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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

Adapting Airpower in Counterinsurgency:
A Roadmap for the Operational Planner

by

James McCall

Lieutenant Commander, USN

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: *James A. McCall III*

6 November 2007

Abstract

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Introduction

Over its first hundred years, the airplane has become an integral part of American combat power and a difference maker on the battlefield. For just as long, a multitude of theorists and operational planners have wrestled with its capabilities and argued over the best methods to employ it. The airplane fulfilled the dreams of professional warriors long enticed by Sun Tzu's hawk analogy, striking swiftly, precisely and breaking "the body of its prey."¹ Spurred by the writings of Giulio Douhet and Billy Mitchell, airmen espoused the primacy of the air arm over other services.² Even Sir Winston Churchill conceded, "Air mastery is today the supreme expression of military power and fleets and armies, however vital and important, must accept a subordinate rank."³ Dominant performances in recent conflicts have reinforced these theories, leading many to assert that airpower can fight and win a nation's wars on its own.⁴ Airpower has played a prominent role in every significant military action since World War I. Yet when applied to counterinsurgency (COIN), many struggle to draw conclusions regarding its effectiveness and utility.

Today, the operational commander faces new and irregular enemies operating in diverse environments. Conventional military power has had to adapt to meet new challenges in current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many contemporary thinkers believe these conflicts represent only the beginning of a long and protracted fight in a global, transnational counterinsurgency.⁵ If true, American combat forces will be forced to evolve in response to adversaries who respect our conventional advantages and instead "search for exploitable seams in our capabilities."⁶

Historically, airpower has been invaluable in COIN efforts, although it has largely been ignored doctrinally. Instead, airpower doctrine has primarily focused on conventional

warfighting. Today's airpower theorists still prefer to think of COIN "as little more than a small version of conventional war."⁷ When combined with predictions that U.S. forces are more likely to be involved in such protracted conflicts in the future, the reluctance of U.S. military thinkers to address the peculiarities of COIN "creates an important void in U.S. airpower theory."⁸

Similarly, COIN doctrine has largely minimized the utility of airpower. Even today, many uniformed personnel have difficulty seeing how airpower can contribute to unconventional operations. For example, shortly after the Army's 3rd Infantry Division captured Baghdad, the division released its air-liaison element, believing that it had nothing further to offer. Even worse, the element left because it did not understand how airpower could contribute any further.⁹ Although the capabilities that airpower brings to the COIN fight might not be as obvious as those of ground forces, airpower is an invaluable enabler for those forces and an incredible force multiplier.¹⁰ However, without suitable doctrine, the joint planner is left to wonder how to best apply airpower in these counterinsurgencies. This paper will offer that planner a starting point. It will do so by exploring the historical application of airpower in COIN, analyzing selected historical examples to identify best practices and crucial mistakes, and providing some critical guidelines for the future employment of this capable arm of American power.

Airpower Theory

One must define several terms before evaluating the effectiveness of airpower in counterinsurgency. First, what is airpower? Brig Gen William "Billy" Mitchell, who commanded all U.S. air combat units in Europe during World War I, was the first American to write widely on the subject. He defined airpower as "the ability to do something in or

through the air.”¹¹ British theorists went further, applying military context: “The ability to project military force through a platform in the third dimension above the surface of the earth.”¹² In the wake of World War I and often in an effort to justify a separate service or military budgets, most theorists tended to gravitate toward conventional applications of airpower and how airpower could be a war winner by itself. Yet when faced with an unconventional enemy, airpower theory often proved inadequate. In French Indochina, the Viet Minh employed tactics that “could obviate superior enemy airpower.”¹³ In the war’s aftermath, the French lamented the challenges of “interdicting an enemy who required few supplies and relied on a very primitive and easily repairable logistic transportation system.”¹⁴ Confused and frustrated, the French questioned “the applicability of the central tenets of American airpower theory” to this form of warfare.¹⁵

COIN Doctrine

This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin – war by guerillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat,; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him.

- President John F. Kennedy¹⁶

Despite an insistence by many classical theorists that COIN operations only represent a smaller version of conventional conflict, by the end of the U.S. experience in Vietnam, it was apparent that insurgency differed in more than just scale.¹⁷ So what exactly is an insurgency? Current joint doctrine defines insurgency as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.”¹⁸ Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5 expands the definition, describing it as “an organized, *protracted politico-military* struggle designed to weaken the control and *legitimacy* of an established government, occupying

power, or other political authority while *increasing* insurgent control.”¹⁹ It is essential to note the elements that differentiate insurgency from conventional war: time (protracted), the politico-military nature, guerilla tactics (subversion), and center of gravity (legitimacy).²⁰

Counterinsurgency, on the other hand, is defined as “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency.”²¹ From this definition, it is clear that military operations are just one facet “of a *balanced* strategy focused on *security* and *legitimacy*.”²²

Historically, the U.S. military has seen some success with COIN, including in various aspects of the Vietnam War. Yet, with the exception of the U.S. Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual*, the American military has not documented its lessons learned in doctrine. Some speculate that the “deplorable experience in Vietnam overshadows American thinking about guerrilla insurgency.”²³

The air arms of the military service are particularly guilty. Airpower theory has revolved around large-scale conventional warfare and the ability to create strategic effects for the better part of the last century. Cold War priorities often overshadowed smaller conflicts as services battled for primacy and budget dollars. Strategic bombing doctrine, unlike the contest for “hearts and minds”, seemed to be easily quantifiable. Even when doctrine did integrate lessons learned, subsequent revisions either minimized or deleted many of them.²⁴

So what does current Air Force doctrine say about airpower and COIN? Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Operations and Organization*, only mentions COIN operations as a bullet under contingency and crisis response operations, but fails to explain what functions airpower can or should provide in the conduct of such operations.²⁵ AFDD 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, mentions COIN only in regard to its Air Component

Coordination Element.²⁶ It also fails to provide more than a casual mention of what role airpower can play in COIN operations. Elsewhere, the Air Force does address airpower in COIN, but does so in the context of Foreign Internal Defense (FID).²⁷ AFDD 2-3.1 only tackles a foreign government's efforts to combat insurgency and the Air Force's methods to support it. Increasingly, in the fight against global, transnational insurgencies, the U.S. will likely need to provide its own combat forces to conduct COIN. In many cases, the U.S. may be the only provider of air assets to the COIN effort.²⁸ And although FID and COIN may be linked, the doctrine and procedures prescribed for FID does not adequately address COIN.²⁹

The most significant work to date describing airpower's role in COIN is the recently released AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*. This document addresses COIN under the umbrella of irregular warfare.³⁰ It broadly discusses basic COIN concepts, capabilities the Air Force brings to COIN, and some general planning considerations. Although it is a noteworthy achievement, it does not serve as a substitute for a cohesive joint doctrine addressing COIN and joint force integration.

These doctrinal shortfalls are further complicated by a distinct lack of guidance regarding COIN at the operational level. Air Force Doctrine Center Handbook (AFDCH) 10-01, the *Air and Space Commander's Handbook for the JFACC*, and AFDCH 10-03, the *Air Component Coordination Element Handbook*,³¹ fail to include any discussion specific to the application of airpower on COIN. As another writer states, "the focus clearly is on major conventional conflict."³²

The U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps have addressed the doctrinal shortfall with their recent release of FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5. While this publication is a concrete step forward, it still lacks in details, especially regarding the employment of airpower. It allocates

just five pages to the application of airpower in an annex entitled “Airpower in Counterinsurgency.” That annex includes only a cursory discussion of five functions: strike, intelligence collection, information operations, airlift (logistics), and command structure (command and control). It also seems incomplete since AFDD-1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, addresses 17 aerial functions.³³ The discussion on organization and command and control, at only three paragraphs, is glaringly lacking. These recent moves in doctrine represent a step in the right direction, but are still inadequate because they fail to address joint doctrinal concerns regarding airpower and COIN.

Historical Analysis: Success and Failure in COIN

If there is one attitude more dangerous than to assume that a future war will be just like the last one, it is to imagine that it will be so utterly different that we can afford to ignore all of the lessons of the last one.

- MRAF Sir John Slessor³⁴

Lack of airpower doctrine regarding COIN is certainly not due to a lack of historical experience with insurgency. The last century provides many remarkable examples of the use of airpower in the context of COIN. In 1913, the French used airpower in Morocco to support military counter-rebel operations, only 10 years after the first controlled, powered and sustained heavier-than-air human flight.³⁵ By the 1920s, the United States Marine Corps had demonstrated the utility of airpower to counter insurgents in Nicaragua.³⁶ In fact, from 1915 to today, the U.S. alone has employed its air forces in more than a dozen separate conflicts against bandits, guerillas, and other irregular forces.³⁷ By examining historical examples, one should be able to draw conclusions relevant for future employment.

By the end of World War I, the aircraft had come of age as an instrument of war. It proved its worth in missions from direct attack to reconnaissance to air superiority. As European nations coped with new and expensive colonial obligations following the collapse

of the Ottoman Empire, they looked to this new asset for help. The British devised the concept of “air control” in which airpower would be the centerpiece of its colonial military operations.³⁸

The doctrine of air control can be traced back to the British protectorate of Somaliland. Harassed by tribal raids against its forces and tribes friendly to the crown, the British deployed a Royal Air Force (RAF) squadron in 1920 to conduct bombing raids against known insurgent positions. By conducting independent raids and supporting fires for ground forces, airpower played a significant role in defeating and evicting a destabilizing force that had irritated the British for close to three decades. Airpower proved a relatively cheap, yet effective solution to the whole affair.³⁹

Armed with this success, the British turned to mounting problems with its League of Nation Mandates in Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. By 1920, Britain faced riots in Palestine and a full-blown and well-armed insurgency in Mesopotamia. In Iraq, the British responded conventionally, crushing the rebellion, but at a staggering economic cost. Buoyed by the Somaliland experience, the British turned to the RAF. Air Marshal Hugh Trenchard, Chief of Staff of the RAF, suggested the RAF take over the direction of military operations in Iraq.⁴⁰ Aircraft could lengthen “the arm of government whilst shortening its purse... controlling vast inhospitable areas at a fraction of the cost of traditional military forces.”⁴¹ Airpower pundits from Douhet to Trenchard have championed airpower to achieve moral effects.⁴² They firmly believed bombing could destroy the enemy’s will to fight. Britain’s Air Staff asserted “the speed and range” of airpower could “keep a whole country under more or less constant surveillance. Insurrection could be nipped in the bud by prompt action and patrolling...might be expected to prevent the seeds of unrest from being sown.”⁴³ Unlike

ground forces, aircraft were deemed invulnerable. They could police and reconnoiter vast areas, transport political representatives for problem solving, and if persuasion failed, bomb rebel targets to coerce compliance.

In retrospect, the effectiveness of air control had its limits. First, successful air control depended on the environment. Wide open expanses suited aerial policing well, but mountainous and forested lands posed problems. And while airpower proved relatively effective against nomadic and tribal people, it struggled against an urban society. Additionally, many criticized the RAF for the doctrine of group accountability, where an entire village would be held responsible for the transgressions of a small bandit group. Critics blasted the use of indiscriminate force that stirred up “feelings of bitter hatred and resentment that would endure for many years.”⁴⁴ The general inaccuracies of both man and machine of the day exacerbated these problems.⁴⁵ These criticisms ring hollow, however, when compared to the alternative, punitive army expeditions that often shelled and burned entire villages.⁴⁶ Concerned about unintended second- and third-order effects, the RAF duly modified its doctrine to incorporate warnings to villages prior to any bombing. By doing so, it hoped to achieve effects on morale more through the disruption of daily life, rather than by material damage alone.⁴⁷

Criticism notwithstanding, over the next decade, the British employed air control with varying degrees of success in nations ranging from Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Aden, Transjordan, Palestine, Egypt to the Sudan.⁴⁸ Air control was cost-effective and the RAF proved a force enhancer. Effective at reconnaissance and close air support, just a few aircraft afforded the same level of support as an entire cavalry battalion. Additionally, the aerial firepower provided psychological effect, both on the enemy as well as boosting morale

for the British forces.⁴⁹ Aircraft had unprecedented impact on the operational factors of time and space, providing firepower quickly and at great distances. It responded to guerilla action in hours rather than days or weeks. It could attack deep inside enemy-held territory and be easily shifted between fronts.⁵⁰ The aviation arm also proved adept in support duties, doing casualty evacuation and liaison functions.

Ultimately many, including J. F. C. Fuller, argued that air control was less effective than aerial action taken in concert with ground troops. They said airpower alone could not achieve pacification, but could only cause destructive effects.⁵¹ In reality, most of the RAF operations conducted in the colonies were done in support of, and in cooperation with, ground personnel.⁵² The RAF's claim of policing its colonial obligations through airpower alone never materialized, despite a romanticized and often exaggerated history. While airpower did significantly reduce the army footprint and was a powerful force multiplier, the British concluded that airpower only realized its true potential when employed in concert with ground forces.⁵³

About two decades later, the British again found themselves in the midst of a counterinsurgency fight, this time in Malaya. Once again, airpower played a critical role. Aimed at suppressing an ethnic Chinese insurgency and limited again by economic constraints, the British employed a fairly small RAF effort, never exceeding 15 squadrons. Actions could be divided into two basic groups: direct, or offensive, actions and indirect, or support, actions. The RAF intended offensive actions to "harass the bandits, to keep them on the move, to destroy their camps and food sites, and, of course, to kill as many as possible."⁵⁴ A dense, triple-canopy jungle, that often obscured the target and lessened the effects of the ordnance, greatly hampered offensive efforts. While, in the aftermath of the war, there was a

tendency to suggest that these operations were totally useless, reports suggest offensive operations did indeed have psychological value. These operations often reached targets well beyond the reach of ground forces, while the sight of aircraft overhead had a positive impact on both the British forces and the local population's morale. Conversely, guerillas often reported a general sense of fear and despondency when subjected to aerial bombardment. One guerilla commented on the debilitating effects of constant bombardment, "Immediately after the bombing we bolted for our lives...I was terribly frightened."⁵⁵

The British used aircraft extensively for reconnaissance, transport, casualty evacuation, aerial resupply, and food control. One of airpower's more important contributions was to Information Operations (IO). The RAF carried out a massive propaganda effort that included leaflets and aerial broadcasting designed to convince the local population of the legitimacy of the government while discrediting the enemy. Leaflets parodied insurgent leaders and told of security forces successes and insurgent setbacks. Aerial loudspeakers broadcast time sensitive information and often targeted specific insurgents by name. Almost 70 percent of surrendering guerillas described the "sky-shouters" as a significant factor in their decision to surrender.⁵⁶

In Malaya, airpower made its greatest contribution through a supporting mission – the airborne insertion of offensive forces. Unable to target their enemy directly from the air with delivered munitions, the British identified two distinct advantages the Malayan insurgents maintained: flexibility and the ability to maintain the initiative by surprise. They turned to airpower to neutralize and overcome these disadvantages. Using intelligence and aerial reconnaissance, the British collapsed the factors of time and space using airpower to rapidly respond and target the enemy. They regained the initiative by inserting ground forces into

known or suspected insurgent territory and they forced their enemy onto the defensive. The RAF then maintained the initiative by supporting “long-duration, deep-penetration patrols and jungle outposts.”⁵⁷ The development and employment of the helicopter proved critical to this unconventional effort. One senior officer said it “almost revolutionized the jungle war.”⁵⁸ Success of these combined arms operations took the fight to the enemy and effectively isolated the battlefield.

Most striking was the balanced and combined politico-military effort the British applied. Airpower was applied in the context of achieving an overall desired end state. Air and ground forces integrated in an unprecedented manner, hunting the enemy and wresting the initiative away from him.⁵⁹ The RAF finally understood that in COIN, airpower’s primary role resided in the support of the ground element. As one officer said, “Army plus Air must be so knitted that the two together form one entity – if you do this, then the resultant military effort will be so great that nothing will be able to stand against it.”⁶⁰

Contrasting these successes is the complete failure of the Soviet response to insurgency in Afghanistan from 1979-1989. From the outset, the Soviets failed to see the political realities of the conflict. The pro-Soviet government enjoyed almost no popular support. After Soviet intervention, the Afghan armed forces demonstrated little desire to fight the insurgents on behalf of their invaders. Entire army units deserted en masse to join the insurgency. Despite having no doctrine or training in COIN, an arrogant Soviet military assumed a poorly trained and equipped insurgency would provide little resistance. Much to its surprise, it was the belligerent that was ill-equipped to fight the ensuing conflict. Soviet forces, armed to fight an armored/mechanized fight, found themselves ambushed and overwhelmed. Even as the Soviets tried to alter their tactics and take advantage of

helicopters to conduct assault and transport operations, mountainous terrain hindered the new tactics effectiveness. Failing in attempts to trap and exterminate the rebels while taking heavy casualties, the Soviets tried bombing the rebels into submission. The Mujahideen adapted to Soviet tactics, employing Stinger missiles to negate Soviet air dominance. By 1985, bleeding in a war whose nature they did not understand, the Soviets withdrew.⁶¹

Today, U.S. Navy, Air Force, Marine, and Army aircraft roam the skies of Iraq and Afghanistan prosecuting the Global War on Terror, executing some classic COIN missions and also some new ones, providing vital tools to the Joint Force Commander. Aircraft have proved essential, executing direct action in support of troops-in-contact (TIC) situations. Using common kill box reference systems and joint doctrinal tactics, airpower provides Close Air Support (CAS) to ground forces in reaction to developing situations from Fallujah to Roberts Ridge. Inherently flexible, aircraft loaded with a variety of precise munitions, are quickly moved around the battlefield to respond to dire circumstances on the ground. They react rapidly to changing conditions and emerging Time-Sensitive Targets (TSTs). Not only have aircraft employed precision ordnance against enemy positions with devastating effect, they have increasingly used smaller, low-collateral-damage munitions, such as guns, to minimize unintended effects on the ground that could hamper the overall COIN effort.

Additionally, airmen have employed innovative non-lethal approaches. Across Iraq, aircraft have performed security for vital infrastructure. They have policed oil pipelines and electrical systems. Aircraft have also supplied real-time intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance to commanders on the ground. Able to transmit reconnaissance photos via secure data link and, in some cases, stream real-time imagery, manned and unmanned aircraft conduct convoy escort and support to cordon-and-search missions.⁶² In these roles, aircraft

can be easily called upon to escalate either kinetically or non-kinetically. Often concerned with the political ramifications of collateral damage, Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTACs) have requested non-lethal CAS, or “shows of force.” By making low passes over insurgents or crowds, aircraft are often effective in coercion, forcing the enemy into breaking contact or causing crowds to disperse.⁶³

As noted above, aircraft have been successful when employed to achieve psychological effects. Often their mere presence has created a sense of security and support for host nation populations while propagating insecurity and fear to the enemy. Simply by “showing the flag,” aircraft used in non-kinetic roles have demonstrated remarkable successes. Lt Gen Thomas Metz, Commander, Multinational Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) understood the possibilities, and deployed airpower to achieve these positive effects during the Iraqi elections. “I want them low – I want them loud – I want them everywhere! I don’t completely understand it, but this population responds to airpower.”⁶⁴

These current efforts are original and effective. Yet General Metz’s comments demonstrate that most commanders fail to understand airpower. Much of the operational and tactical employment of airpower in COIN is ad hoc, created through individual innovation and trial and error. Without suitable joint doctrine, these methods and lessons learned will soon fade from collective memory.

A Roadmap for Success

The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.

- Carl von Clausewitz⁶⁵

History demonstrates that the current lack of airpower doctrine does not correspond to a lack of applicability in COIN.⁶⁶ While employing airpower effectively is certainly

challenging in some environments, to dismiss its effectiveness “is to overlook the inherent flexibility of the air vehicle.”⁶⁷ Indeed, airpower has become a major asset in fighting insurgents. And today’s global circumstances suggest the U.S. military will execute more COIN operations for the foreseeable future. Yet, future operations will continue to provide new and unexpected challenges as America’s enemies use asymmetric means to offset its strengths and exploit its weaknesses. As these enemies continue to evolve and adapt, so must airpower. While there is certainly no single formula for victory, there are some guidelines that should ensure that U.S. airpower is used in the most efficient and effective manner.

An Integrated Effort. Since insurgency is at its root a “politico-military struggle,”⁶⁸ it is important to stress that airpower must be integrated as a part of a larger civil-military effort whose actions are coordinated to achieve a desired end state. Military force, including airpower, must be applied in the context of long-term strategic objectives. Effects must be weighed so short-term gains and their ensuing second- and third-order effects don’t jeopardize the desired end state and its supporting objectives, losing the war for “hearts and minds.” The British demonstrated this understanding throughout their colonial experience. In Malaya, airpower was used within a coordinated civil-military strategy and was often secondary to the government’s many political and economic programs. Today in Iraq, collateral damage concerns often mandate the application of non-kinetic solutions. Any COIN effort, if not applied within this framework, cannot succeed. Unsuccessful operations, such as the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, reinforce this tenet. Incorrectly assuming the conflict to be a conventional military operation, the Soviets completely ignored the political and economic dimensions of the fight.

Within this planning construct, airpower must be applied to achieve strategic objectives. FM 3-24 identifies the strategic objective singularly: legitimacy. One writer goes further, describing the objectives as three interrelated competitions for legitimacy, perceptions, and security versus system disruption.⁶⁹ In fact, airpower, with its considerable asymmetric advantages, is ideally suited to enable victory within these three competitions.⁷⁰

Providing Security. Establishing a secure environment lays the foundation for all ensuing COIN operations. Insurgents will use violence to create chaos and, in turn, erode U.S. and host-nation (HN) credibility. Airpower brings initiative and flexibility, overcoming traditional strengths of the insurgents.⁷¹ It can strike directly at the enemy, eliminating extremists who “have to be killed.”⁷² Aircraft blend a unique combination of speed and range which allow the prosecution of targets well beyond the reach of ground forces, disrupting enemy strongholds, movement, and logistics. Airpower’s flexibility allows rapid response to TSTs and deteriorating conditions on the ground, making it an indispensable security asset to the JFACC. It can also provide supporting functions from reconnaissance and surveillance to maneuver and supply. Working jointly with ground forces, airpower can take the fight to the enemy, finding and rooting out insurgents and keeping them off balance.

Airpower should also assist in less direct applications. Normally, a large number of ground forces are required to establish security for the local populace. A large ground force can often be portrayed as occupiers, aggravating the population and eroding U.S. and HN political will. Airpower can change this calculus. In recent operations in Afghanistan, airpower was an effective force multiplier for a relatively small ground footprint.

Additionally, large portions of present-day Iraq, Afghanistan, Philippines, and other countries are sparsely populated. Many times these lightly inhabited areas contain vital infrastructure

such as pipelines and power lines and critical lines of communication.⁷³ The British air control experience demonstrates airpower's ability to patrol and control vast areas. Not only can airpower monitor these vital areas, but it can deliver deadly effects if required. Furthermore, this can free up critical ground forces to focus on urban areas.

Creating Perceptions. Just as the adage states, "Perception is reality," and COIN operations are no different. The battle of ideas is central to the counterinsurgency fight, and again, airpower can play a crucial role. History has demonstrated that airpower, whether kinetic or not, has created remarkable psychological effects, on the enemy, friendly forces, and the population at large. Mere presence, alone, positively reinforces perceptions of legitimacy and security. Additionally, IO should be pursued to discredit insurgency and reinforce HN legitimacy. Airpower can contribute to psychological operations and strategic communication through aerial broadcasting and leaflet drops. Not only have these methods proved effective in Malaya, but after-action reports from Iraq confirm their effectiveness today. Psychological operations are "the bullet that hits the heart before hitting the body...when it hits, it makes a fearful man."⁷⁴ When employed in concert with psychological operations, precision attacks help turn the fear into dread and panic.⁷⁵

Building Legitimacy. Airpower's ability to deliver precision kinetic effects with minimal collateral damage enhances U.S. and HN legitimacy. Yet, it is airpower's supporting functions that play the most important roles in building legitimacy. Aircraft should be involved in supporting civil and humanitarian actions. By bringing food, clothing, and medical supplies to the population, airpower can have tremendous influence on the "battle for hearts and minds."⁷⁶ Airmen should remember that it is important to put a local "face" on these efforts, whenever possible, because HN legitimacy is the ultimate objective.

Similarly, U.S. Forces must look to build HN capacity. Eventually, American airpower must turn over their security and support effort to local and often newly re-created air forces.⁷⁷ These units must be capable of executing missions ranging from aerial transport and border patrol to counter-guerilla operations. Through support to build and sustain these capabilities, the American airmen shape the strategic landscape, enhancing HN legitimacy while reducing their dependence on the U.S.

Conclusion

Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.

- Giulio Douhet⁷⁸

Today, America finds itself engaged in the beginnings of a protracted fight against a global, transnational insurgency. U.S. airpower is deployed around the globe, contributing to this effort. Yet even now, as U.S. airpower is conducting COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan without coherent joint doctrine, its airmen lack a playbook. American airmen must capture their lessons learned and codify them in doctrine, but this represents only a starting point. America's enemies will continue to adapt and evolve, presenting new and unforeseen challenges. Commanders and planners must be ready to respond to those challenges. Airpower, as a joint-force enabler, represents America's greatest asymmetric asset against the insurgent. Flexibility, adaptation and innovation are its hallmarks.⁷⁹ Yet, airpower represents only one piece of the solution. Commanders and planners must apply airpower, in concert with ground forces, as a part of a larger joint, combined, and interagency effort aimed at building and restoring host-nation legitimacy. Only when applied in such a measured manner can airpower help the commander attain victory.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 92.

² See Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air* and William Mitchell, *Winged Defense*. For an overview of the history of airpower thinking see Phillip S. Meilinger, ed., *The Paths to Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL.: Air University Press, 1997).

³ Churchill, Mid-Century Convocation.

⁴ In the wake of air operations in Kosovo, noted British military historian John Keegan conceded "It now does look as if air power has prevailed in the Balkans, and that the time has come to redefine how victory in war may be won." John Keegan, "So the Bomber Got Through After All," *London Daily Telegraph*, 4 June 1999, p. 28. Gen. Michael J. Dugan, a former U.S. Air Force chief of staff, declared "For the first time in history...we saw an independent air operation produce a political result." Quoted in James A. Kitfield, "Another Look at the Air War That Was," *Air Force Magazine* (October 1999), 40. See also Dave Moniz, "Afghanistan's Lessons Shaping New Military," *USA Today*, 8 October 2002; Fareed Zakaria, "Face the Facts: Bombing works," *Newsweek*, 3 December 2001, 53; and Michael Kelly, "The Air-Power Revolution," *Atlantic Monthly*, 289, no. 4, (April 2002), 18.

⁵ See David W. Barno, "Challenges in Fighting a Global Insurgency," *Parameters*, 36, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 15-29; David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28, no. 4 (August 2005): 597-617; Frank Hoffman, "Learning Neo-classical counter-insurgency," *Parameters*, 37, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 71-87; Steven Metz, *Learning from Iraq: Counterinsurgency in American Strategy*, (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, 2007). Additionally, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report calls the current conflict a "long" and "global" war against extremists. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, v.

⁶ Peck, "Airpower's Critical Role in Irregular Warfare," 10.

⁷ Drew, "U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge", 809.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 809.

⁹ Searle, "Making Airpower Effective against Guerrillas," 13.

¹⁰ Peck, "Airpower's Critical Role in Irregular Warfare," 10.

¹¹ Mitchell, *Winged Defense*, 3.

¹² Clodfelter, "Airpower versus Asymmetric Enemies," 38.

¹³ Drew, "U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge", 814.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Kennedy.

¹⁷ Beebe, "The Air Force's Missing Doctrine," 29.

¹⁸ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*,

¹⁹ FM 3-24 and MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 2 [emphasis added].

²⁰ See Drew, "U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge", 810-11. Drew argues that insurgencies differ from conventional war in five distinct ways, adding logistics.

²¹ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*,

²² Beebe, "The Air Force's Missing Doctrine," 29 [emphasis added].

²³ Joes, *America and Guerilla Wars*, 325.

²⁴ Drew, "U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge," 822-23.

²⁵ AFDD 2, *Operations and Organization*, 25.

²⁶ AFDD 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 62.

²⁷ AFDD 2-3.1, *Foreign Internal Defense*.

²⁸ Beebe, "The Air Force's Missing Doctrine," 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁰ AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*.

³¹ AFDCH 10-01, *Air and Space Commander's Handbook for the JFACC*.

AFDCH 10-03, *Air Component Coordination Element Handbook*.

³² Beebe, "The Air Force's Missing Doctrine," 33.

³³ AFDD-1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 39-58.

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- ³⁴ Air War College, "Transformation of War & U.S. Military," <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/awc-chng.htm> (accessed 22 October 2007).
- ³⁵ Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 1.
- ³⁶ Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 238-39.
- ³⁷ Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 3
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, 51.
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, 53.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 54.
- ⁴¹ Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 143.
- ⁴² See Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air* and Phillip Meilinger, "Trenchard and 'Morale Bombing.'" ⁴³ *Ibid*, 146.
- ⁴⁴ Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 156.
- ⁴⁵ Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 63-64.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 59.
- ⁴⁷ Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 148.
- ⁴⁸ Meilinger, "Trenchard and 'Morale Bombing,'" 253.
- ⁴⁹ Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 65.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 81.
- ⁵¹ Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 156.
- Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 61.
- ⁵³ Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 85-86.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 194.
- ⁵⁵ Towle, *Pilots and Rebels: The Use of Aircraft in Unconventional Warfare 1918-1988*, 86.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 90-1.
- ⁵⁷ Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 195.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 195.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 197.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 199.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*, 387-97.
- ⁶² Belote, "Counterinsurgency Airpower," 57.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*, 58.
- ⁶⁴ Belote, "Counterinsurgency Airpower," 59.
- ⁶⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.
- ⁶⁶ Beebe, "The Air Force's Missing Doctrine," 3.
- ⁶⁷ Drew, "U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge," 815.
- ⁶⁸ FM 3-24 and MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 2.
- ⁶⁹ Hoffman, "Learning Neo-classical Counterinsurgency," 77-79.
- ⁷⁰ Lacy, "Al Qaeda's Global Insurgency," 8.
- ⁷¹ Corum and Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*, 434.
- ⁷² FM 3-24 and MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 45.
- ⁷³ Searle, "Making Airpower Effective Against Guerillas," 19.
- ⁷⁴ Woods, *Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 125.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 125-29.
- ⁷⁶ Lacy, "Al Qaeda's Global Insurgency," 8.
- ⁷⁷ Searle, "Making Airpower Effective Against Guerillas," 19.
- ⁷⁸ Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, 30.
- ⁷⁹ Peck, "Airpower's Critical Role in Irregular Warfare," 11.

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