

The Evolution of the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control (NAEW&C) Force

Project Overview

During the lifetime of the NATO E-3A (NE-3A), the changing security environment and technological developments over the last 30 years have resulted in the scope of the NE-3A capability evolving from primarily providing surveillance of NATO airspace to supplying an immediately available airborne Command and Control (C2), air and maritime surveillance, and battle-space management capability.

During this time, the NATO Airborne Early Warning & Control (NAEW&C) Force's role has expanded to support a wide range of challenges NATO has faced over the last three decades: air policing, communications/data networking, support to counter-terrorism, evacuation operations, embargos, initial entry, and crisis response. Consequently, the NE-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) Component has been a key player in NATO operations and exercises for more than 30 years.

In light of the impact and role that E-3A aircraft have had on NATO operations and missions, at the Wales Summit in 2014, Heads of State and Governments affirmed their commitment to the modernization of the NE-3A fleet. Ultimately, the Strategic Commands (SC), with HQ Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT) in the lead, were requested to provide input to the Military Committee on the future requirements for any follow-on to Alliance E-3A AWACS capabilities. In response to this request, SACT issued direction and guidance specifically requiring the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC) to conduct an analysis of lessons learned in support of HQ SACT Assistant Chief of Staff Capability Engineering & Innovation, the designated lead for the tasking within Allied Command Transformation.

Six Consequences of the Expanding Role

The project team conducted a review of relevant documentation as well as interviews with Subject Matter Experts from across the NE-3A community. Based on the research conducted, the project team observed that the changing strategic environment, technological advances, key events, missions, and operations that took place during the 30 years of the NAEW&C Force have impacted and expanded its role over time to meet the increasing operational requirements. As a result of this expanding role, there have been certain key consequences for the NAEW&C Force, which the project team summarized under six main areas in the JALLC Research Paper:

- The need for basing outside the NATO area of responsibility
- NAEW&C Force Training Capabilities
- The evolution of NE-3A aircraft self-protection measures
- Tasking of the NAEW&C Force - Setting Priorities
- Data Exchange / Processing Capacity
- Flying in Civil Airspace



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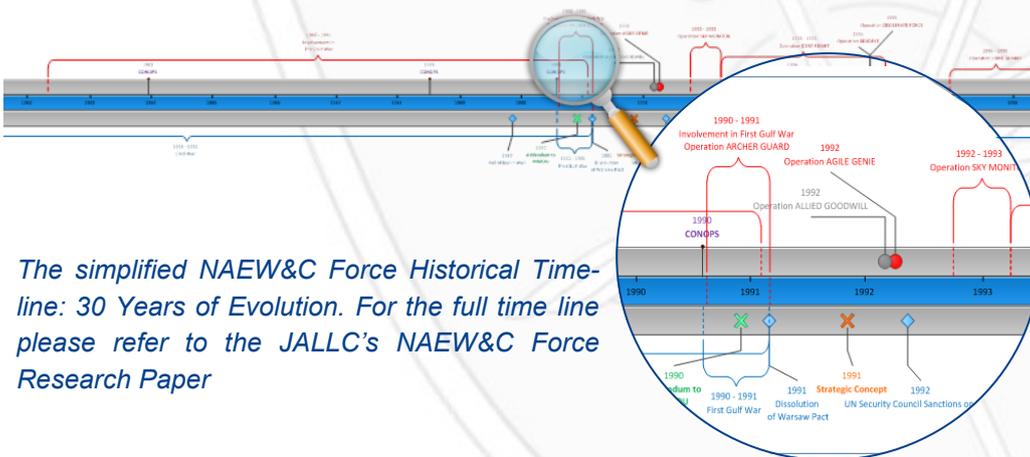


NAEW&C Force Today

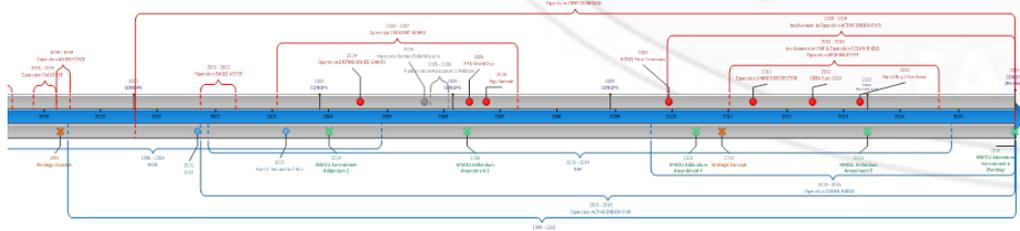


The NE-3A Component is currently operated by 16 Nations, while the UK E-3D component is operated solely by the UK. The NE-3A Component is NATO's only multinational operational flying unit and provides the aircraft as well as the specifically trained crews to deliver a surveillance and/or control platform whenever and wherever directed by HQ NAEW&C Force Command.

Today the NAEW&C Force provides an immediately available airborne C2, air and maritime surveillance and battle-space management capability in a wide range of missions. These missions include support to maritime operations, close air support, airspace management, combat search and rescue, disaster relief, counter-piracy, and assisting in the fight against terrorism.



The simplified NAEW&C Force Historical Timeline: 30 Years of Evolution. For the full time line please refer to the JALLC's NAEW&C Force Research Paper



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