WHO ARE WE FIGHTING?
THE ENEMY IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

There are many debates about the nature of war in the 21st Century but most agree with the 2009 Defence White Paper judgment that intra-state conflict will be the most common type of conflict over the next twenty years. Such conflicts are inherently messy, complicated and confusing, and aptly described by Rupert Smith as 'wars amongst the people'.

In intra-state wars contemporary air power can generally engage adversaries whenever and wherever required. The central issue is developing a comprehensive understanding of the adversary's vulnerabilities and sensitivities. At its core, intra-state warfare is based on actionable knowledge, information superiority and rapid response making Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and air mobility critically important air power roles.

Several different types of opponents can be identified in intra-state conflicts, either singly or in some combination. These adversaries each have their own strategic ethos and operational logic, which could have some inherent vulnerabilities that can be exploited by air power.

Transnational Criminal Gangs. The longest running intra-state wars are what Moisés Naím (editor-in-chief of Foreign Policy magazine) termed the five wars of globalisation: the illegal international trade in drugs, arms, intellectual property, people and money. Criminal gangs, driven by the laws of demand and supply operate nomadically, go where the money is, and rely on continued access to the global marketplace. These are market-driven enemies. Air power is best used to support the civilian authorities principally through ISR and air mobility.

Terrorists. Terrorists use opportunistic violence to try to provoke a seemingly disproportionate and senseless reaction from their opponents. A terrorist group does not seek legitimacy but aims to make their opponents' reactions appear illegitimate. Terrorists cannot win by their own actions and depend on media coverage to spread their ideas. These are message driven enemies. Actions against such groups must counter not reinforce their message. Air power is best used in a counterforce role to disrupt and degrade terrorist groups in their sanctuaries, and to closely monitor their movements and activities.

Warlords. Warlords are essentially large-scale gangsters who seek personal gain through the threat and use of violence. Their power resides in the 'army' they maintain. In keeping control through force, warlords are unconcerned about public opinion, support or legitimacy. They control their fiefdoms to increase personal wealth, generally through extorting locals, foreign governments and aid agencies. These are pay-off driven enemies. Air power is best used in a counter-value manner, monitoring and disrupting the warlord's economic activities that increases his operating costs and lowers financial gain.

The integration of USAF JTACs with Northern Alliance forces in 2001 is an example of integrating air power with friendly irregular forces.

Militias. Militias seek to provide security for their particular faction, group or clan and fight with a belief in the virtues and ideals of their community. Their ultimate loyalty is to their community not their commanders. Militia members value legitimacy and do not see themselves as bandits. Militias exist within the extant state and do not seek to overthrow it, although some community leaders may use their militia's prowess to access the national political arena. These are short-term, security driven enemies. Air power is best used to monitor militia growth and activities, to limit their access to military capabilities and through helping the

state protect the community, discourage the militia's continuance.

Insurgents. Insurgents seek to take over the state apparatus; they want to be the government. For insurgents, legitimacy is important as they seek to govern all the people. Insurgents therefore have a heavy footprint insisting on people choosing who they support. They have a long-term perspective of their objectives and are prone to protracted conflicts. These are political power driven enemies. Air power is best used to protect the population, placing emphasis on ISR, air mobility and—when the insurgents and population are clearly separated—precise, discriminatory air strikes. Air power employment must support the overriding message that the state is the only legitimate guardian of the people.

Territorial Separatists. Separatists aim to capture part of the territory of the current state in order to set up an independent state on a long term, permanent basis. They need the support of the people in the territory sought for legitimacy to govern that territory. However, they are unconcerned about the other members of the original state. These are territorial control driven enemies. Air power is best used in a counterforce role to disrupt, degrade and destroy the military units of the separatists.

Identity Separatists. Identity separatists seek to cleanse the territory of 'their' state and make it homogenous by expelling those 'others' who don't conform to their chosen identity discriminator. These differences may be cultural, ethnic or racial and are ruthlessly exploited by the identity separatists in their bid for political power. To succeed such separatists have to be recognised as legitimate within their chosen group, without which they will fail. The identity separatists are unconcerned about appearing legitimate to outside groups and are therefore, less constrained in their use of force to achieve their aims. Identity separatists seek permanent solutions. These are identity driven enemies. Air power is best employed with a counterforce focus on disrupting, degrading and destroying the separatist's military units although in some circumstances counter-value targeting may also be effective.

Proxy Warriors. Proxy warriors fight on behalf of others in the territory of another, focusing on damaging the interests of the third party involved. Legitimacy is immaterial in such conflicts. The intent is to fight a protracted war that has psychological effects on the third party opponent. In this case keeping the fight going is more important than the results. Proxy warriors rely mainly on external resources provided by their sponsors, state or non-state, and so can have a relatively light local footprint. These are mind game driven enemies. Air power is best used in a counterforce role to disrupt, degrade and destroy the proxy military units, and where practical to interdict their supply routes.

The various potential opponents also differ in their abilities to equip for war—criminals and terrorists parasitically exploit their host societies' resources, warlords and insurgents access military capabilities from local and transnational sources, while separatists and proxy forces normally wage hybrid wars that mix older and very advanced technology.

In intra-state wars, adversaries may take many forms but understanding their nature is key to countering them. Just as in inter-state warfare, the successful employment of air power will be based on a comprehensive knowledge of an opponent's objectives and their critical vulnerabilities.

- *Air power can engage adversaries wherever and whenever required*

- *In irregular warfare, the critical need is to understand the adversary and respond rapidly and therefore, ISR, air mobility and precision strike are critical air power roles*

- *In IW air power is best employed within a whole-of-nation approach*

"In point of fact you do not control a country from the air any more than from the business end of a gun. It is the Civil Administrator, the District Commissioner or Political Officer and the policeman who control the country."

Air Chief Marshal J. C. Slessor, 1957

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