



Brigadier General Paul Desair

(Photo: EATC)

Challenges – “Doing the Right Things Right” to Get Ready for the Next Decade

EATC proudly looks back on strong performances and great achievements over the last decade. Now, time has come to consolidate and establish a promising future for EATC. Since its creation in 2010, EATC “did the right things”. We now need to ask ourselves if we ‘do the right things right’ to get ready for the next decade. Can we further improve effectiveness and efficiency? How do we integrate multinational units, reinforce cooperation with ‘third parties’ or strengthen the collaborative efforts with NATO and EU? We will be extremely attentive to the environmental changes. Unpredictable crisis and invisible challenges make us work, act and re-act in different ways. How flexible and adaptive was or is EATC in times of a pandemic? What about external initiatives and influences that we do not control? Indeed, multiple questions come our way, for which we have no clear answers yet. Further brainstorming, thinking and decision-making will be on our agenda in order to continuously shape and fine-tune EATC for its future tasks. The following lines provide a glimpse of what lies ahead for EATC.

Interoperability, Effectiveness and Efficiency

Enhancing interoperability, optimising effectiveness and improving efficiency are the main drivers for bringing new ideas and projects forward within EATC. To live up to this objective, it is of utmost importance to carefully listen to the needs of the member nations, to study their air mobility requirements and to stay in constant contact with them. EATC

has perfected this approach in the past and will continue doing so in the future.

As such, in 2018, EATC identified a chance for pooling and sharing airlift on dedicated routes to mutual theatres of operation. From an initial idea to set up a shuttle system allowing efficient use of assets, EATC will continue conceptual thinking and in-depth planning with regard to the implementation of a so-called ‘hub-and-spoke’ system. The ultimate goal will be to combine the shuttle system with infrastructural and logistically improved main operating bases, linked to land and/or sea transport solutions.

Operations can only be effective and efficient if the operational process is well-tuned. In this context, Operational Risk Management (ORM) plays a particular role. Although ORM is ultimately a national responsibility, it is also high up on the priority list for EATC. In the future, EATC will concentrate on generating a more comprehensive intelligence picture. The output of the EATC intelligence branch will be further optimised in order to offer even better services to the nations. The ultimate goal being: to build an initial, all-encompassing intelligence picture as a basis for further analysis and mitigation of operational risks. EATC’s focus will be on transparent and open exchange of information between the nations during all phases of a mission, from planning and tasking till execution and reporting.

New Fleets, New Structures, New Ways of Working

Most of EATC’s member nations go through a transformation process. Legacy fleets are replaced by modern platforms (A400M, A330 MRTT, C130J) that are multi-mission capable. This also requires multi-mission capable aircrew, handlers and service providers. Moreover, these new



assets are able to operate in the most challenging scenarios, covering the full spectrum from low- to high-intensity conflicts and crisis scenarios. Based on “you train as you fight,” EATC’s experts will tailor training objectives and exercise scenarios to the expectations of those, running future air campaigns (JFACs). Here, mutual understanding of aircrew capabilities and platform performances are key to success.

The introduction of multi-mission air mobility assets will influence the scope for EATC planners and taskers. Combining different missions into one makes it more flexible and efficient, but also more complex. An A400M executes both strategic and tactical missions, while it is also capable of providing Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR). The MRTT can combine AAR with airlift, while being used as a flying hospital. The mix of different combinations will require adaptation of existing processes and a different mind-set for EATC planners and taskers. Interaction between EATC and planners at the operational command levels within NATO and EU gain importance. De-confliction and in-depth coordination of strategic airlift outside the Joint Operations’ Area (under EATC operational control) versus tactical assets flying inside the Joint Operations’ Area (under JFAC operational control) will be of vital importance during future conflicts or crisis.

Besides procuring new common platforms, nations also look into new ways of cooperation amongst them. Several multinational units have stood up in the last years: nations bundle their efforts to be more cost-efficient, while they look at EATC to remain in control for planning, tasking, executing and monitoring missions (transfer of authority). It is of utmost importance to integrate these multinational units into the existing EATC processes. Only thanks to these well-thought-out processes, EATC can offer an optimised and accurate service to the member nations, including their multinational units.

The newly set-up multinational units are not always limited to EATC nations only. This entails that EATC will indirectly operate with non-EATC nations. This is of course an unexpected challenge and opportunity for EATC. Third parties, members of these multinational units, offer innovative ways of cooperation for the future.

Digital Development and Modernisation

Over the past ten years, digital technologies and communications have evolved in an accelerating way. The EATC Commander has thus put priority to adapting and preparing EATC’s IT set up to serve the requirements of this new decade. The challenge is multifaceted.

First of all, EATC needs highly qualified military IT personnel to translate the requirements into concrete results for cyber security, document management and ‘home office’ capabilities.

Secondly, growing digitisation and real-world cyber threats ask for secured networks and reliable communications systems. This is especially true for MEAT NG (Management of European Air Transport New Generation), EATC’s in-house designed and maintained Command and Control (C2) software application with more than 3,400 users within the EATC nations.

Brigadier General Paul Desair took over the position as Deputy Commander, EATC, on 28 September 2020. In 2004, he became Crisis Response Planner (J5) at Joint Staff level. Promoted Lieutenant Colonel, he was in charge of planning Belgian military assets in support of operations worldwide. In 2009, he became Colonel and took up responsibility as Chief Air Operations (A3). Whilst being fully involved in the restructuring of the Belgian Defense Staff, he was in charge for the readiness of the Belgian air assets, taking responsibility for the programming, planning and follow up of all Belgian air operations. In 2012, he became the 23rd Base Commander of the 10th Tactical Wing in Kleine-Brogel. On 3 July 2015, Colonel Desair left the 10th Tactical Wing and returned to the Defence Staff and became Chief of Cabinet to the Belgian Chief of Defense (2016-2020).

Lastly, there is the urgent need for a general review of IT requirements in the domains of digitisation and connectivity.

EATC is working with a multitude of multinational partners on a daily basis: units, air forces, third party nations, international organisations and the like. In order to develop the digitisation process, EATC will closely coordinate with all these actors to understand their functional requirements and develop means of “collaboration” across technology solutions. While doing so, EATC will interlink with the Dutch host nation. EATC, the Eindhoven Air Base and all other co-located international organisations will act in concert to identify synergy effects and prepare a modernised digital future.

Reaching Out

Throughout the years, the EU has established permanent military structures and is now able to define policies and prepare coherent EU responses to crisis situations. EU is relying on PESCO projects to create and build “own defence capabilities”. Military Mobility is such a project, with EATC involved and acknowledged as a high valuable partner and as ‘centre of expertise’ for the sub-area of military air mobility. Furthermore, EATC, as Operational Command, has the potential to serve as an excellent tool in support of future EU military C2 structures.

Reasons enough for EATC to keep on engaging itself into this changing environment and, therefore, to focus on outreach: the defence community and all that lies beyond need to know who we are, what we stand for and what we do.

‘Lessons Learned’ From COVID-19

One of our main ‘lessons learned’ regards the revolution initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic to face remote work. The pandemic made us rethink how to operate and communicate. A transformation process will take place in the coming months and years, where the development of reliable home office capable IT solutions to ensure location-independent operation are key points. This will include remote work, as well as new ways of internal communication and external interaction.

Another main lesson learned confirmed that EATC structures and processes are able to cope with pandemic challenges. EATC showed resilience and the ability to adequately plan and task missions during the pandemic situation. Flexibility, standardisation and acquired interoperability among the EATC nations compensated for the multiple obstacles that EATC was confronted with. In order to transport COVID-19-infected patients, EATC quickly developed new guidelines and procedures that were also adopted by non-EATC nations. We will now look into the future to translate in particular aeromedical related challenges into multinational opportunities.

The pandemic, with the subsequent time pressure and operational urgency, strengthened the trust, cooperation and communication between EATC and the member nations. We are thus looking forward to seizing this momentum and ease the way for further standardisation of regulations and a common procurement of equipment.

Conclusion

EATC is well on track to embark on this new decade, doing the right things right. Some processes will be long, some will be straightforward, but all will be approached with burning ambition and professional competence. We are looking forward to detecting unexplored opportunities and utilising them to make EATC more accessible, more efficient, resilient and capable of supporting a wide variety of air mobility missions. New environments, new fleets and new conceptual ideas will allow EATC to adapt to new ways of working, to remain a strong and reliable partner in air mobility, to increase interoperability and to prove itself as a ‘centre of expertise’ also for the next decade to come.

