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1st Lt. Ferenc Bálint

HOST NATION SUPPORT AT THE HUNGARIAN DEFENCE FORCES 47TH AIRBASE

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ABSTRACT: *Europe and NATO are facing a deteriorating security environment, which makes it even more important than ever to strengthen the pillars of defence. Among them is the institution of host nation support (HNS), which involves the tasks of receiving and stationing Allied forces, primarily for NATO's eastern member states. At the Hungarian Defence Forces 47th Airbase, multinational forces have been stationed for nearly twenty years, and during the past years, the number of national and international exercises has increased, resulting in HNS becoming a fundamental task and part of everyday life. The professional implementation of HNS requires the establishment of adequate infrastructural, technical, and procedural conditions, enabling well-trained specialists from Pápa to meet the needs of foreign partners at a high level, thereby contributing to the achievement of NATO's operational capabilities.*

KEYWORDS: *host nation support, HNS, capacity building, operations support, exercise support*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
1st Lt. Ferenc Bálint is a logistics officer at the Hungarian Defence Forces 47th Airbase. (ORCID: 0009-0002-6672-2594; MTMT: 10102509)

INTRODUCTION

Since the early days of warfare, it has been common for armies to supply their allied forces arriving from afar with all necessary materials and equipment at the assembly point, restocking their depleted and used-up supplies before the battles. These activities of the receiving party have become increasingly complex and organized throughout military history, and during the years of global conflict in the 20th century, they came to be known as host nation support. After World War II, Europe, which was in a weak position in terms of defence, was threatened by further Soviet expansion in the newly established bipolar world order. The gradual integration of European nation states into NATO has led to the extension of other member states' response and mobility capabilities, derived from their collective defence responsibilities to the European continent. In the past few years, it has become clear that threats coming from the east are a major concern for Europe and NATO, which is why the defence readiness and HNS capabilities of NATO member states in Central and Eastern Europe are also crucial for the responsiveness of NATO forces.

HOST NATION SUPPORT

Host nation support, according to NATO's interpretation, refers to all civilian and military support provided by the host nation in peacetime, during a crisis, or in wartime to NATO

forces, other allied forces, and NATO organizations operating[1] or transiting through its territory, arising from its Alliance obligations or bilateral or multilateral agreements.[2]

The definition clearly shows that the support to be provided can be diverse; therefore, its implementation requires a complex, systematic approach from all concerned governmental, defence, and civilian parties.

The processes and procedures of HNS can best be applied and developed in peacetime through exercises that closely resemble real-world situations. Exercising is an obligation; the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) must be ready to perform Alliance or European Union tasks related to defence against an unexpected armed attack on one or more NATO or European Union member states, abroad and at home (as part of host nation support).[3]

The activities of HNS include providing logistical support to the military organizations of the HDF, including stationing, refuelling, catering, convoy support, and transportation of materiel.

SPOTLIGHT ON ACCESSIBLE FUNCTIONALITY

The HDF 47th Airbase is easily accessible, geographically well located, and covers an area of 6.2 square kilometres, which makes it an ideal location for a wide variety of domestic and international exercises or their air components. The deploying forces generally plan extensively with the support of the host nation.

A closer look at the infrastructure of the airbase reveals that fewer and fewer elements built during the era of the former tactical fighter wing can be found in their original condition. The entire aerodrome has undergone significant changes over the past two decades, resulting in the "inherited" facilities – which served their previous functions well – being converted and renovated to meet the requirements of the modern task system. For instance, in 2017, a modern transit hostel with a capacity of 280 people was built to provide short-term rest for personnel following or prior to redeployment. As a result of this same process, the Airbase now has an 8,000 square meter combined container and vehicle storage area located next to its own railway track, as well as a service road that allows for uninterrupted access to the hazardous materials storage facility. The demolition of unused buildings and landscaping freed up tens of thousands of square meters of space that can be used for camp infrastructure or vehicle storage. The list could be continued with numerous other successful investments, but the capacity developments carried out outside the fence of the Airbase have at least as much impact on and significance for the host nation support as the internal ones. Among these, it is worth mentioning the new two-lane dual carriageway of Main Road 83, which was opened in 2023, connecting Pápa to the M1 motorway, enabling the safe transport of shipments and convoys.

The HDF 47th Airbase connects road, rail, and air transport sub-sectors; therefore, it also serves as a transport hub during large-scale exercises when all three modes of transport are involved in moving cargo and personnel.

1 NATO 2021, 1.
2 NATO 1991.
3 1393/2021. (VI. 24.) Korm. határozat 2021.

Deployments by air are carried out using military strategic transport aircraft (C-17, C-130, A400M) and civilian aircraft leased from airlines (B737, A320, An-124), the reception, servicing, loading, and passenger handling of which requires special aerodrome service equipment, procedures, and training. The objective in this area is to harmonize aircraft servicing with the rules prescribed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

In recent years, the sending nations have repeatedly decided to use the rail-side loading ramp located at the Airbase, even though a front loading platform, which allows for easier loading of rolling stocks, is also available to them at the Pápa railway station, located 2.2 kilometres from the cargo gate of the Airbase. This is clear feedback that it is necessary and sensible to maintain and develop military railway infrastructure. It is also justified by the railway's suitability for transporting tactical, off-road, oversized, caterpillar-type military equipment, which is less suitable for long-distance public road transport. Furthermore, it can be observed that the foreign partners use a large number of 20' containers. In this case, the public road network can be eased by choosing rail transport, which is a significant aspect, because the majority of shipments arrive by road anyway.

The proper management of significant convoy and truck movements arising from HNS tasks requires precise planning in advance, involving the transport specialists of the sending party. The knowledge of the transport infrastructure and traffic management of the Airbase and its surroundings is essential for this. The surrounding road and the access cargo gate, for example, become bottlenecked when a certain number of trucks arrive at the same time. The primary goal is to prevent this when planning the implementation of HNS tasks, which is partly possible by guiding foreign partners to the deployment area step-by-step. In other cases, vehicles will be redirected to a buffer parking lot and then called in from there.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The symbiotic effect that has developed among the national defence facilities located in the North Transdanubian region is a phenomenon recognized by the Airbase. It can be observed that the forces using the Újdörögd Training Area, under the command of the HDF Joint Forces Training Centre (JFTC), prefer to use the Airbase for air, road, and rail redeployment and stationing purposes. The force planning to carry out tasks in the area of the JFTC will, in most cases, appear in Pápa in some form (redeployment, supply transport, medical evacuation, or refuelling) even if it does not use the Airbase as its operational base. It should also be noted that the Military Terminal Maneuvering Area (MTMA) airspace of the Airbase and the TRA11 airspace of the training area border each other, and the flight time with a rotary wing aircraft is only ten to fifteen minutes. This is one of the main attractions of Pápa, which is further enhanced by the possibility of utilizing airspace with less traffic than in Kecskemét or Szolnok. Any investment or development carried out by a surrounding military organization also has a beneficial effect on the other military organizations. This effect is particularly beneficial when developments are coordinated, and the military organizations are able to provide HNS at a similar level.

SUPPORT WITH TWO DECADES OF EXPERIENCE

In order to operate the multinational Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) program, the HDF 47th Airbase has been providing continuous national support for organizations based in Pápa since 2008 for almost two decades. It is important to note that the SAC's military

operational arm, the multinational Heavy Airlift Wing (HAW), also performs real-world operational transport tasks in war and crisis zones.[4] Active participation in the performance of these tasks has enabled the Airbase to gain unique experience, tools, and procedures within the HDF, thanks to which Pápa is now recognized by all sending nations as a professional, predictable, and reliable supporter. These characteristics, combined with the necessary flexibility, greatly strengthen trust and cohesion within the defence alliance, which is expressed as an important common goal in all defence forums.

The primary tasks of the HDF 47th Airbase include maintaining continuous contact with allied forces stationed at the Airbase and providing services within the framework of host nation support. Since 2020, there has been a steady increase in the annual number of these tasks and in international interest in the free capacity of the Airbase, which highlights the importance of HNS.

Between 2020 and 2025, the HDF 47th Airbase supported, among others, the Swift Response 2021 airborne exercise, which was carried out as part of Defender Europe 2021, during which nearly two thousand personnel used the Airbase as an Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) and then carried out their airborne missions in the Romanian and Bulgarian areas of operation.

Since 2021, under the auspices of the European Defence Agency (EDA) and then the Multinational Helicopter Training Centre (MHTC), the Helicopter Tactics Instructors Course (HTIC) has been carried out, which is certainly going to have its main operational base in Hungary until 2029.[5]

During QUADRIGA 2024/Swift Response 2024, the HDF 47th Airbase hosted a German-led, high-visibility airborne exercise for the duration of the operational task preparation, force generation, and execution.

Subsequently, in 2025, the Airbase served as the location for MILEX 25, an international alert and deployment exercise carried out by the European Union for the purpose of testing the effectiveness of military command structures and procedures during crisis management exercises, practicing the alert and deployment of the EUBG 25[6] standby force, while also served as the main location for approximately 600 personnel and 200 pieces of rolling military equipment.

TEAMWORK AT ITS BEST

The HNS capabilities of the HDF are communicated to the partner countries by the HDF Logistic Support Command Host Nation Support Branch, which also distributes HNS tasks and maintains close contact with the HNS planning and coordination staff of the military organizations concerned. Effective coordination is particularly important in both vertical and horizontal directions because the established planning cycle is full of deadlines for both the sending and receiving parties. The intensive planning phase preceding the execution phase, which sometimes lasts more than a year, is not spectacular, but its effectiveness and details determine the smoothness and success of the execution phase. The necessary procedures are prepared during the planning phase, and purchases are made to ensure the

[4] NATO Support and Procurement Agency 2025.

[5] Sin 2024.

[6] The EU Battlegroup is a multinational military unit that forms the core component of the European Union's military rapid response capability.

interoperability of technical equipment manufactured according to different standards in the sending and receiving countries.

Once the execution phase is complete, the HNS activity is terminated, but following redeployment, the work ends with the completion of certificates in relation to services provided, invoicing, and identifying the lessons learned.

The specific nature of HNS tasks is that sending nations rely on their own capabilities and those of the host nation to varying extents, which means that there are no two HNS tasks that are alike. In most cases, sending nations bring with them capabilities that could also be provided within the framework of the HNS in order to utilize their own logistical support capabilities and fulfil their operational logistical training objectives (in some cases, for reasons of cost-effectiveness). In the latter case, the HDF's competence is to request quotations from civilian service providers for the requested services (if they cannot be provided from HDF resources) in accordance with the agreed specifications, and then to order and provide them, with the approval of the sending nation.

It is not unprecedented for the sending and host parties to develop a composite solution for a given task. For example, American refuelling vehicles with American crews participated as reinforcements alongside the refuelling vehicles from Pápa during the night of the operation of Swift Response 2021 Joint Forcible Entry (JFE) when 11 C-17s and C-130s had to be refuelled in a short period of time in order for the air formation to deliver a given number of paratroopers at a given time.

A special form of logistical support provided by the host nation is when the sending nation's personnel operate the host nation's equipment after receiving the necessary training and transfer. At the HDF 47th Airbase, this is typically used for aircraft tow trucks and, less frequently, for forklift trucks. This form of service makes HNS more efficient, because the management of the asset does not tie up the host party's staff, and the sending party can immediately arrange for transportation or material handling at its own competence and responsibility.

The exercises are always carried out with the aim of achieving training objectives. The performance of the host party's HNS tasks can therefore be interpreted as the sum of all efforts made to assist the sending party in achieving its objectives. The host party has a duty of care that accompanies its complex support activities as a service. Achieving training objectives indicates the success of the HNS and, at the same time, the quality of the host nation's services.

As mentioned earlier, there are no two HNS tasks alike. However, there is an HNS recipe that can be successfully applied to solve HNS tasks of any complexity. In order to ensure smooth HNS, it is important that both the sending and the host nations set up contact groups. The two groups must work together physically, because in a dynamically changing environment of tasks and exercises, there is no time for emails; most situations and problems must be resolved immediately. The contact group is formed to carry out a specific task and, depending on the nature of the task, usually consists of four to ten members. In the case of the HDF 47th Airbase, the core of the contact group consists of air operations, logistics, supply, and administration subject matter experts (SMEs), who are reinforced as necessary by communications, human resources, flight safety, and military operations SMEs, as well as military supply (specifically food and fuel), transportation, and accommodation SMEs. The members of the group are selected individuals who are experts in their field, have a confident command of English, possess assertive communication skills, are able to cope well with stress, have a proactive and flexible attitude, and are self-motivated to

perform their tasks successfully and accurately. It is no exaggeration to say that the members of the group are elite representatives of their profession and of the Airbase, entrusted with a mission. The leader of the group, the conductor of the HNS activities, is the deputy commander (cooperating), who coordinates the daily work of the group, plans and manages resources, distributes tasks based on the competencies of the group members, makes decisions, and liaises with the management of the sending party, the superior military organizations, the leaders of other military organizations concerned, and the management of the Airbase and subunit commanders.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITALIZATION IN HNS

In modern warfare, logistics is not just an operational necessity but a strategic linchpin. Modern military operations require advanced technological systems to facilitate the rapid and coordinated movement of forces and supplies.[7] These systems also include digital systems that process data within the HNS system. From the HNS perspective, there are numerous useful software solutions available to NATO member states for this task. Common to all of these is that their effectiveness is only evident if they are sufficiently standardized and widely used among the member states of the Alliance.

Notable among these is the Logistics Functional Area Service (LOGFAS), which is designed to enhance logistics planning, coordination, and execution. The HNS Capability Planning Catalogue (HNS CAPCAT) can complement LOGFAS by cataloguing available host nation resources, including facilities and transportation capabilities, and provides standardized documentation of national capabilities.[8]

The Host Nation Ordering and Billing System (HOBS), developed and implemented in Norway, speeds up and simplifies the process of meeting the logistical needs of sending nations. Services and materials can be selected and requested from a catalogue on the online platform; the system ensures full transparency and traceability of the billing process.[9] HOBS is designed to replace the current chart-based Statements of Requirements (SOR) and aims to provide comprehensive software support for all HNS processes. Its success is clearly demonstrated by the fact that it has already been adopted in many European countries, and the HDF have also taken steps in this direction.

The above systems, however, do not substitute for the work of logistics professionals; rather, they create a supportive environment for the transparent and efficient execution of HNS tasks. The significance thereof is particularly evident in the support of large-scale exercises and military operations, as in such cases, logistics processes would be unmanageable using traditional methods or would tie up an unrealistically large number of human resources. Maximizing the potential of the above-mentioned systems requires users to have an adequate level of language proficiency, background knowledge, and proficiency in using the software. These are significant factors that can either facilitate or hinder technological advancement.

To support military exercises and other military tasks, several IT tools have been purchased in Pápa in recent years as part of the digitization process. Among these, the smartboard can be highlighted, as it combines the capabilities of whiteboards, projectors, and

7 Facchi 2025.
8 Facchi 2025.
9 Gulyás 2024.

smart touchscreen devices with its large display. Also worth mentioning is the installation of wireless internet access points in the buildings most frequently used during military events, as information and communications tools that enhance HNS.

The future development of HNS will presumably be largely determined by the availability of artificial intelligence (AI), which has now become an integral part of warfare. NATO has recognized the rapid development of AI, not only its potential benefits but also its potential risks. NATO's AI Strategy, therefore, aims to ensure the responsible use of AI across the full spectrum of defence tasks as soon as possible.[10] AI could provide effective support in several areas of HNS. For example, in the case of temporary force deployment, comparing the logistical capabilities of the staging location with the expected logistical footprint of the forces, calculating the quantity of supplies required for sustainment over the specified period, and monitoring inventory trends are all potential areas of application.

HDF 47TH AIRBASE PERSPECTIVES IN THE HNS AREA

The HDF 47th Airbase is facing significant short-, medium-, and long-term aerodrome infrastructure development, which includes building a fuel hydrant pipeline, taxiways, aircraft parking aprons, an upgraded land-based navigation system, and the extension of the runway from 2,400 meters to 3,000 meters, among other things.[11] In addition, a US-financed warehouse complex is currently under construction,[12] where materials, equipment, and vehicles necessary for the *ad hoc* establishment and operation of an aerodrome will be stored.

These clearly indicate that our country and our NATO allies are committed to jointly guaranteeing the security of the region and the Alliance's responsiveness.

All this goes hand in hand with the emergence of aircraft that can be operated with a higher payload than before, which places additional service demands on the HNS, meaning that a greater use can be made of it.

The aerodrome expansion is being implemented as a complex project aimed at eliminating several bottlenecks simultaneously. The increase in covered surfaces has led to an increase in aerodrome maintenance tasks, which require sufficient personnel and equipment.

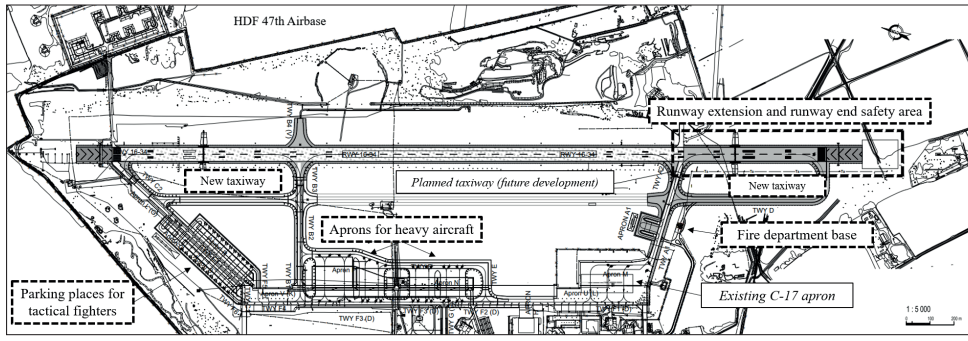


Figure 1 *Airbase development plan*
(Textboxes with dashed lines show infrastructure elements to be built up in the near future)
Source: *Architectural drawing of Út-Vasúttervező Zrt. edited by the author*

[10] NATO 2024.
[11] 1748/2020. (XI. 11.) Korm. határozat 2020.
[12] US Army Corps of Engineers Construction Mission in Hungary 2025.

As a result of the aerodrome expansion, the base aerodrome will be able to accommodate up to two squadrons of fighter jets and eight to ten strategic transport aircraft simultaneously. Aircraft, as well as the passengers and cargo they carry, are using HNS to an unprecedented extent; therefore, the capacity expansion carried out on the airside of the aerodrome must be followed by a corresponding expansion on the landside. This applies to the full range of support capabilities, from the quantitative and qualitative availability of public utility networks to the capacity of canteens to the development of areas suitable for camp construction, since the capacity of the military facility (stationing) does not increase simply by extending the runway or building aprons. An airbase free of bottlenecks is the best place to increase national support capabilities. In addition to the physical components of HNS, it is important to gain experience and to learn and apply "best practices." Therefore, the HDF 47th Airbase is required to continuously practice and develop HNS, to formulate and achieve training objectives in this area. For this, the planned national and international exercises will provide an excellent opportunity in the future as well.

CONCLUSION

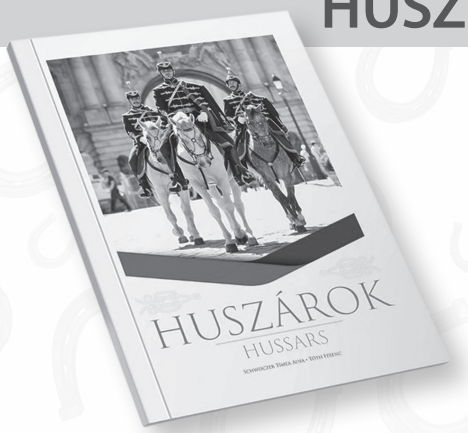
Europe and NATO are forced to face a deteriorating security situation. The Alliance's operational capabilities can be developed to ensure security in the Eastern European region by relying on the HNS capabilities of eastern member states. Hungary's National Military Strategy regulates the fulfilment of HNS tasks, meaning that the Hungarian Defence Forces must be ready to perform Alliance or European Union tasks. The HDF 47th Airbase's advantageous military transport options and continuously developing facilities currently provide high-level support for the activities of the forces stationed there, and thanks to the planned aerodrome development, significant changes in capacity and capabilities will take place, restructuring the nature of support activities. Thanks to the harmonious work of the groups assigned to coordinate HNS tasks, foreign partners in Pápa can achieve precisely the training objectives they envisioned during the planning phase, in exactly the way they envisioned them. National and international exercises and real-world operations usually challenge the defence organizations involved in operating the HNS, but this ultimately feeds back into the HNS system in the form of experience and improved standards, supporting positive developments.

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