircraft and 3,200 more helicopters. While one might see these figures as a bargain, the proposal has been made with utter disregard of such key factors as NATO's strategy, geographical considerations, and the psychological and political impact of American withdrawals on the European political world.

Bean counts or military doctrine

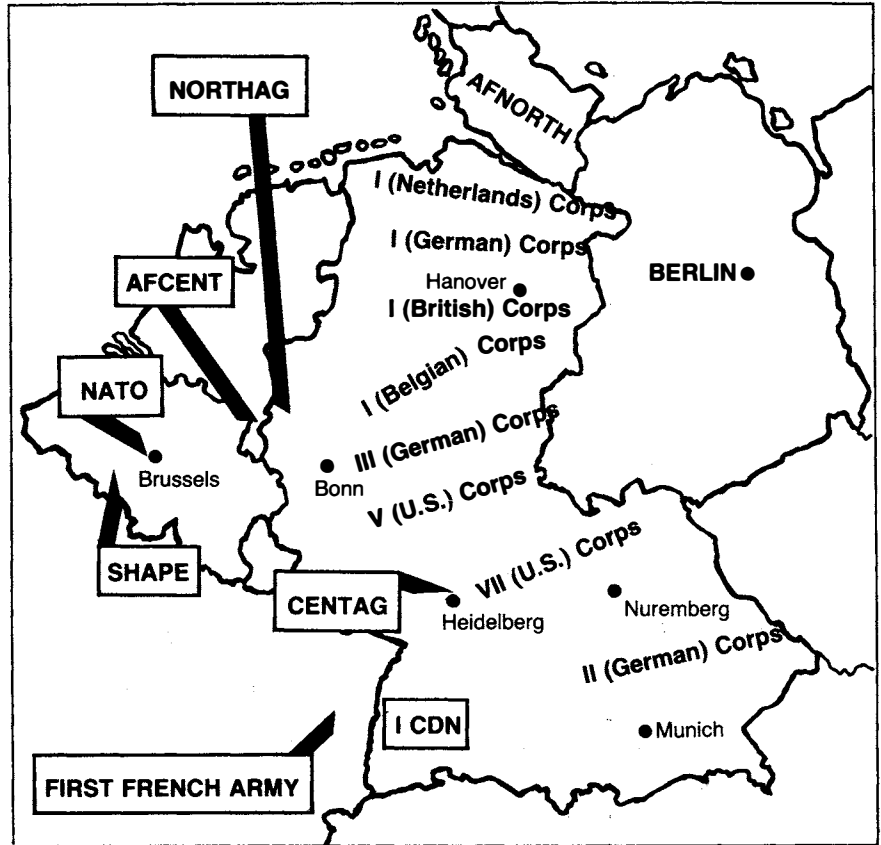
The more alarming aspect of Bush's proposals is that they serve as a smokescreen for real and contemplated withdrawals from Europe, dictated by the administration's commitment to disengage from Western Europe irrespective of the outcome of the conventional arms control talks taking place in Vienna.

According to rumors circulating in the June 5 issue of *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, much of the 15% cut in U.S. forces will occur, regardless of arms control talks, when the fiscal 1990 defense budget is implemented. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney has already slashed the F-15E project, which was aimed at upgrading the American F-15 Eagle into a dual-capable fighter for both air defense and tactical bombing. It had been a project undertaken especially for the needs of the European theater. It is already mooted that the 72 F-16s scheduled to be withdrawn from Spain will, in fact, be brought back to the United States rather than being relocated to Italy as planned.

Cheney's proposals have set the stage for other budget-cutting tendencies in Western Europe as well. The Federal Republic of Germany has canceled proposed upgrades of existing aircraft, such as its F4-G Phantom interceptors and ground attack Alpha jets, and the crucial European Fighter Aircraft project, a joint program by the British, West Germans, Italians, and Spanish to develop a new fighter interceptor, is also being put into doubt.

A press conference given by U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. R. Olsen, Chief of Staff of NATO's Fourth Allied Tactical Air Force, gave little reassurance on the issue of American cuts. Replying to a question on President Bush's proposals, he said that "No changes in deployments have been put forward yet," but later admitted that he "would suspect there would be some cuts" as a result of reductions in the 1990 defense budget.

MAP 1
**NATO forces in
 Central Europe**



This point is reinforced by the complete absence of discussion on how such reductions would affect military strategy and doctrine. For instance, one criterion put forth as a basis for determining reductions is age of aircraft. Retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. David C. Jones (USAF), predicted that the first candidates would be the aging American A-10 Thunderbolts and the West German F-4 Phantoms. The problem with this is that the elimination of the A-10 would leave American ground forces in West Germany with no close air support, and the elimination of Germany's F-4s would leave West German forces without any air defense! It should be remembered that General Jones headed the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President Jimmy Carter and advocates American disengagement from Western Europe, which is the real purpose that lies behind such proposals.

By contrast, the Soviet arms control initiatives are clearly conceived and well coordinated with their changing military doctrine and strategic goals. The Soviet cuts in troop strength and equipment allow them to rationalize their armed forces structure coherently with a new evolving Soviet military doctrine. Their much-touted "defensive military doctrine" is, in fact, a war-winning strategy based on a "leaner, meaner"

force structure that allows for an extremely rapid mobilization capability.

This new doctrine will have a strong impact on air war. While implementing their new doctrine, the Soviets would be more than prepared to shed many hundreds of aging MiG-21s and other, less effective aircraft they have kept in their inventory. In fact, the Soviets have been deploying new aircraft that go a long way toward closing the technology gap. Highly capable aircraft, such as the MiG-29, have been widely deployed among Soviet forces based in the Western Strategic Theater facing NATO and are now being deployed into the air forces of East Germany and Czechoslovakia as well. Also, greater numbers of the highly capable SU-27 Flanker fighter-bomber and the SU-25 Frogfoot ground support fighter have been deployed. The Soviets also maintain a large inventory of Backfire bombers, capable of long-range strike missions.

Furthermore the Soviets are developing far greater air defense capabilities, including the deployment of the IL-76, their version of the Boeing 707 AWACS airborne early warning system, and far denser surface-to-air missile defense systems, aimed at freeing their air defense aircraft for supporting offensive air operations. In this regard, it should be noted

that the Soviets have refused to include aircraft of their Air Defense Forces in the conventional arms control talks in Vienna. These are among the most advanced aircraft in the Soviet inventory, such as the MiG-31. These aircraft, like the rest of the Soviet forces in Russia, can be very easily concentrated against NATO, whose German-German border lies only 650 kilometers away, compared to over 6,000 kilometers separating the United States from continental Europe.

The Soviet arms control proposals are aimed at undermining NATO's unity, resolve, and technological edge. The Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty which eliminated the extremely effective Pershing II and cruise missiles while signaling American disengagement from Western Europe, was a case in point.

Conventional arms control talks are moving in the same direction. Now that Bush has stated his intention to negotiate a reduction of both troop strengths and aircraft, he has crossed the line the Soviets have been demanding. Unlike the Americans, the Soviets will not negotiate agreements based simply on numbers or age of aircraft, but on capabilities, including NATO's reinforcement and tactical capabilities, particularly the penetration and interdiction capabilities of NATO's air forces.

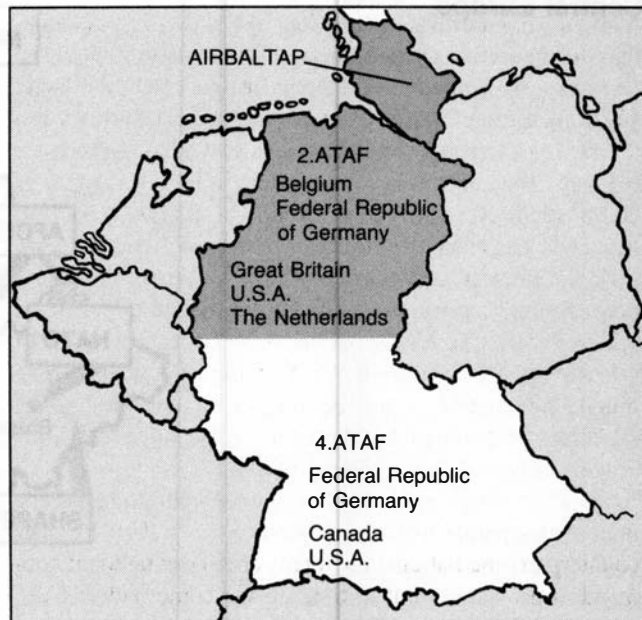
With the help of their friends in the West, the Soviets are working to create the political climate for these reductions. For over a year, the peace movement and left and liberal press have conducted a campaign against low-level training flights by NATO's air forces. Although low-level training overflights are often disturbing to a normally peaceful countryside, they are essential to NATO tactical doctrine for air defense and for the penetration of Soviet air defense capabilities that would be part of an offensive operation against NATO. It is such training that has made NATO's pilots better than Warsaw Pact pilots, factors that Soviet military planners have grown to appreciate. The climate against low-level flight training has been reinforced by several air disasters, especially the crash of three Italian Air Force stunt pilots at the American-sponsored air show last August at Ramstein Air Base in West Germany and 125 NATO aircraft crashes in the past 18 months.

EIR's own investigations, in cooperation with leading experts in the field, have brought forward evidence pointing to Soviet-inspired sabotage, either by means of sophisticated electromagnetic capabilities or more conventional sabotage techniques.

Since the conventional arms control talks began, the Soviets have consistently called for the reduction and withdrawal of NATO's fighter-bomber forces, whose backbone is the fleet of 650 Tornado fighter-bombers of the British, West German, and Italian air forces and the dual-capable Mirage jets of France. These aircraft happen to be the most modern in NATO.

One Soviet proposal called for all such aircraft to be stationed 600 kilometers from the German-German border,

MAP 2
NATO air forces



- Allied Air Forces Baltic Approaches (AIRBALTAP)—German Element. The Air Force air defense units in this area are under the command of 2nd ATAF
- 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force (ATAF)
Allied Air Force Central Europe (AAFCE) region
- 4th Allied Tactical Air Force (ATAF)

in effect forcing NATO to withdraw its aircraft to a point somewhere in the North Sea, and sending American aircraft back to the United States. Although supporters of such proposals assert that aircraft can be easily flown back, both Soviet and Western military planners know nearby airfields and logistical support are required to support modern military aircraft, and, more importantly, NATO needs to have pilots and ground personnel trained to fight in the European theater, where conditions are far different than in the United States.

The Soviets have been chipping away at NATO's integrated defensive structure to try to drive the numbers of NATO aircraft even lower, knowing that once these numbers drop below a certain point, NATO's air defense will no longer be effective.

What are NATO capabilities?

While these far-reaching proposals were in the air, our observation of this year's Central Enterprise gave us further insight into NATO's strengths and weaknesses. At the core

of NATO doctrine is multinational cooperation and interoperability, and nowhere else is this more apparent than in NATO's air forces. In time of peace, all NATO armed forces are under members' national command. NATO's ground forces are organized along the Central Front in such a manner that the respective ground forces of the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Belgium are assigned a territorial responsibility along the German-German and West German-Czech borders (see **Map 1**). The corps areas in the northern half of the F.R.G. comprise the Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) based in Mönchen-Gladbach, while those in the southern half comprise the Central Army Group (CENTAG) based in Heidelberg. Both army groups are under the overall command of Allied Forces Central Europe based in Brunsum, the Netherlands. All are designated NATO commands with multinational commanders, deputy commanders, and staffs, and all fall under the command of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe based in Mons, Belgium.

The air forces of NATO are organized along parallel lines, but separate from the ground forces. Like their army counterparts the national air forces are under national command in peacetime, but in time of war come under NATO command. The Central Front, comprising the territories of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, is divided into two zones with the 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force in the north and the 4th Allied Tactical Air Force in the south, both under the command of Allied Air Forces Central Europe based in Ramstein, West Germany (see **Map 2**). NATO's air forces represent a limited resource, and are deployed on the basis of decisions made by NATO multinational commands, rather than being tightly linked to the ground forces of their respective countries.

Defending NATO air space: a 24-hour job

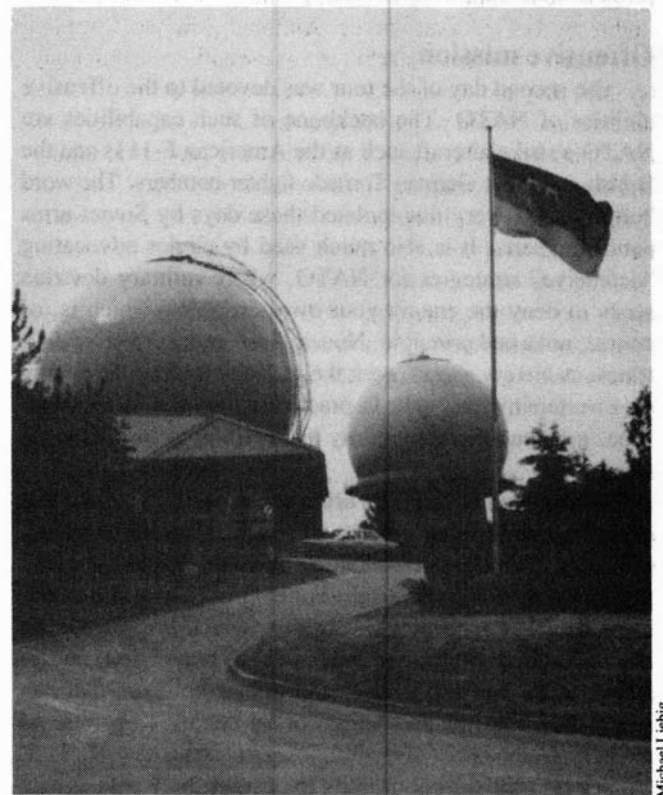
Our press tour was organized in two parts: The first day concentrated on the "defense" and the second on the "offense."

Unlike NATO's army establishments, which are mostly involved in training and readiness, NATO's air forces have a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week peacetime task of guarding NATO's air space. Running north to south along the Central Front is an air defense belt comprised of low- and high-altitude radars, tactical radar systems, and the Boeing 707 AWACS system that can "see" deep into Warsaw Pact territory. The AWACS, the only operational system manned by multinational crews and operated by NATO's Supreme Headquarters, is a prime example of NATO integrated structure. These radars feed information for target acquisition to the weapons systems—including a variety of surface-to-air missiles, ranging from the American-made Patriot system now being deployed by the forces of West Germany and the Netherlands against high-altitude threats, down to the Hawk system for the medium- to low-altitude threat, and other systems for

point defense. Finally, the most important are NATO's specialized air defense aircraft, which are heavily armed with radar-guided air-to-air missiles and other munitions.

We had the opportunity to visit a medium- to high-level radar station at Brekendorf in Schleswig-Holstein. The station, operated by the West German Air Force with the ability to scan a radius of over 200 kilometers, is one of several throughout the Central Front up and down the German-German border and along the North Sea coast of the Netherlands and Belgium. Although during our visit the airmen at the radar screens were actively part of the Central Enterprise, their day was not much different than any other. Stations such as this pick up any aircraft approaching the Central Front and track and target them if it is determined they are hostile. When Warsaw Pact planes are seen approaching the border, air defense aircraft are immediately ordered into the air, to meet and determine whether the aircraft are hostile. As a legacy of the postwar treaties that divided Germany, West Germany does not have peacetime military jurisdiction over its own air space. Therefore only American F-15s or British F-4 Phantom IIs are allowed to meet the potential threat, and only an American or a British commander can make a decision to fire upon a threat.

One radar operator, while giving us a thorough briefing on the operation of the radar and his responsibilities, ex-



The West German Air Force operates this radar installation at Brekendorf, Schleswig-Holstein.

plained that a common Soviet tactic is to deploy four aircraft at high speed in the direction of the German-German border, forcing a “scramble” of F-15s or F-4s, only to turn away from the border at the last seconds. *Glasnost*—or more likely *maskirovka* (deception)—has led to fewer such incidents this year.

In addition to air defense aircraft, the radar would also task high-, medium-, and low-altitude surface-to-air missile systems as required to meet a threat. We had the opportunity to observe the German Air Force demonstrate their “point defense” capabilities using the case of an air base. At the center of this operation was the new Roland medium- to low-altitude weapons system. This rather impressive system is a joint Franco-German project, equipped with a radar that can track over 130 targets simultaneously. Despite its sophistication, it is vulnerable to electronic warfare, and it therefore has a manual override, including optical sighting systems. The Roland was only one aspect of a layered point defense system that included the hand-held Stinger surface-to-air anti-aircraft missile and very accurate 20 millimeter automatic anti-aircraft guns. The Stinger is an American design which has been produced in West Germany under license. It made a good showing in the hands of Afghan rebels in downing Soviet helicopter gunships and other aircraft. Our tour confirmed for us the necessity for the work of the Strategic Defense Initiative and the absolute need for a Tactical Defense Initiative for Western Europe.

Offensive mission

The second day of the tour was devoted to the offensive abilities of NATO. The backbone of such capabilities are NATO’s strike aircraft such as the American F-111s and the British and West German Tomado fighter bombers. The word “offensive” is very manipulated these days by Soviet arms control experts. It is also much used by circles advocating “defensive” strategies for NATO, where military doctrine seeks to deny the enemy your own territory—which is, of course, not a bad principle. Nonetheless, more effective doctrines, as history shows, seek the capacity to deny the enemy *his own* territory as well. In practicing only the former doctrine, a potential enemy really has nothing to lose if he attacks.

The mission of NATO’s offensive capacity is to deny the enemy use of his own territory as a safe haven for mounting offensive operations. Negotiating away this capacity, given the evolving Soviet doctrine, is being militarily obscured. Even neutral countries like Sweden, which has one of the largest air forces in Europe, relative to its population, retains a mix of air defense aircraft and fighter-bombers that can strike deep into the full length of an enemy’s operational territory.

We also had the opportunity to observe the West German Air Force’s 34th Fighter-Bomber Wing based at Memmingen, in southern Bavaria. Equipped with Panavia Torna-

does, it is one of the most powerful bomber wings on NATO’s Central Front. The Tornado is another example of NATO cooperation, being a joint venture of the aerospace industries of the United Kingdom, West Germany, and Italy. The craft is at the peak of its capabilities and lifespan. Its primary mission is “interdiction,” and its potential effectiveness has made it a prime target of Soviet arms control negotiators. The West German Air Force has over 200 of these aircraft organized into five wings throughout West Germany. The West German Navy has an additional 112 for the maritime strike role. Great Britain’s Royal Air Force has another 229 of these aircraft.

At Memmingen our press group was taken into the squadron briefing room for an explanation of how the 34th would conduct any given mission. The key mission of the 34th is battlefield interdiction, which could be the targeting of an enemy air base, a column of enemy armor, or any other target crucial to defeating a Warsaw Pact offensive operation.

The day’s hypothetical mission was an enemy airfield over 300 kilometers north of Memmingen. Our briefing demonstrated that, with NATO’s limited resources, such operations require a maximum of organization and flexibility, and nowhere else is this demonstrated more than in NATO’s multinational force structure. This particular mission, as are all of the 34th’s missions, was defined by the Allied Tactical Operations Center (ATOC) of NATO’s 4th Allied Tactical Air Force, of which the 34th is a member. Based in Heidelberg, the ATOC collects intelligence as NATO’s 18 E3A AWACS and air reconnaissance units under its subordinate commands. After evaluation and choice of target, the ATOC assigns the mission to one or more of NATO’s air forces. Many missions, including this one, are what is called a Composite Air Operation, composed of the air forces of more than one nation. While the 34th would perform the actual bombing in this exercise, it would be supported by elements drawn from other national air forces, which is necessary in order to penetrate the formidable defenses of any Warsaw Pact air base, which could include heavy anti-aircraft missile defense and interceptor aircraft. These resources in support of the 34th’s operations would include electronic warfare aircraft for jamming the enemy radar and radio communications. In some cases, “Wild Weasel” hunter killer teams capable of electronically tracking enemy radars and knocking them out with anti-radiation missiles would be brought to bear. Also air defense interceptor aircraft would shepherd the bombers, if enemy interceptors were expected.

Our hosts took us, step by step, through what appeared to be a tremendous amount of detail and procedures in a process that they would carry out in less than one hour from the time they received the initial mission until they were airborne. One hopes that the high degree of motivation, determination, and *esprit de corps* demonstrated in these exercises can be appreciated by our policymakers.