

Rethinking Our Current NATO Relationship Within the AEROSPACE (AEW) DOMAIN

**A proposal for a possible NATO AWACS
Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Canada**

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Canada plays a significant role within both the current North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Air Defence and NATO security investment domains. Specifically, we directly contribute approximately \$33 million annually (based on 2004 Canadian Forces (CF) figures) and over 113 personnel to Geilenkirchen, Germany, E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) Component, an organization considered the crown jewel within the NATO Airborne Early Warning Force (NAEFW). This investment is significant, making us the third largest contributor to both the capital and annual operating budgets of the NAEWF E-3A AWACS program.

Of equal fiscal importance, but much less apparent, is that Canada also contributes millions (a further \$43 million annually) to NATO via a separate infrastructure and capability fund referred to as the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP). This article attempts to analyse these separate albeit important and perhaps interrelated NATO programs, the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP) and NAEWF, with the intent to stimulate discussion regarding future options toward a better, cost-effective alignment of NATO aerospace resources within the current Canadian Forces transformation framework.

My contention is that our government should better transition from merely accepting the high cost of NATO participation (paying our NATO membership dues) and its poor rate of return on its significant investment, and perhaps establish a clearer goal to exploit a greater, more effective slice within both NAEWF operations as well as the redefined NSIP. I believe there is significant rationale and considerable benefit for Canada to leverage better return on its NSIP spending (exploiting NSIP required “over and above” rationale). A relatively effective solution may be to simply pursue designation of a NATO AWACS FOB location in Canada to provide increased opportunities for NATO E-3A as well as E-3D, E-3F (NAEFW) training visits.

Furthermore, a second solution might be to challenge our nation’s apparent “blind faith” approach, generally implying NATO is effectively

conducting an “away game” campaign to defend our nation against possible asymmetric/external threats.

Finally, a third option is to better promote the idea to NATO, in particular the NAEWF, to refocus required training and protection on NATO’s equally vulnerable western front, namely Canada.

NATO Airborne Early Warning Force (NAEFW)

For over 50 years the tangible dividends of Canada’s significant investment in NATO have included access to strategic information, exercises with allied forces and an equal voice in high-level decisions affecting Euro-Atlantic security and stability. Since 1949 Canada has been the sixth largest contributor to NATO’s military and civil budgets. Since the early 1980s, Canada has also been one of the original participants and is currently the third largest supporter of the NAEWF, more specifically, the NATO E-3A Component, an organization very much in transition and continuing to redefine itself within the current NATO Response Force (NRF) framework.

Like many other aerospace organizations, NAEWF E-3A Component is in a perpetual search mode for quality training opportunities around the globe. Surprisingly, Canada rarely (directly or officially) requests dedicated E-3A training support, nor specifically develops quality training opportunities other than the standard yearly Ex Maple Flag. Outside of Maple Flag, CF members within CC-NAEFW (Geilenkirchen) are usually the catalysts who recognize opportunities for both Canada and the E-3A and who initiate E-3A training within Canada (e.g., 2006 TRIDENT FURY and current 2008 Maritime Forces Atlantic (MARLANT) exercise initiatives. Again, activity originated from the bottom up by CF staff attached to the NATO E-3A Component and not by any CF headquarters (HQ) level coordinated development).

While this is an acceptable practice, this has been Canada’s approach for 25 years of E-3A activity and many opportunities are perhaps missed. Generally, the average CF aerospace

populace appears relatively unaware and continues to display limited creativity to exploit this robust and available surveillance / command and control (C2) capability. The bottom line is it may be determined that Canada could easily access more quality and needed training opportunities in association with the E-3A and other available aerospace participants regarding anti-highjack, anti-terrorist and other training, with minor staffing and relatively minimal financial cost to our nation.

“Asymmetric Threat” Still a Factor? Has it Disappeared for Canada?

The current asymmetric landscape combined with our significant CF efforts in Afghanistan should, in reality, be indicators steering Canada to continue to maintain vigilance against possible retaliation. Like most others, I feel patriotic and generally believe Canada—in particular the CF—is performing outstanding work helping the Afghan people create a better future. However, the Taliban along with active terrorist cells in the region may not have the same happy sentiment and will obviously distort our efforts in a more negative way. To them we’re uninvited guests, perhaps literally “pissing in their backyard.” Therefore, should we not rethink our position and consider being ever-vigilant shoring up our security arrangements close to home, and in particular, re-evaluating how we request available NAEWF training?

This implies not just focus on traditional E-3A participation at the yearly Maple Flag composite air operations (large package fighter activity), but also on looking toward more fulsome, mutually beneficial processes linking the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), civilian air traffic control, military C2, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in perhaps an anti highjack or asymmetric support-related exercise. Ideally we should support and attempt better synergy with Canada Command centric “contingency robust/asymmetric” sanctioned Air, Land, Maritime/Arctic exercises that provide tangible aid in direct defence of Canada.

Opponents to this line of thought may say that Canada already accesses suitable AWACS

support, citing NORAD and our NATO AWACS participation in yearly Maple Flags. My response to this ideology, and I believe most AWACS expertise within Canada would agree with me, is that NORAD and NATO AWACS training activity in Canada is not robust and regrettably sporadic at best. Moreover, despite NORAD, our US friends may naturally be forced to consider national concerns. This may trump NORAD, and in particular Canada, if future asymmetric activity is prevalent on the US side, regardless of whether it manifests on both sides of the border.

One only has to remember post-9/11 Article 5 / NATO EAGLE ASSIST and the request by the US for seven NATO AWACS to assist that country to realize there may not be enough Airborne Warning and Control systems to go around at the right time. Times are changing dramatically. Of significance, this was the first time in history that NATO had defended North America, specifically the US. It doesn’t take much of a stretch to consider Canada’s unique needs within this context and in particular, within the framework of possible future terrorist scenarios.

NATO AWACS Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Canada? Why not?

One approach Canada could begin looking at more seriously is developing a better training relationship with NATO, in particular the NATO E-3A Component to better exploit available NATO aerospace resources (AWACS). No doubt, the NATO E-3A Component would greatly benefit from a designated Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Canada. The approach would begin by assigning a location, an actual cost-effective “footprint” on which both Canada and NATO could focus training and pre-position NAEWF equipment to conduct activity within our contiguous aerospace. Canada’s relatively clear airspace would be a welcome respite from the confines of European skies, in particular for training NATO AWACS aircrews. The aircraft could be utilized to perform cost-effective surveillance activity in our Northern regions as well, helping to validate our sovereignty, not unlike

similar roles this jointly owned and multinational manned NATO AWACS aircraft repeatedly performs in Europe.

This concept may begin by simply offering a FOB designation or perhaps requesting NATO funding for constructing a possible E-3A FOB in one or more key strategic locations such as, but not limited to: North Bay, Trenton, Shearwater, Greenwood, Bagotville and Comox. These are areas that provide access to important alliance players within the traditional maritime (MARLANT / Maritime Forces Pacific (MAR-PAC)) and aerospace (namely 3 and 4 Wing/ NORAD) domains. Moreover, we'd be actually laying preliminary groundwork with the expressed goal of creating more synergistic training opportunities. This approach would perhaps bode well within the groundbreaking transformational processes consuming the CF, NORAD, Northern Command, and the follow on activities identified by the post-9/11 Canada/United-States Bi-National Planning Group.

NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP)? A White Knight or Red Herring?

Good idea perhaps. However, many will question how we create this NATO transformational opportunity in Canada with a limited defence budget. Good question! To begin, one may look no further than the current NSIP funding program. NSIP funds were initially designated "cold war" funds to be utilized for European infrastructure development protection against the Soviet Union. Interestingly, since the early 90s and the end of the cold war those funds have continued to flow unabated from Canada into NATO's new revamped NSIP transformation coffers. In these two NATO programs

alone, Canada contributes \$76 million annually (2004 CF figures). Of the millions we invest annually, it's generally a one-way cash flow for Canada.

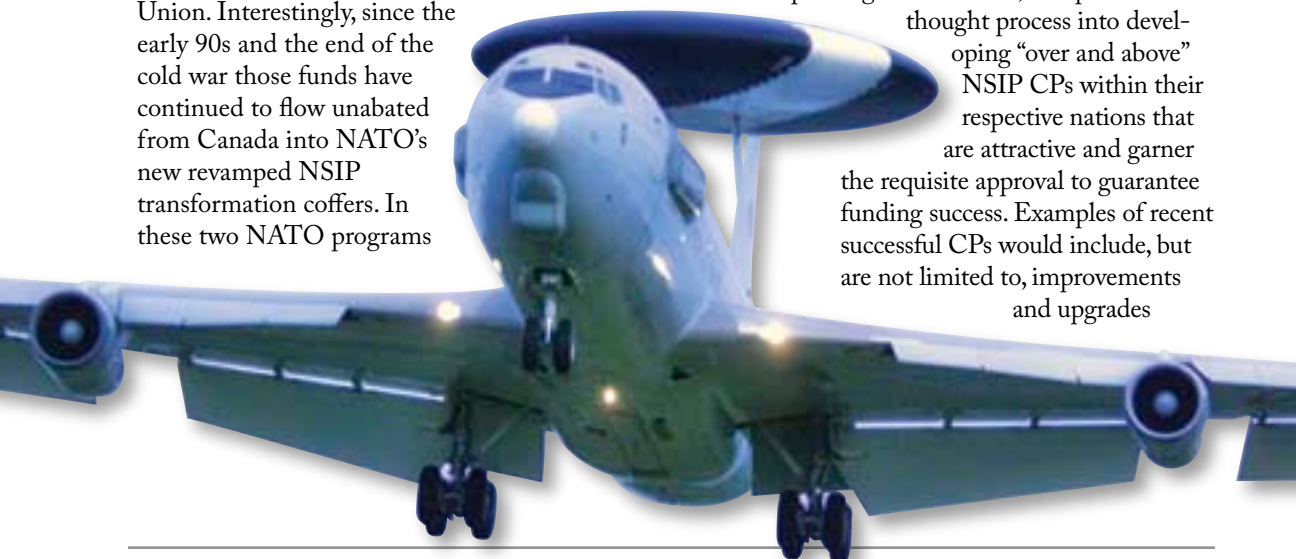
The vast majority of our investment never makes it back to this side of the ocean in the way of credible E-3A training/operations or tangible NATO security investment. (I postulate that most defenders of this approach would quickly imply the continued NATO dues ideology, "big brother" protection and the "away game" mentality NATO supposedly provides to us and our unquestioning membership).

Currently, the NATO military planning staffs of the Allied Command Operations and the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) provide oversight in NSIP construction and procurement projects based on prioritized and accepted requirements to support the Alliance's war fighting capabilities. To clarify the process, NATO nations develop formal requests, or what are identified as capability packages (CPs) to compete for NSIP funding. NATO nations must remain mindful that effective NSIP CPs should address the following six transformational categories: Deployability/Mobility, Sustainability, Command/Control, Air Defence, Command Structure/Training, and Exercises.

Next, these project categories are bundled within CPs, which NATO military and civilian decision-makers review in detail based on relevance to NATO. Most NATO nations

pour significant effort, manpower and thought process into developing "over and above"

NSIP CPs within their respective nations that are attractive and garner the requisite approval to guarantee funding success. Examples of recent successful CPs would include, but are not limited to, improvements and upgrades



to NAEWF FOB locations in Trapani, Italy and Preveza, Greece, or NATO Fleet support upgrades to various NATO designated naval facilities in participating NATO countries around the world.

Traditionally, Canada has one of the lowest, if not the lowest rate of NSIP return based on the funds submitted. Why? Simply put, Canada traditionally has refrained from actually submitting credible NSIP CPs to access funds, something our NATO Allies are happy to exploit when we don't. Yes, CPs must address "over and above" national requirements, and yes, they appear somewhat complex to develop. However, we have creative minds throughout the CF that can overcome these relatively simple issues. Moreover, this same passive approach to NSIP resource exploitation appears to manifest itself within our CF approach to the NAEWF and its relationship to overall E-3A activity within the confines of Canada.

Again, Canadian NSIP funds to NATO are significant, to the tune of approximately \$43 million per year. Of significance over the past 50 years, Canada, as well as the US, has received abysmal returns on its overall NSIP investments (2005 estimates: Canada 4-5 per cent, the US 9 per cent), perhaps initially justifiable as a bi-product of the Soviet threat. However, since 9/11 even the US has aggressively reacted and is developing NSIP capability packages and designated units within the continental US as NATO units (e.g., 10th Mountain Division) in an attempt to keep precious NSIP funds firmly within their control. The recent US effort has been successful, as they are nearing 23 per cent return from NSIP. Apparently, an equally justified NSIP funding focus swing to benefit Canada has garnered somewhat tacit interest within National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) and perhaps the overall CF in general, but a significant Canadian centric capability package development apparently has yet to truly materialize despite our equally robust CF transformation process.

NSIP NATO AWACS FOB – Is there a Possible Relationship?

Again, one solution may be as simplistic as drafting a relevant NATO NSIP capability package for an E-3A FOB utilizing available NSIP funds, thereby creating a more hospitable environment for this sophisticated aircraft to regularly visit and train. The same opportunities are already provided by NATO and regularly exploited by many of our NATO allies. With the required infrastructure in place, Canada, with a little imagination, could rapidly become a centre



for excellence for NRF training or Data Link (Link 16) with relatively minor upgrades to facilities such as those at North Bay. This would bode equally well for interoperability with our current CF-18 fleet and MARLANT/MARPAC Fleet Link 16 upgrades and an attractive option for current NATO E-3A training opportunities in just these two very important areas.

I offer up two very simplistic examples to consider, which combine and would perhaps better exploit both NSIP and NAEWF:

Concept: NATO AWACS Forward Operating Base (FOB) 22 WING - NORTH BAY Ontario.

Canada (perhaps as simply as with the stroke of a pen) could designate 22 Wing North Bay as their NATO Forward Operating Base (FOB) of choice for the NAEWF. North Bay may be an ideal location, based on its NORAD connection and location within Canada, to provide surveillance of major urban centres and offer E-3 access to CF resources, namely fighter aircraft in both Bagotville and Cold Lake, as well as training opportunities south of the border. The way ahead

would require 1 Canadian Air Division (1 Cdn Air Div) or Canadian NORAD Region staff to submit a NSIP CP to the CAS for furtherance to ACT. The goal would be to receive NSIP funding to upgrade existing runways and hangar space to allow various NATO E-3 resources to operate within an FOB framework. Success would prove mutually beneficial to Canada, NATO and NORAD and allow Canada to better exploit its \$33 million yearly AWACS investment.



Moreover, without question, support would translate into significant improvements in current training opportunities for NATO, as well as a measure of proactive training and support for the CF and for various other government agencies in preparation for future NATO Article 5 type support. NATO could benefit greatly, allowing mutual training for future Article 5 support operations and a relatively open airspace to conduct flight crew training. This is an opportunity that is considered by many in Geilenkirchen as an ever-diminishing luxury and certainly in very high demand due to the confines of European airspace.

Concept: NATO AWACS Forward Operating Base (FOB) 12 WING – SHEARWATER, Nova Scotia.

Canada could also designate Shearwater as its NATO FOB of choice for the NAEWF. Although some may consider this pure folly due to current limitations of Runway 16-34, Shear-

water upgrades don't appear insurmountable. It could, therefore, be considered an ideal location. It offers some compelling options for NATO: proximity to Europe, access to significant CF Maritime training with MARLANT Naval, MARLANT HQ, Link 16 units, Maritime Patrol Aviation, CF18, and east coast US Naval and Aerospace assets. The way ahead could have MARLANT submit a NSIP CP request to Chief of the Maritime Staff to designate

Shearwater (or perhaps Greenwood) as a NATO E-3A FOB to receive NSIP funding to upgrade and improve existing runways and hangar space to allow various NATO E-3 resources to operate. Moreover, NSIP support could be further legitimized (exclusive of

the NAEWF) by providing a significant NATO AIRHEAD for CC130 and C17 flights (C17 implies future NATO, US and current CF assets) to exploit Shearwater's facilities and to move troops and resources to and from MARLANT (SEAHEAD). The expressed aim is to access future roll-on/roll-off / amphibious vessels for the navy, as the current Chief of the Defence Staff has identified the need for this capability.

Bottom-line, there are no guarantees in life. It is my contention and the consensus of some familiar within the overall CF NSIP planning structure that the way ahead may cost the CF little more than simply submitting a NSIP CP as a viable option for NSIP funding.

Based on the creativity within the current NSIP funding strata the rewards could be as high as 100 per cent financial support for upgrades to hangar space, runways and other support structures. Certainly, it is within the mandate of a creative CF aerospace planner within the CAS domain at NDHQ to flesh out creating a NATO "over and above" requirement

independent of our direct CF needs, but within the mandate of the NSIP rules of funding. This is the exact same opportunity exploited by other NATO nations, namely NAEWF FOB / forward operating location (FOL) locations in Greece, Turkey, Norway, and Italy; opportunities that even today are constantly being exploited by all NATO nations, excluding Canada. Yes, NSIP funding is moving away from infrastructure “bricks and mortar” funding. However, terrorist events during 9/11 have changed the rules significantly. No doubt, the demands for an FOB in Canada in the early 80s wouldn’t garner much support. A Canadian specific NSIP CP in this area should be given serious consideration due in no small part to our significant low level of past NSIP investment return.

Putting Canada first, offering up a NATO FOB location and requesting to receive NATO funding is rational and allows for proactive training and initial pre-positioning resources within this country in times of increased tension. Can we afford to sit back and wait? Why take this approach? From a military concept, it seems irresponsible. Critics of this “wait and see” approach highlight that in response to 9/11, the terrorist “horse had already left the barn” by the time Article 5 was implemented and NATO’s EAGLE ASSIST support to the US actually came to fruition.

Equally disturbing is the fact that our NATO allies are more than happy to let Canada continue to sit idle while allowing their own European dominance of the NSIP funding program, and more importantly, their utilization of NAEWF resources to continue relatively unabated. One only has to attend an annual NATO AWACS planning meeting and NSIP funding meetings to see how well equipped and how eager our NATO allies pursue the available E-3A capability and overall NATO funding. What is clearly evident is the current NAEWF support directed toward Canada is more a product of creative staff work by zealous CF aerospace control officers from within the NATO E-3A Component. Should it not resonate from within our own aerospace domain, namely 1 CAD or CAS with better focus, foresight and planning?

Certainly, by not reacting soon, the current yearly E-3A training hours allotted could continue to migrate away from Canada with the advent and continued refinement of its role within the NATO Response Force with its voracious appetite for quality training opportunities. Canada needs to rethink its significant NATO investment aside from just the high cost (dues) required for NATO participation. We may be required (or smart!) to keep our hand out like all other NATO nations, including the US and be more vigilant regarding our own internal/collective aerospace training.

In conclusion, submitting a NATO/NSIP CP and a more concerted effort to access available NATO AWACS assets should be simplistic enough to overcome. The concept and context of our Canadian security is changing and everybody in the business of aerospace security has to adapt and become smarter in accessing and leveraging readily available technology, personnel, equipment and resources (more specifically potential funding). All NATO nations are examining ways to improve abilities to protect themselves against the use of weapons of mass destruction, capabilities to more effectively protect populations and to assist civil emergencies. Canada can no longer rely on the geographic protection of the oceans that surround us. Threats are trans-national, complex and far reaching.

Attempting to exploit available NATO NSIP funds and state of the art NAEWF assets in unison makes logical sense and is one process we need to better execute. Consider that based on cost comparison and relative NATO fiscal terms, Canada’s AWACS percentage of capital funding is significant, the equivalent of owning almost two NATO AWACS aircraft outright. Let’s not forget, these particular aircraft are currently amongst the most capable and up to date AWACS aircraft anywhere in the world. Combined with our NSIP investment, we can ill afford to neglect the fact that we invest a total of almost \$80 million yearly into these two NATO programs and should continually be attempting to maximize the return on this significant investment. Every other NATO nation takes this approach; why don’t we?

Looking Outside of the Box

If not, couldn't we use NATO funding elsewhere more effectively? We'd be foolhardy to assume asymmetric threats or terrorist cells are going to signal or allow NATO enough time to pre-position and spin-up to support its member nations (Article 5). Furthermore, a strategy that considers the current NATO E-3A Component investment sound or somehow fighting an "away game", or worse, providing an effective barrier against terrorism on behalf of Canada within the confines of European airspace is myopic at best and downright foolish in the worst case. Continuing to remain with the current approach to NATO, in particular supporting "Canada after all others," NATO aerospace doctrine seems flawed and perhaps better situated in the previous cold war mentality.

Finally, many might say that Canada's current fiscal conduct towards NATO—in particular the NAEWF—appears to lack direction and perhaps even borders on being considered irresponsible with regards to supporting our own nation's transformational needs. This body of evidence may help stimulate other, more creative ideas to challenge the status quo.

I believe we can ill afford to continue to throw vital defence funds in NATO's direction

without receiving a more effective rate of return, as we've taken a back seat long enough with regards to NATO security spending. After 50 years of Canada supporting this North Atlantic security organization, fear not! NATO will still wish to keep us part of the Alliance, and more importantly, perhaps respect us more for not always being the fiscal martyrs we tend to portray ourselves as. ■

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List of Abbreviations

| | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------------|---------|--|
| ACT | Allied Command Transformation | HQ | headquarters |
| AWACS | airborne warning and control system | MARLANT | Maritime Forces Atlantic |
| C2 | command and control | MARPAC | Maritime Forces Pacific |
| CDS | Chief of the Defence Staff | NAEWF | NATO Airborne Early Warning Force |
| CF | Canadian Forces | NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| CP | capability packages | NORAD | North American Aerospace Defence Command |
| FOB | forward operating base | NRF | NATO Response Force |
| FOL | forward operating location | NSIP | NATO Security Investment Program |