

Air Power Review

Volume 15 Number 1

Spring 2012

Remoteness, Risk and Aircrew Ethos

Dr Peter Lee

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Kabul Airlift of 1928-29**

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Roe

**A Greek Tragedy? The Royal Air Force's
Campaign in the Balkans, November
1940 to April 1941**

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Royal Air Force Air Power Review

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Short Sunderland Mark I, N9029 'NM-V', of No. 230 Squadron RAF Detachment based at Scaramanga, Greece, in flight over the Greek islands on 27-28 March 1941.



Short Sunderland Mark I, T9048 'DQ-N', of No. 228 Squadron RAF, being boarded by RAF personnel in a rowing boat off Kalamata, during the evacuation from Greece on 24 April 1941.



Oblique aerial photograph taken from a Bristol Beaufighter of No. 252 Squadron RAF, showing the aircraft's bombs exploding alongside the enemy collier, BACCHUS, under attack while anchored off Preveza, Greece.

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Bristol Blenheim Mark I, L6670 'UQ-R', of No. 211 Squadron RAF preparing to taxi at Menidi/Tatoi, Greece.



A Bristol Beaufighter releases its bombs towards the further of two German flak vessels attacked by aircraft of No. 201 Group, south of the island of Kalymnos in the Dodecanese.

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Foreword

Spring 2012 brings the next edition of APR and a new Director of Defence Studies (RAF), Group Captain Peter Squires, a biography of whom is included. The first article is offered by Dr Peter Lee from the department of air power studies at RAF College Cranwell and is entitled 'Remoteness, Risk and Aircrew Ethos'. From the era of dog-fighting biplanes to the age of fly-by-wire, stealth technology and satellite-guided weaponry, the article examines how each iteration of technological advancement has seen its associated RAF aircrew – especially the pilots – incorporate their ethos in the shadows of those early pioneers. The article examines how the heritage and heroics of their forebears have been claimed and selectively incorporated in the ethos of each new generation. It goes on to look at how the advent of the Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) has brought a new dynamic to the aircrew/aircraft nexus, with the former being physically removed from both the cockpit and the battle space. This article explores some of the ways in which the personal and collective ethos of those who operate the Reaper RPAS is formed now and may be formed in the future.

The second article, entitled 'Evacuation of Kabul' is written by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Roe, an author well known to regular readers of APR. The article is a fascinating comparison of 2 ostensibly similar actions separated by over 8 decades. In 2010, the Royal Air Force (RAF) undertook a hazardous mission to evacuate British nationals from Libya, North Africa. The rescue effort was a complete success; all willing and entitled British civilians were evacuated safely and no aircrew or aircraft came to any real harm. Eighty-three years earlier, the RAF undertook another risky air evacuation to save hundreds of embassy staff and their families of several countries from the inter-tribal strife, which spread into civil war in Afghanistan. This time the destination was Kabul. The article exposes the political background behind the evacuations, the actions of the threatened British Legation and the skill and determination of the pilots and crew involved in the little known, but extraordinary, evacuation of Kabul in 1928-29.

Moving forward in history, the next article is authored by another familiar and welcome contributor, Group Captain Alistair Byford, and is entitled 'A Greek Tragedy? The Royal Air Force's Campaign in the Balkans, November 1940 to April 1941'. The article describes how the campaign in Greece in the winter of 1940-41 was the last of 3 disastrous expeditionary campaigns mounted by British forces in the first 15 months of the Second World War, following the intervention in Norway and the *blitzkrieg* in France and Flanders. While the campaigns were similar in nature – all were joint, fought in coalition and culminated in a desperate evacuation – each had a unique character. The article contends that the RAF's experience in Greece yields specific and valuable contemporary lessons about the employment of air power. Most importantly, success and failure were intimately connected to the degree of control of the air that could be achieved, in turn determined and constrained by the organisation of deployed logistics and support functions. However, the campaign is most notable as an example of the primacy of the political imperative above purely military considerations, and illustrates the unpalatable strategic choices that very senior commanders must make as they attempt to manage and mitigate operational consequences.

With another chronological jump, the fourth article is penned by Dr Ben Jones, also at the air power studies department of the RAF College Cranwell. The article is entitled 'The Persian Gulf and British Defence Policy, 1956-1971'. In the fifteen years prior to Britain's military withdrawal from east of Suez in 1971, the defence of its protectorates in the Persian Gulf became a key focus for British defence policy, largely for economic reasons. The article charts the changing diplomatic situation in terms of Britain's relations with its allies and the threats which existed to them. The major focus is upon the resulting decisions with regards to the stance and readiness of Britain's military forces in the area. The concept of deterrence was crucial and contingency plans emphasised the need to act quickly and decisively. The article contends that what changed was not Britain's interest in the region, but the practical issues of maintaining its defence posture and whether these commitments could be afforded.

The fifth and final article for this edition of APR, 'Non-kinetic operations: information operations, air force style' is a guest article written by Colonel Bruno Mignot of the French Air Force. Colonel Mignot is currently serving as Chief of the National Air Operation Centre at Lyon-Mont Verdun. The article describes the French Air Force approach to non-kinetic influence operations and includes the whole range of information operations in the broadest sense. Typical of this approach, which has already received international recognition during joint and combined exercises, is that it takes account of the political, military, cultural, economic and social environment of a country in crisis at the time of an external operation. The article examines non-kinetic operations firstly by looking at the various players in the operational theatre, then by asking what is meant by "non-kinetic". Information operations and the strategy of influence are examined and then eight basic functions of non-kinetic ops are described with the article concluding with a description of the organisation of a non-kinetic cell.

This first edition of 2012 concludes with 2 viewpoints and 2 book reviews. The viewpoints are offered by Flight Lieutenant Sandy McKenzie from the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre, Chicksands and Dr Rob Wheeler from the RAF's Air Warfare Centre. Sandy MacKenzie provides some thoughts on the renaissance of air power in light of recent operations, as a counterpoint to Van Creveld's views on air power, whilst Dr Wheeler takes a look at the moral issues surrounding the employment of RPAS.

Finally, Group Captain Alistair Byford has submitted a book review of 'British Naval Aviation: The first 100 years, Edited by Tim Benbow and Wing Commander Greg Hammond has written a review of the classic 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' by T E Lawrence.

Biography

Group Captain Peter J M Squires

OBE MA BEng (Hons) RAF

Group Captain Squires joined the RAF in 1989 following a bursary at Southampton University whilst studying Aeronautics & Astronautics. His flying career has been predominantly on the Harrier where he has amassed 1800 hours on 5 different marks of Harrier at 4 different Squadrons at both Flight Lieutenant and Squadron Leader ranks. He has conducted 7 operational flying deployments to the Middle East and Former Republic of Yugoslavia and is a Qualified Weapons & Tactics Instructor. He was at the forefront of the embarked Harrier II operations which included a 5 month embarked operational deployment during Op BOLTON for which he was awarded a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service. He also flew the 1(F) Sqn Harrier display in 1997.

A staff tour as the Wing Commander Joint Combat Aircraft Requirements' Manager was followed by Advanced Command & Staff College at Shrivenham where he graduated with an MA in Defence Studies. Following this he was posted to HQ 3(UK) Division as the senior air power advisor to the General Officer Commanding and commanded the Divisional Air Cell. He deployed to Iraq with the Division in 2008 as MND(SE)'s Chief Air Plans.

He commanded 100 Sqn RAF Leeming from April 2009 to April 2011 and was responsible for providing Close Air Support for Land Forces prior to operational deployment; training Weapon System Operators prior to the Tornado GR4 and the supply of aggressor forces for all RAF Squadrons and many multinational forces. He was awarded an OBE in the 2012 New Year's Honours' List for his work on the Squadron which was followed by a brief period in the Release to Service Authority, where he responsible for staffing all fixed wing clearances for the RAF. He was promoted to Group Captain in June 2011 and assumed command of 906 Expeditionary Air Wing which provided combat support air assets to Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR charged with protecting the lives of Libyan civilians. Following the conclusion of that Operation, Squires assumed the post of Director Defence Studies for the RAF.

Notes on Contributors

Dr Peter Lee is a King's College London Lecturer in Air Power Studies based at Royal Air Force College Cranwell. While specializing in the ethics of war, Dr Lee lectures across a range of diverse subjects from international relations to the evolution of air power. In November 2011 he published his first book entitled *Blair's Just War: Iraq and the Illusion of Morality* and is regularly invited to lecture on this subject to military, academic, church and wider audiences. From 2001 to 2008 Dr Lee served as a Royal Air Force chaplain.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Roe YORKS, CO 2 Yorks, and previously Military Assistant to the Surgeon General, was commissioned into the Green Howards in 1992. He has held various command and staff positions in Northern Ireland, Germany, Bosnia, Afghanistan, the Falkland Islands and Iraq. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and Staff College and the School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He has a PhD from King's College London and is the author of *Waging War in Waziristan: The British Struggle in the Land of Bin Laden, 1849-1947*.

Group Captain Alistair Byford is the Assistant Head of Air & Space at the Ministry of Defence's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre. A Tornado strike, attack and reconnaissance pilot, he has flown over 4,000 fast-jet hours in an operational career that began with the first Gulf War and has included twelve operational deployments, command of No.31 Squadron and, most recently, No. 904 Expeditionary Air Wing in Afghanistan. A former Director of Defence Studies (RAF), he has taken post-graduate degrees at Kings College London and Cambridge University, the latter under the Chief of the Air Staff's Fellowship scheme. Group Captain Byford is the author of the current edition of *AP3000: British Air and Space Doctrine* and was awarded the Gordon Shephard Memorial Prize in 2011 for the best essay on the employment of air power by a serving officer.

Dr Ben Jones joined the new Defence Studies Department based at the Royal Air Force College in Lincolnshire as a Lecturer in 2006. He previously taught at the Department of War Studies at King's College London. In 1998 Dr Jones completed his MPhil on the air operations of the British Pacific Fleet, analysing the development of Fleet Air Arm operations during the Second World War. In 2002 Dr Jones produced a new history section for the Royal Navy's website. Dr Jones finished his PhD on British naval air logistics during the two World Wars in 2007. This study examined the whole spectrum of logistic provision from strategic to tactical requirements. It analysed the evolution of air expansion programmes, the administration of aircraft procurement and the co-ordination of Squadrons to meet operational needs. Dr Jones is currently conducting research into the political and military background to the Falklands War and the debate over the requirement for aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy, 1957-1970.

Colonel Bruno Mignot gained an engineering degree at the French Air Force Academy in 1985 before becoming a fighter pilot on Mirage 2000, and subsequently flying transport aircraft (C160 Transall), helicopters, and ultra-lights. He has worked in the French Intel staffs, notably including the National Defence General Secretariat, in joint communication staffs as Chief of the editorial staff within the Defence News Agency, in defence military cooperation as the Director of the African War College in Yaoundé (Cameroon), and finally in the air operations domain within the Air Operational Staff in Paris. He is currently Chief of the National Air Operation Centre at Lyon-Mont Verdun.

Remoteness, Risk and Aircrew Ethos

By Dr Peter Lee

From the era of dog-fighting biplanes to the age of fly-by-wire, twin-engine fast-jets with stealth technology and satellite-guided weaponry, each iteration of technological advancement has seen its associated RAF aircrew – especially the pilots – construct their ethos in the shadows of those early pioneers. The heritage and heroics of their forebears have been claimed and selectively incorporated in the ethos of each new generation who would apply the increasing utility of air power in combat operations. However, the advent of the Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) in recent years has brought a new dynamic to the aircrew/aircraft nexus, with the former being removed from both the cockpit and the battle space. This article explores some of the ways in which the personal and collective ethos of those who operate the Reaper RPAS is formed now and may be formed in the future.

Introduction

Flight and Squadron Commanders wore bunches of long ribbons which flew back from their helmets in the slipstream and looked for all the world like bannerets of the knights of old ... In their helmets, gauntlets and flying goggles, the pilots were truly romantic figures, and every small boy used to dream, in those days, of how *he* would look in the garb of his heroes.¹

With a few evocative words John Harris captured some of the sense, some of the stereotype perhaps, of the first knights of the air. Therein lie romantic notions of duelling men of honour, trusty steeds on boggy fields replaced by soaring contraptions framed with fabric and wood. Almost a century after World War I these partial conceptions of the soaring warriors and their self-sacrificial actions above the trenches are embedded in our history, an oft-repeated cultural memory that has taken on a reality of its own. So familiar is the caricature of the WWI fighter pilot that when the fictional comedy creation Squadron Commander the Lord Flashheart stepped onto British television screens in *Blackadder Goes Forth* he needed no further introduction or contextualization.

From the era of dog-fighting biplanes to the age of fly-by-wire, twin-engine fast-jets with stealth technology and satellite-guided weaponry, each iteration of technological advancement has seen its associated RAF² aircrew – especially the pilots – construct their ethos in the shadows of those early pioneers. The heritage and heroics of their forebears have been claimed and selectively incorporated in the ethos of each new generation who would apply the increasing utility of air power in combat operations. However, the advent of the Remotely Piloted Aircraft System³ (RPAS) in recent years has brought a new dynamic to the aircrew/aircraft nexus, with the former being removed from both the cockpit and the battle space. Understandably, given the rapid technological advances that are being made and the nature of counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan in particular, debate is dominated by the art of what is technically and militarily possible today and speculation about what developments we might see in the future. Correspondingly, and encouragingly, debate is already taking place about the associated moral issues that are raised by the remote operation of the Reaper⁴ today, as well as the moral challenges that increased autonomy might bring in the future.⁵ Further, research is already under way on both sides of the Atlantic to monitor and assess the psychological impact of remote operations on RPAS pilots and sensor operators⁶, given the unique juxtaposition of engaging in battle for hours on end and a ‘normal’ domestic life outside of the working environment.

In contrast, the scope of this article is much more modest and will explore some of the ways in which both the personal and collective ethos of those who operate the Reaper are formed now and may be formed in the future. I will argue that personal ethos is formed in two separate but interwoven ways: externally and internally. The ethos of aircrew (or soldiers, sailors or marines) is formed partly from external factors such as they way their actions are understood and portrayed in public discourse. This external dynamic is accompanied by the

self-forming of personal ethos in the ways that pilots and sensor operators see themselves and shape their actions and attitudes accordingly.

I assume that aircrew ethos, like the formation of ethos in any walk of life, is not formed in a conceptual vacuum but draws upon familiar, existing discourses, incorporating those aspects that are relevant, or can be modified to be relevant, in the present while ignoring those concepts from the past that are not. In addition, the meanings of the various discourses that use and interpret throughout the article, from books to Victoria Cross citations to written and oral contributions from current Reaper crew, are assumed to be contested and contingent. In times of war, past and present, issues of truth, objectivity and bias must be weighed up in the context of propaganda and broader political dialogue. Consequently, in assessing my arguments readers should therefore also consider the relative merits of the sources I draw upon.

Two key threads will run through this discussion. First, the place of personal risk in the formation of aircrew ethos and, second, the utility of air power in some of the ways it has been historically deployed (what pilots/crews do and how they do it). The first part of the article will outline further what I mean by ethos before exploring aspects of the historical emergence of aircrew ethos in World War I, while the second part will consider aircrew ethos over the decades that followed, particularly in World War II. The final section, drawing on sources that include personal interviews and written exchanges with current and previous RPAS crews, will look at some of the ways in which the ethos of Reaper pilots and sensor operators still draw upon aspects of those historical discourses.

The Emergence of Aircrew Ethos

The first difficulty we encounter in trying to say anything about aircrew ethos is located in the transitory, contested and nebulous meaning of the word *ethos* itself. Broadly speaking, one understanding of ethos focuses on the collective or the institution, while an alternative understanding focuses on the individual. Anthony King adopted the former approach while researching the ethos of the Royal Marines, noting, 'Every social group has an ethos for it is precisely the existence of an ethos which denotes a social group. Ethos certainly includes a spiritual dimension; it encompasses the shared understandings of the group. Yet it is more robust than this spiritual communion. Ethos refers simply to what a human group does and how it does it.'⁷ King's approach is appealing – perhaps especially in a military environment – because it focuses on observable external actions and methods. Aspects of King's understanding can be found in the official *Ethos of the RAF*:

The distinctive character, spirit and attitude of the RAF which together inspire our people to face challenge, and, on occasion, danger. It is underpinned by tradition, esprit-de-corps and a sense of belonging. It encompasses the will to contribute to the delivery of effective air power that arises from confidence in the chain of command, trust in colleagues and equipment, respect for individuality, sustainment of high professional standards and the courage to subordinate personal needs for the greater good.⁸

The focus of the official RAF ethos is on 'the delivery of effective air power', while the remainder of the statement sets out how this aim is to be achieved. However, the RAF ethos also suggests, but does not develop, a role for the individual within the whole. In so doing it captures elements of Stephen Deakin's use of the term ethos in relation to the British Army and its heritage and history. He wrote: 'Ethos is concerned with the way in which people actually live and it presupposes community. Ethos is the characteristic spirit of a community.'⁹ Deakin's conception of ethos appears to be more balanced than King's, incorporating both individual and communal aspects.

The most helpful, though admittedly still flawed, alternative understanding of ethos I can offer acknowledges positive aspects in the approaches of both Deakin and King, and is analogous to the mathematical concept of fractals. Fractals are geometric shapes, often irregular, which when divided or split reveal a shape or pattern that is a smaller copy of the original whole. The RAF as an entity, like any other organization, cannot have an ethos that is anything other than utterly reliant on, and reflective of, the people who make up that institution. Ideally, the institutional 'shape' of RAF ethos will be found in a similar form in the smaller units that combine to make up the RAF as a whole: Commands, Stations, Squadrons and Flights. However, the ethos of all of these elements of the institutions ultimately rests upon the ethos of the individuals therein. In order to explore aircrew ethos I will therefore extend King's very straightforward notion that 'Ethos refers simply to what a human group does and how it does it'¹⁰, adding the individual-oriented perspective of the French philosopher Michel Foucault who described ethos as 'the formation of a certain way of being, a certain way of doing things, of conducting oneself as an individual'.¹¹ Consequently, my examination of the impact of remoteness on the ethos of Reaper crew will encompass the complex interplay of three interrelated questions: How does the identity of aircrew emerge? What does aircrew do? How do they do it?

When the matter of identity – a combination of self-perception and the perception held by others – is included in our understanding of ethos, the link between personal qualities and skills and the aims and methods of institutions such as the RAF becomes clearer. To demonstrate the point further, take the relationship between ethos and ethics, which are often, and mistakenly, taken to be synonymous. Individual ethical conduct, like ethos itself, shapes and is shaped by the three questions: Who am I? What do I do? How do I do it? However, ethics is only part of ethos and is primarily concerned with how I *should* conduct myself. Ethos weaves together two related questions: 'What should I do?' and 'What do I actually do?' In turn, ethical failure impacts not only upon the individuals involved but also on the ethos and standing of the institutions to which they belong.

On 5 July 2011 the Guardian newspaper stated boldly: 'Afghan civilians killed by RAF drone'.¹² Note that the headline placed the responsibility on the RAF and its 'drone' – implying an absence of human decision making and control – even though the article later acknowledged that it was remotely piloted from Nevada. A Ministry of Defence report on the same incident

noted that 'the UK Reaper's crews actions had been in accordance with procedures and UK Rules of Engagement'¹³, thereby exonerating the crew. Because the crew did what they were tasked to do based on the available intelligence, with the sole intention of killing enemy combatants, their personal ethics remain intact. Despite this, the reputation of the RAF was diminished and its *modus operandi* publicly questioned. Another report on the same event added a further dimension. Aljazeera's headline stated: 'Afghan civilians killed by British drone'.¹⁴ Responsibility for the deaths of Afghan civilians was attributed not to the pilot or sensor operator involved or even to the RAF but to Britain. We can therefore see how, in a volatile region, the political significance of the killing of civilians goes beyond both ethics and ethos and the individual/institutional questions: Who am I? What do I do? How do I do it? The article now turns to the historical emergence of aircrew ethos in WWI and the contributions made to aircrew ethos in WWII, and will return to the matter of remoteness, risk and ethos in relation to the work of Reaper crew in the final section.

Knights of the Air

Paul Robinson, in *Military Honour and the Conduct of War*, says of modern war, 'One area in which people did feel that the old ideals [about honour in battle] did survive was air warfare'.¹⁵ He was referring specifically to the rise of aerial combat in the First World War as the benefits of using aircraft for artillery spotting and reconnaissance inevitably led to the fight for control of the air. Robinson's observation is not a twenty-first century idealization of the role of pilots from almost a hundred years earlier. He cites Bennett Molter, an American pilot, who wrote in 1918: 'In many ways the fighting aviators are living much like the lives of the heroes of chivalry. Their warfare is that of man to man'.¹⁶ According to Molter, pilots would occasionally invite an enemy to single combat, a romantic notion that he compared with knights of old.

As the war progressed, the German, French and British authorities were keen to publicly exploit the growing legend of the noble fighter ace in the terms that Molter set out. Newspapers were complicit in the romanticizing of the Knights of the Air. In a book of that title years later John Harris used similar discursive constructs in capturing the exploits of WWI Canadian fighter aces: 'Rain and intense cold often added discomfort to the dangers of flight, but on the other hand there was a grand sensation in handling the light responsive biplanes ... In their helmets, gauntlets and flying goggles, the pilots were truly romantic figures'.¹⁷ However, the figures were much less romantic than Harris's description of them. Starkly contrasting and more realistic was British pilot – and ace – James McCudden's recollections of aerial combat.

Taking into account his understated writing style and his preference for factual detail over displays of personal emotion or reflection, McCudden's effective and at times distinctly unchivalrous approach to the enemy shines through. Along with all other pilots, he was required to give himself the greatest possibility of killing his opponent in the air while maximising his own chances of survival. He described an encounter on 13 January 1918 when he was flying at 17,000 feet, 10 miles beyond his own lines over German occupied territory. He spotted an enemy two-seater aircraft several thousand feet below heading west and set out to

ambush it. He set his engine to idle to reduce noise and kept his own aircraft 'in between the sun and the Hun'¹⁸ to reduce his chances of being seen while gliding down to make his attack. McCudden recalled:

So when I got within good close range, about 100 yards, I pressed both triggers; my two guns responded well, and I saw pieces of three-ply wood fall off the side of the Hun's fuselage. Then the L.V.G. went into a flat, right-hand spiral glide until it hit the ground a mass of flying wreckage ... I hate to shoot the Hun down without him seeing me, for although this method is in accordance with my doctrine, it is against what little sporting instincts I have left.¹⁹

McCudden, in keeping with much military practice throughout history, typically depersonalised his aerial opponents: referring to them by the generic name of 'Hun', accompanied by the type of aircraft the 'Hun' was flying. However, he did grant exceptions to this general rule. In his memoir, *Flying Fury*, he wrote almost warmly when he referred to the German fighter aces he encountered: 'The marvellous fight which Voss put up against my formation will ever leave in my mind a most profound admiration for him, and the other instances which I have witnessed the skill and bravery of German pilots.'²⁰ Yet despite his admiration for German bravery and some level of desire for a sporting fight, military efficiency in the successful application of air power took priority. McCudden was certainly aware of his own ethos as a pilot and perhaps even still retained a desire for some idealized version of it as he physically and mentally deteriorated towards the end of the war. This desire took second place, increasingly so, to his effectiveness in killing the enemy. If romance endured anywhere it was not in the minds of those pilots who achieved fame through their proficiency: they had seen, heard and experienced enough of the human cost of their military art.

I previously set out three questions to be used in trying to understand the emergence of aircrew ethos, which I will use here with reference to those early pilots: How does the personal identity of a pilot emerge? What does a pilot do? How does the pilot do it? Clearly these three elements of ethos are interlinked but the first – identity – has two further aspects to it: how pilots saw themselves and how others saw them. McCudden typified a self-deprecating understatedness that has become a hallmark of aircrew ethos in the RAF; in *Flying Fury* his descriptions of his own actions are heavily factual and almost devoid of emotion or drama. On the privations of war and the mental and physical toll of combat he wrote: 'The are times while flying when one experiences such hardship and suffering [especially from the cold] that one is inclined to say, "No more flying for me," but after passing that state one becomes keen again and the fascination of the whole things begins afresh.'²¹ In stark contrast to McCudden's mundane self-analysis, the perception of some of those soldiers and officers who looked upwards from the squalor of the trenches was that of a self-aggrandizing elite who were separated from the harsh realities of the front lines. Such a view was probably reinforced by the rising curiosity of a public that, as the war progressed, wanted to hear more and more about the pilots whose freedom of the skies was often enjoyed for the briefest period before their untimely deaths.

Major 'Mick' Mannock was accredited with destroying 50 German aircraft and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross (VC) on 18 July 1919. Marking the occasion, the *London Gazette* summed up his flying career and character: 'This highly distinguished officer, during the whole of his career in the Royal Air Force, was an outstanding example of fearless courage, remarkable skill, devotion to duty and self sacrifice, which has never been surpassed'.²² McCudden's VC citation referred to his 'utmost gallantry and skill, not only in the manner in which he has attacked and destroyed the enemy, but in the way he has during several aerial fights protected the newer members of his flight'.²³ The characteristics and skills that were attributed to Mannock, McCudden and others acknowledged the gallantry for which their VCs were conferred. The citations also created and reinforced in the eyes of fellow combatants of all branches of the armed forces and the general public the discourse of the pilot as a form of ideal warrior. Even where the dangers of combat were shared in two-seat aircraft, with very few exceptions it was the pilot alone who was given the publicity and awards.

No matter how many gallantry citations are read, the same characteristics are called upon repeatedly in the descriptions of the pilots and their actions: skill, duty, courage, perseverance, self-sacrifice. The common thread that connected these qualities and abilities in the eyes of the public was risk: physical danger from a combination of the enemy, the elements or the aircraft that were flown at and beyond the extremes of their technical specifications. Ferdinand West's award was not made because he attacked a large number of enemy fighters; pilots on both sides regularly carried out such actions. West was recognised because he fought on in extreme pain, overcoming the limitations placed upon him by the wounds he sustained.²⁴ Similarly, George Barker was awarded the VC for sustained attacks against the enemy despite being shot in both legs and having his left arm shattered.²⁵ Skill was essential in every pilot. Maintaining that skill level in spite of grave injuries and the threat of death gave rise to the myth of the pilot as some kind of demi-god, not only physically separated from those who looked up from the fields below but somehow morally transcendent as well. On such foundations was aircrew ethos built.

Reinforcing the public perception of pilots as somehow possessing extraordinary characteristics and capabilities was the disproportionately high number of awards they received, in contrast to the number given to the vast armies of soldiers who battled on the ground. The immense, anonymous wholesale slaughter that took place in trench warfare is difficult to comprehend but provides an important backdrop to the recognition given to those who flew overhead. From a twenty-first century viewpoint where individual losses in Afghanistan feature regularly in both broadcast and print media, the numbers involved in WWI are almost too great to imagine. In one week in the Ypres Salient, only one element of the Ypres land campaign, two million artillery shells were fired by the British Army, 3,000 soldiers died and 14,000 were wounded.²⁶ The scale of the losses and the nature of the fighting, as well as provoking questions about tactics, morality, morale and leadership, caused problems when it came to the award of decorations. How could one or two individuals out of 500 be set apart from those who shared their risks, privations and horrors?

The war in the air, in contrast, provided the canvas upon which reputations and legend could be written. Even Trenchard publicly declared (against his private disregard for the aces): 'Albert Ball was the most audacious, the most skilful and most marvellous pilot in the RFC. Every pilot in the corps considered him the perfect model and strove to imitate him'.²⁷ Lord Rothermere the Air Minister, on the day the RAF came into existence, went much further in extolling aircrew, enhancing and endorsing their already burgeoning and unrealistic legend. He wrote an article entitled 'British Airmen's Daring' where he eulogized the outstanding bravery of 'the British flying man', going as far as to say that the pilots of the RFC and RNAS had rewritten the definitions of bravery and daring²⁸. Going further, the remarkable deeds of these airmen and their successful attacks on 'the Hun' were attributed to a combination of 'perfect physique, of matchless bravery, [and] of extraordinary quickness of brain'.²⁹

Lord Rothermere's short article used the word 'bravery' four times and referred to the airmen as 'supermen'. The breathless tones in his description of aerial derring-do would appear more at home in a romantic novel than in a ministerial message published in *The Times*. Airmen were not only physically set apart from their fellow combatants by their ability to take to the skies, they were metaphorically set apart as being somehow extra-ordinary. The emergence of aircrew ethos took on a dynamic that was beyond the control or the desire of those who flew in battle. Public perception and the shaping of public perception in political and military discourse resulted in a 'reality' that did not match the experience of the aircrew in the war in the air. Since millions of people vicariously shared in the public 'reality' and only thousands knew what it was like to fly in combat the perceived reality morphed into actual 'reality' over time. This process was helped by a wilful determination to maintain the myth, the legend of the supermen. Politicians and military leaders increasingly wanted it, the public wanted it, and at least some proportion of flyers revelled in it.

How could anyone live up to the words of the Air Minister? For all the lack of realism in the tone of his article – it should be borne in mind that he was also fighting a propaganda war at the time – the foundation of aircrew ethos was set by the end of World War I and it would prove remarkably durable. Perhaps more interestingly, since Lord Rothermere was writing on 1 April 1918, aircrew ethos was already clearly established *by the time the RAF was formed*, being brought into the new organisation from the RFC and RNAS. The essential elements of ethos that I set out previously – What is the identity of the pilot? What did he do? How did he do it? – were all present in Rothermere's statement. The pilot's identity as the brave superman of extraordinary physique and intelligence brought him affection from the public and envy from the trench-bound Tommy. He 'strafed the Hun', contested aerial duelling, reconnoitred enemy territory, drop bombs: all with remarkable skill, endurance in the face of physical and mental injury, determination and cunning. Usually until he died doing so.

Fighters and Bombers

After the Great War ended aircrew ethos altered little over the decades, fliers and adoring public alike still preferring the legends to the harsh realities of policing the Empire with scarce

resources. If there was any risk of pilots in particular falling from public favour as the most adored and romantic of combatants then World War II confirmed their places, *in perpetuity*, in the pantheon of military heroes. Over the summer of 1940 another generation of young men took to the skies in their Hurricanes and Spitfires to stave off the German quest for air superiority that was intended as a prelude to an invasion of the UK. From early in WWII Churchill and the government sought to use any means to boost public confidence and morale at a time when a country under siege needed both hope and heroes. Fighter pilots provided an ideal point of focus and optimism. Gallantry awards continued to be publicised as public perception of the pilots slipped straight into the stereotypes of the past. The VC citation of Flight Lieutenant James Nicolson captures his efforts as the Battle of Britain approached its most intense period:

On 16th August, 1940, Flight Lieutenant Nicolson's aircraft was hit by four cannon shells, two of which wounded him whilst another set fire to the gravity tank. When about to abandon his aircraft owing to flames in the cockpit he sighted an enemy fighter. This he attacked and shot down, although as a result of staying in his burning aircraft he sustained serious burns to his hands, face, neck and legs ... this incident shows that he possesses courage and determination of the highest order ... he displayed exceptional gallantry and disregard for the safety of his own life.³⁰

Aircrew ethos was perpetuated on the basis of the same characteristics and actions upon which it had been founded almost three decades earlier: skill, duty, courage, perseverance and self-sacrifice in the context of extreme physical risk. Seventy years after those immortalized aerial duels Geoffrey Wellum, a former WWII Spitfire pilot, recalled the challenge they faced. "The effort that was being put in by the Germans and the Luftwaffe – they weren't doing it for fun and we had to stop them. That was the important thing. Not whether Jim shot down 10 and Bill shot down one and poor old Sid didn't get any. It didn't matter who shot down what. It never worried me, these Germans were up to no good and they HAD to be stopped."³¹

Wellum's stark account dispensed with the romantic notions that meant so much to those who observed the pilots' actions from afar, his realism encapsulated in a single imperative: 'they had to be stopped'. As a combatant his emphasis was on repelling wave after wave of attack with consideration of the individual personalities or opinions of the pilots almost irrelevant. There was certainly no place for gentleman duelers. Patrick Bishop sums up the seriousness of the situation early in the war: 'Of the 2,917 men who fought in Fighter Command air battles of the summer of 1940, 544 were killed'.³² On 15 September 1940, as the period commonly recognised as the Battle of Britain came to a close, Churchill reinforced the legend of the fighter pilot even further with his immortalized words: "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few."³³

While the pilots of Fighter Command took their plaudits, the war progressed on multiple fronts, with Bomber Command aircraft able to strike directly against Germany. The dangers

faced by the bomber crews took a different form to those faced by their fighter counterparts. Instead of repeated, short, intense high speed encounters they had to endure up to eight hours' flying over occupied territory and Germany. The constant threats posed by mechanical failure, icing, anti-aircraft batteries and interception by Luftwaffe fighters led to its aircrew suffering the highest attrition rates of any arm of the British forces. The comparative dangers also resulted in 23 VCs being awarded to Bomber Command and only one to Fighter Command. Leonard Cheshire's VC was unique because it was awarded for persistent bravery in the face of the enemy over an extended period – 102 sorties – rather than a specific act of valour. His citation stated:

In four years of fighting against the bitterest opposition he maintained a standard of outstanding personal achievement, his successful operations being the result of careful planning, brilliant execution and supreme contempt for danger – for example, on one occasion he flew his P-51 Mustang in slow 'figures of eight' above a target obscured by low cloud, to act as a bomb-aiming mark for his squadron. Cheshire displayed the courage and determination of an exceptional leader.³⁴

As a feat of physical and mental endurance his accomplishment was remarkable. With regard to aircrew ethos, however, the key words remained: skill, duty, courage, perseverance and self-sacrifice. Furthermore, Cheshire's development of low level target marking highlighted a commitment not only to bombing proficiency but in doing so reduced what we now refer to as collateral damage, all whilst increasing his own exposure to the risk of being shot down. The extreme dangers and the associated high possibility of death or forced landing and imprisonment were not sufficient to deter those who waited to sign up for the riskiest of duties.

Significantly, increasing numbers of gallantry awards were made to rear crew who placed themselves in danger or sacrificed themselves in the hope of saving their aircraft and their colleagues, highlighting the shared risks they faced. Flight Engineer Sergeant Norman Jackson was awarded the VC for attempting to save his burning Lancaster and the lives of his colleagues therein. Despite being wounded in the leg during an attack by a German fighter, Jackson climbed on to the wing of his aircraft to try and extinguish a fire near a fuel tank on the starboard wing. He suffered horrific injuries in the failed attempt, falling from the aircraft in a partially opened parachute.³⁵ What the Bomber Command offensives contributed to aircrew ethos was an emphasis on duty, the bearing of personal danger and a willingness to project air power with extreme prejudice in support of military and political ends: to do what needed to be done as proficiently as possible. Any thoughts of romance were firmly quelled by the deadly realities of bomber operations, whether they were called precision bombing, area bombing, carpet bombing, saturation bombing or any of the other euphemisms that were used.

What the bombers did – try to defeat Germany and its Nazi regime – took priority over the personal feelings of the aircrew and whatever preconceived notions of what it was to be an aviator. It also took precedence over their views of the means they used: the destruction of

large swathes of German cities with the associated burning and death of child, shopkeeper, firefighter and munitions maker alike. Mark Wells summed up the character and achievements of the bomber crews: 'British airmen of Bomber Command ... faced a daily routine that pointed to the inevitability of combat death. Their response, which was to cling together, overcome their fears and to go on, is a tribute to man's ability to survive almost any hardship'.³⁶ Having explored a number of historical aspects of the emergence of aircrew ethos the article now turns to examine how the ethos of RPAS crew has emerged in recent years as they have operated Reapers and Predators in combat operations.

Ethos and Remote Operations

In an era of instant global communications via the internet, 24-hour scrolling TV news and an increasingly sensationalist print media the line between perception and reality in the domain of war is as blurred as it has ever been, even without an official propaganda ministry of the type used in both world wars. Once a 'narrative' has been established in public discourse and a widespread degree of acceptance achieved, it becomes almost impossible to subvert or change it. On the one hand this means that no matter how many revisionist books are published about the Battle of Britain they are unlikely at this stage to cause any major shift in the public's view of what took place. On the other, it is very difficult to transform negative impressions, and much of the public discourse surrounding the use of the Reaper in Afghanistan has negative connotations. Consider these contrasting newspaper stories concerning two events that took place in March 2011:

'RAF Top Guns launch Libya raids'

- BRITISH Top Guns last night launched a series of precision bombing raids on Colonel Gaddafi's armoured vehicles as they were poised to attack civilians.³⁷

'Afghan civilians killed by RAF drone'

- Four Afghan civilians were mistakenly killed and two others injured in an attack by a remotely controlled RAF "drone" targeting insurgent leaders in Helmand province.³⁸

The first story was illustrated by a photograph of an RAF Tornado GR4 and went on to discuss 'guided Brimstone missiles', describing how they were used in 'precision bombing raids' against military targets: all with the aim of saving civilian lives. The article referred to 'the "herculean" efforts of our brave crews', a reference that could have come from a government description of pilots in either of the world wars. The piece concluded by highlighting the risk to aircrew, mentioning 'the wreckage of a US F-15 fighter that crash-landed in Libya'.³⁹

The second story appeared alongside a photograph of a USAF Reaper taken in a hangar at Creech Air Force Base, Nevada. The accompanying article referred to Afghan civilians being mistakenly killed as a result of poor intelligence on the ground. The basing of the crew in Nevada was discussed before a journalistic link was made to the CIA operating 'drones' in Pakistan. The repeated use of words like 'drone', 'unmanned drone' and 'remote controlled

aircraft' implied the de-humanising or de-personalising of combat operations and the taking of life. The article quoted Chris Cole, from the Drone Wars UK website, who stated: 'The secrecy and lack of accountability surrounding the use of British armed drones is a matter of great concern'. Perhaps not surprisingly, given that the deaths of four civilians were being reported, the tone of the item was sombre. Notably, however, in contrast to the description of the Tornado strike, the Reaper, its *modus operandi* and its aircrew were described in an almost entirely negative light.

When these stories are juxtaposed in this way the difficulty of developing an RPAS aircrew ethos with which the pilots and sensor operators can identify *and to which the public can relate* becomes clearer. The consistently negative tone applied to remotely piloted aircraft systems and those who operate them also has implications for the way this particular capability is viewed both by other branches of the armed forces and by the crew themselves. The most commonly identified feature of Reaper operations in current public discourse is that they are operated from Nevada, with an emphasis on the physical separation of the operators from the battlefield in Afghanistan. The implication is that they are not sharing the operational risks that are being faced by those on the battlefield below or the inherent risks involved in flying a fast-jet low and fast over hostile territory.

The nature of remote operations highlights one problematic area for the ethos of pilots and sensor operators: aircrew ethos as I have described it above has always been built on the bedrock of courage in the face of danger or death and the capacity to perform at a high skill level under great pressure or whilst injured. Therefore, what is RPAS aircrew ethos built upon in the absence of threat from the enemy? In answering this question it should be borne in mind that while there seems little chance of the Taliban or other Afghan enemy fighters being able to target Reaper crews at Creech Air Force Base at present, it cannot be assumed that a different, better resourced enemy would not seek to do so in the future. In addition, the generalization about the absence of risk cannot be extended to those pilots who carry out the visual take-offs and landings of RPASs within an area of combat operations such as Afghanistan or Iraq.

I have explored this issue at length with a number of RPAS pilots and sensor operators, some of whom previously operated the Predator or Reaper and some of whom continue to do so. The opening question that I have asked every one of them is: 'When asked, how do you describe what you do in the RAF?' Those who transferred from piloting another aircraft type – Tornado, Harrier, Hercules – gave almost identical answers that can be summarized as: 'I am a pilot who now flies the Reaper,' as opposed to, 'I am a Reaper pilot.' (In contrast, one of their colleagues was very clear in his identification with the RPAS type: 'I describe myself as a Reaper Sensor Operator'.)

The emphasis of the replies was on 'pilot', with Predator or Reaper added on as appropriate. The reasons given for this emphasis varied and included: the kudos associated with being an RAF pilot; a preference for manned flight; and not having a real choice about transferring

to Reaper when another aircraft type was taken out of service. Each of my exchanges also addressed the preconceptions of the pilots themselves as they moved into this new and rapidly developing field, some of which were initially very negative. Interestingly, they also spoke of being 'convinced by' the capabilities of the Reaper and its role once they stated to engage in combat operations. A key motivator for this was outlined: 'In the Tornado we trained for most of the year and deployed on active operations for a few weeks each year. On the Reaper every sortie is a combat sortie'. For some there was a clear disjuncture between how they viewed themselves ('I am a pilot [as opposed to an RPAS pilot] at heart') and their enthusiasm for what the Reaper could achieve on the battlefield. Those without prior operational experience as a pilot appeared more comfortable with and confident about their identity as a Reaper pilot or sensor operator.

In *Wired for War*, Peter Singer explored a number of aspects of what it means to belong to a Predator or Reaper squadron. On the relationship between the combatant, risk and bravery he wrote: 'The courage of a warrior, then, is about victory over fear. It is not about the absence of fear. By removing warriors completely from risk and fear, unmanned systems create the first complete break in the ancient connection that defines warriors from their soldierly values.'⁴⁰ As far as Singer is concerned the RPAS crew is 'now fully disconnected' from war.'⁴¹ On a physical level, his argument appears unassailable. Even if a small-arms round or shoulder-launched rocket-propelled grenade happened to strike and bring down a Reaper the immediate physical response from its pilot will be visual and limited, an acknowledgement of a blank screen where previously there had been moving images. However, while there is no danger of that round or grenade hitting the Reaper pilot or sensor operator thousands of miles away, the individuals cannot fully be said to be without a physical response. Adrenaline, the body's fuel for 'fight or flight', still surges when a Reaper crew is tasked to provide close air support to allied soldiers or marines on the ground. An overabundance of adrenaline experienced over an extended period can have a debilitating physical affect on the human body – including the brain – regardless of its proximity to war.

Peter Olsthoorn explores respect as a crucial dimension of military ethics and makes a bold point about remote pilots and the psychological impact of physical separation from the battlefield. He writes: 'It's hard to imagine how one can respect the local population, as said a vital element of the hearts and minds approach, from, for instance, a control room in Nevada (where pilots of Predators and Reapers mostly work from). With such a distance – physical, but also psychological – between soldiers and the horrors of war, it has to be feared that killing might get a lot easier.'⁴² Like Singer's similar claim about RPAS crews being fully disconnected from war, intuitively, Olsthoorn's argument appears sound. How can someone thousands of miles away in a temperature controlled environment properly engage – physically, psychologically or emotionally – with a battle in Afghanistan when they cannot feel for themselves the searing heat, taste the impenetrable dust and smell the stench of sweat and fear? When they cannot 'sense' the hostility of local tribesmen and their guts are not doing somersaults waiting for the first incoming sniper round or the deadly thump of an IED?

When I put this question to Reaper crew, including individuals who have flown missions from Nevada and also carried out take-offs and landings during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the consistent answer was not what I expected. While Olsthoorn's point has some merit it should be generalized with great caution because it overlooks the counter-intuitive point. Far from providing only disadvantages, the emotional and physical separation of the remote pilot from events on the ground brings the benefit of increased objectivity. The number of available visual inputs through multiple screens provides a breadth (though admittedly not the depth) of perspective not available to a crew travelling in a fast-jet at high speed and having to be continually rotating their heads to carry out checks, maintain spatial awareness and stay safe in the air. Furthermore, if fatigue sets in for the Reaper crew there is always the option of being temporarily relieved and coming back to the situation rested and with renewed concentration.

Singer's and Olsthoorn's assumptions about the disconnection of RPAS crews from war should be qualified further. Physical separation from the combat zone does not, for example, automatically lead to emotional disconnection. The crew of a Tornado flying at low level above an enemy contact may be *more* emotionally disengaged than the Reaper crew depending on the personalities of the pilot and weapons systems officer (WSO) and the intensity of the tasks they are carrying out in the air. This point was stressed by a Reaper pilot who had previously flown the Tornado GR4 in combat operations. Consider some of the actions of the crews of these respective types of aircraft.

Many fast-jet targets are pre-planned and as long as the necessary legal authorization is granted will be carried out under the relevant rules of engagement unless a forward air controller or some other individual in the 'kill chain' highlights a change of strike parameters. However, whether it is a planned strike or in response to an in-air tasking, the fast-moving Tornado crew has only a few seconds to acquire and attack a target. Then, having hit the intended target the aircraft will depart the scene as rapidly as it arrived, some 800 to 900 feet per second. Consequently, the results of the strike are not immediately seen by the pilot or weapons systems officer: sparing them the instant emotional impact of the physical destruction of life and materiel below.

In contrast, a Reaper crew can spend hours or even days confirming the identity of an enemy combatant. Long loiter times enable a pattern of life to be established in considerable and mundane detail, with meal times, prayer times, toilet habits, friends and even relatives being identified. A much greater degree of emotional engagement with an intended target becomes possible when aspects of his personality and lifestyle become familiar, in contrast to the high speed interventions of a manned fast-jet. Consequently, as one Reaper, former fast-jet, pilot summed it up: 'UAV targets are much more personal'. Numerous studies have been and are being undertaken to examine physical, emotional and psychological factors involved in the operation of RPASs and only the passing of time will reveal how many of their crews will develop symptoms associated with combat stress or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Syndrome.⁴³ These will eventually be compared and contrasted with the experience of their fast-jet counterparts.

I have discussed at length the relationship between courage and risk at the heart of the emergence and maintenance of aircrew ethos since the advent of air combat in WWI, and for the most part the emphasis has been on what might be more specifically called physical courage: the ability to persevere with a high degree of skill in the face of mortal danger or physical injury. There can be little doubt that with regard to the need for physical courage Singer, Olsthoorn and others are correct about the remoteness of Reaper crew rendering this aspect of their characters and ethos obsolete (at least until a more competent enemy can target their Nevada or other haven). However, there is and always has been more to the place of courage in aircrew ethos than the willingness to physically confront the dangers posed by an enemy, and that is having the moral courage to kill, or refrain from killing, as circumstances and rules of engagement dictate. This is clearly stated in Air Publication 1, *Ethos, Core Values and Standards of the Royal Air Force*, which says: 'Courage, both physical and moral, forms the bedrock upon which bravery, fighting spirit and success depend'.⁴⁴ It is that moral courage, combined with a determination to protect allied troops and kill enemy combatants while going to great lengths to avoid the unnecessary deaths of noncombatants that already provides, and will increasingly provide, the basis of RPAS aircrew ethos. An example of the seriousness with which Reaper pilots and sensor operators approach their operational art came in a candid submission to my research, part of which I reproduce here in full:

I sleep soundly at night because every person that I have killed was a clearly identified enemy combatant engaged in hostile actions as described in the rules we work to. I utterly refute the concept that we are capable of reducing the taking of life to a "play-station game" just because we are 12000 miles from the people we kill. I feel that the certain knowledge that everything we do is being watched by many others: general officers, legal advisors, operations officers etc in the command centre makes us more, rather than less, aware of the consequences of the actions we take. We have the capability to see (unlike in a fast-jet) the effect of our weapon strikes in relatively close-up detail. Also, if the troops on the ground take photos of the strike effects they often send them to us as feedback. No matter how explicit these photos are I personally look at them all. Not because of some voyeuristic tendency but because I believe that if you cannot face the reality of what you do in killing a human being then you should not be part of that process.⁴⁵

The author of those words moved to the Reaper from the Tornado fast-jet, thereby giving credence to his comparison of the two roles. From the initial identification to the targeting and then the killing of enemy combatants there is a clear dependence on rules of engagement, comprehensive oversight of the process and a highly developed sense of personal responsibility for the taking of life that I encountered in all the subjects I engaged with. The importance of ethical conduct in personal ethos was consistently emphasized to me, usually in quite forceful terms: 'Ethics are paramount. To take a life when it is not necessary is an act of moral cowardice'. If that ethical standard is inculcated in every new remote pilot or sensor operator then the ethos of that particular flying branch will be set on a sure footing

for all future operations. The corollary of my general observation is that any ethos, in any armed force, which does not rest on the highest ethical standards will inexorably lead only to unconstrained violence, needless death and the moral degradation of the perpetrators.

Currently, and I have focused on the RAF, the disparate previous experience of Reaper crew members means that ethos can be more individualized than shared depending on how individuals form their own identities as aircrew. I would suggest that this is especially true of pilots, with many – perhaps most – of them more closely associating themselves with aircraft that have been flown in the past than with the RPAS they fly in the present. This is not necessarily a bad thing, though it defers the time when remote aircrew ethos can be more commonly shared. The positive benefit is that operationally experienced aircrew, whether they are from fast-jet, multi-engined or helicopter squadrons, bring tremendous experience and air-mindedness. However, if RPAS's are to provide a significant cornerstone of future RAF capability in the long term, financial strictures alone will prohibit the use of experienced aircrew from fast-jet and other squadrons. Directly recruited and trained pilots and sensor operators will probably identify more strongly with their remote airframe and an associated ethos but they will lack the wider experience of those who pioneered this type of operational capability. In the midst of overcoming technological and operational challenges in the future the importance of the continual embedding of ethos and ethical standards should never be overlooked.

Summary

It is difficult to see how representations of RPAS operations and crews in the media will shift from the negative connotations now commonly portrayed to something more positive. The contrast with the long established and deeply embedded public perception of fighter pilot and fast-jet operations in particular provides TV and print media journalists with easy and convenient labels on which to hang their stories. Consequently, those who opt to serve as remote aircrew will have to accept that they will never be viewed in the romantic or daring light of aircrew elsewhere. Those I have questioned prioritized the protecting of allied troops on the ground above the killing of the enemy, their unanimity suggesting that this 'protector' role plays a significant part in their individual and collective ethos. Having also spoken to both Army and Marine officers about the role of the Reaper and those who operate them I would also suggest that the latter are unlikely to be seen by the former as fellow warriors in any historical understanding of the word.

In terms of constructing current and future RPAS ethos from historical air-centric discourses, I would make the following observations. Reaper pilots and sensor operators will never be seen as the new Knights of the Air, principally and obviously because they are not in the air. Similarly, they will not be associated with that part of aircrew ethos over the past century that was forged in battle through acts of daring, courage and self-sacrifice: the absence of risk will preclude it. However, there are aspects of historical, traditional aircrew ethos that remain highly relevant. Most of the personal aircrew characteristics I highlighted earlier from

WWI and WWII – skill, duty, courage, perseverance, self-sacrifice – are still relevant, albeit in modified form. The need for great skill is perhaps the most obvious, especially when fighting an asymmetric counter-insurgency where the line between combatant and noncombatant has long been blurred. In the absence of physical danger the requirement for moral courage is as great as ever. The requirement may even be greater than ever because those who take life from a Reaper do so with a much more intimate sight and knowledge of their targets than others before them in combat aircraft, and with a detailed and prolonged exposure to the consequences of their actions. This was acknowledged by one Reaper pilot who wrote to me: ‘Flying a UAV from across the world sounds obviously detached but, due to the nature of the targets and our insistence (we watch them for hours), I feel closer to the action than I did in a fast jet’.

The sense of duty and the need for perseverance, though with an emphasis on mental rather than physical endurance, might perhaps be associated with aspects of Bomber Command ethos in WWII. Granted, there is no longer the extreme and extended exposure to the risk of death, burning or capture, but there is a deep sense amongst those who operate the Reaper that they are taking the fight to the enemy in an essential, though unglamorous way. Just as the crews of Bomber Command – perhaps with the exception of No. 617 ‘Dambuster’ Squadron – did not attain the degree of affection that the public bestowed on their fighter counterparts, it is unlikely that RPAS crews will be admired in the way that other operational aircrew, particularly fast-jet aircrew, are today or will be in the future. In addition, the long standing army and navy disregard for all things Royal Air Force (characterized by banter such as: ‘The army digs in; the navy sails in; and the air force checks in!’) will probably be intensified towards those who operate from a safe distance. However, from time to time a quiet word or the briefest email message will sum up the essence of what RPAS crew do on a daily basis and an ethos built on moral courage, integrity, professionalism and ethical conduct: ‘Thanks guys, you got us out of the s**t that time.’

Notes

¹ Harris, John Norman, *Knights of the Air* (London: Macmillan, 1958) p. 12.

² This observation clearly applies to other air forces as well but I will focus on the RAF.

³ I will use the term Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) throughout as it is currently the preferred terminology used by the RAF and 39 Squadron, which operates the Reaper. Other terms presently used in wider debate include Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), Remotely Piloted Vehicle (RPV) and ‘Drone’. I have tried to avoid these labels – especially the latter – because they connote higher degrees of autonomy and de-humanization than I believe to be the case with the currently operated Reaper and because they are often used to describe small and micro (including battlefield) aerial vehicles.

⁴ In my research I have been assisted by both Reaper pilots and sensors and Predator pilots. To make it easier for the reader I will refer to the Reaper throughout.

⁵ See, for example, Arkin, Ronald C., ‘The Case for Ethical Autonomy in Unmanned Systems’, *Journal of Military Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2010) p. 332-341; Lin, Patrick, ‘Ethical Blowback from

Emerging Technologies', *Journal of Military Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2010) p. 313-331; Dipert, Randall R., 'The Ethics of Cyberwarfare', *Journal of Military Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2010) p. 384-410; Singer, P.W., 'The Ethics of Killer Applications: Why Is It So Hard To Talk About Morality When It Comes to New Military Technology?', *Journal of Military Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2010) p. 299-312; Strawser, Bradley Jay, 'Moral Predators: The Duty to Employ Uninhabited Aerial Vehicles' *Journal of Military Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2010) p. 342-368; Sharkey, Noel, 'Saying 'No!' to Lethal Autonomous Targeting', *Journal of Military Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2010) p. 369-383.

⁶ 'Sensor operators' are responsible for operating surveillance and weapon systems on remotely piloted aircraft systems such as the Reaper.

⁷ King, Anthony, 'The Ethos of the Royal Marines: The Precise Application of Will', Independent report commissioned by the Commandant, Commando Training Centre, Royal Marines, Lympstone, July 2004, p. 2, located at <https://eric.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/58653>, accessed 10 October 2011.

⁸ *Ethos, Core Values and Standards of the RAF*, Air Publication 1, TGDA Media Services, Crown Copyright.

⁹ Deakin, Stephen, 'British Military Ethos and Christianity', *British Army Review*, No 138, (Winter 2005) p. 98.

¹⁰ King, 2004, p. 2.

¹¹ Foucault, Michel, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others*, Edited by Frédéric Gros, Trans. Graham Burchell (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p. 65.

¹² The Guardian, 5 July 2011.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Aljazeera, 6 July 2011, located at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2011/07/2011761314932518.html>, accessed 6 October 2011.

¹⁵ Robinson, Paul, *Military Honour and the Conduct of War* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006) p. 155.

¹⁶ Molter, Bennett A., *Knights of the Air*, New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1918) p. 121 cited in Robinson, 2006, p. 155.

¹⁷ Harris, John Norman, *Knights of the Air* (London: Macmillan, 1958) p. 12.

¹⁸ James T. B. McCudden, *Flying Fury* (Newbury: Casemate, 2009) p. 253.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 282.

²¹ Ibid., p. 270.

²² *The London Gazette*, 18 July 1919, p. 9136.

²³ *The Times*, 3 April 1918, p. 9.

²⁴ *The London Gazette* (Seventh Supplement), 5 November 1918, p. 13190.

²⁵ *The London Gazette* (Second Supplement), 30 November 1918, p. 14203.

²⁶ Denis Winter, *The First of the Few* (London: Allen Lane, 1982) p. 132.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

²⁸ *The Times*, 1 April 1918, p. 8.

²⁹ Id.

³⁰ *The London Gazette*, 15 November 1940, p. 6569.

³¹ Geoffrey Wellum, 22 September 11, Interview with John Sergeant in 'The Spitfire: Britain's

Flying Past', BBC2.

³² Bishop, Patrick, *Fighter Boys: The Battle of Britain*, 1940 (New York and London: Viking, 2003) p. 398.

³³ Churchill, Winston, 15 September 1940, quoted in Hart, Liddell, *History of the Second World War* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1970) p. 107.

³⁴ *The London Gazette*, 5 September 1944, p. 4175.

³⁵ *The London Gazette* (Fourth Supplement), 26 October 1945, p. 5233.

³⁶ Wells, Mark, K., *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (London and Oregon: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 2000) p. 132.

³⁷ *The Sun*, 24 March 2011, p. 1, located at <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3487789/RAF-jets-launch-raids-in-Libya.html>, accessed 28 September 2011.

³⁸ *The Guardian*, 5 July 2011, p. 1, referring to an incident on 25 March 11, located at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/jul/05/afghanistan-raf-drone-civilian-deaths>, accessed 28 September 2011.

³⁹ *The Sun*, 24 March 2011, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Singer, Peter, W., *Wired for War* (New York: Penguin, 2009) p. 332.

⁴¹ Id.

⁴² Olsthoorn, Peter, *Military Ethics and Virtues: An interdisciplinary approach for the 21st century* (New York: Routledge, 2011) p. 126.

⁴³ See the following examples from a large and growing body of literature: Barnes, M.J. and Matz, M.F. (1998) 'Crew Simulations for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Applications: Sustained Effects, Shift Factors, Interface Issues, and Crew Size', *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society 42nd Annual Meeting*, p. 143-147; McCarley, J. S. and Wickens, C. D. (2004) 'Human factors concerns in UAV flight', located at <http://www.hf.faa.gov/docs/508/docs/uavFY04Planrpt.pdf>, accessed 14 October 2011; Trimble, Stephen, 'Flying Predators Bad For Pilot's Health', The DEW Line: 'Distant Early Warning' for the Defense Industry, 15 April 2008, located at <http://www.flightglobal.com>, accessed 14 October 2011; Tvaryanas, A. P., 'Human systems integration in remotely piloted aircraft operations', *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine*, Vol. 77, No. 12 (2006) p. 1278-1282.

⁴⁴ Op cit., p. 5.

⁴⁵ In accordance with the assurance of anonymity that I gave to those who assisted me with my research, the quote will remain unattributed. The individual is currently serving on operations at Creech Air Force Base, Nevada.

Evacuation by Air: The All-But-Forgotten Kabul Airlift of 1928-29

By Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Roe

In 2010, the Royal Air Force (RAF) undertook a hazardous mission to evacuate British nationals from Libya, North Africa. The rescue effort was a complete success; all willing and entitled British civilians were evacuated safely and no aircrew or aircraft came to any real harm. Eighty-three years earlier, the RAF undertook another risky air evacuation to save hundreds of embassy staff from several countries, along with their families, after inter-tribal strife spread into civil war in Afghanistan. This time the destination was Kabul. This article exposes the political background behind the evacuations, the actions of the threatened British Legation and the skill and determination of the pilots and crew involved in the little known, but extraordinary, evacuation of Kabul 1928-29.

I submit that the history of these evacuations [from Kabul] constitutes a record with which the Royal Air Force can justifiably be satisfied. The efficiency and determination of the officers, non-commissioned officers and men were well tested, and I am proud to recall that it was not found wanting.

Sir Geoffrey Salmond

Introduction

In February 2010 the Royal Air Force (RAF) undertook a hazardous mission to evacuate British nationals from Libya, North Africa. Staging from the Mediterranean island of Malta, C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, supported by E-3D Sentry AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System), landed in Tripoli International Airport and remote desert airstrips to rescue workers stranded in the country's capital and oilfields, as the state plunged into a bloody civil war. Despite occurrences of small arms fire, which on one occasion entered the cockpit of an aircraft and bounced off a pilot's helmet, the rescue effort was a complete success; all willing and entitled British civilians were evacuated safely and no aircrew or aircraft came to any real harm.¹ On conclusion of the tri-Service operation, Prime Minister David Cameron stated: 'I'm sure the whole House [of Commons] will want to put on record its thanks to all those who have made the rescue effort possible; to the skill of the RAF pilots, and to all those involved from all three Armed Services; to our diplomatic service, and to all those who put themselves in harm's way to help our people leave safely.'²

Eighty-three years earlier, the RAF undertook another risky air evacuation to rescue hundreds of embassy staff from several countries, along with their families, after inter-tribal strife spread into civil war in Afghanistan. This time the destination was Kabul,³ the ancient walled city on a grassy plain some 6,000 ft above sea level that Alexander the Great passed through in 330 B.C. while en route to India.⁴ The operation, flown over two-months and in some of the worst weather on record, through the 10,000 to 14,000 ft snow-capped mountains of the Hindu Kush, was to pass in the annals of history as the first major airlift of officials and civilians from one country to another.⁵ This article exposes the political background behind the evacuations, the actions of the threatened British Legation and the skill and determination of the pilots and crew involved in the little known, but extraordinary, evacuation of Kabul 1928-29.

A Chaotic and Ever-Changing Political Situation

The catalyst for events in Kabul was seemingly innocuous. In 1927 King Amanullah of Afghanistan, an engaging and amiable sovereign, decided to undertake a seven-month 'Grand Tour.' Visiting India, Egypt, Italy, France, Germany, the Soviet Union, Turkey and Iran, he was spellbound by Kemal Ataturk's innovations in Turkey and Shah Riza's advances in Iran.⁶ Accompanied by his influential young queen, Souriya, he also visited Britain, staying at Claridge's, and was warmly received by the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace. Greatly impressed by what he had seen throughout his tour, particularly the emancipation of women, the King was determined to push forward a number of sweeping Western-style social reforms

in his own country. Ignoring, or perhaps not truly cognisant of the deep religious fervour of his subjects and their ultra-conservative traditions, he implemented a series of changes that put him in direct conflict with many powerful elements of society and in direct opposition to Muslim practice.⁷ Martin Ewans, a former Head of Chancery in Kabul, cautions: '... he had also lost all conception of the bounds of the acceptable, and when he returned to Kabul in July 1928 (driving his newly acquired Rolls-Royce all the way from Teheran), he promptly set in train the events that were to lead to his early downfall.'⁸

Opening new schools, implementing additional taxes, abolishing *purdah* (females were no longer required to wear a veil over their lower faces when in public), creating the first Afghan parliament, eliminating polygamy, setting a minimum age for marriage and the compulsory wearing of European-style dress (including homburg hats) for all inhabitants and visitors to Kabul, generated extreme bitterness, humiliation and fury.⁹ Other measures, particularly the increased limitation of the powers of the mullahs (holy men, educated in the scriptures of Islam), a raise in land revenue and the lengthening of the period of conscription, amplified his unpopularity still further. 'By attempting to curtail the influence of the mullahs, he antagonised the most powerful force in Afghan life. To unveil their women was against their religion, and when he attempted to emancipate them his various measures precipitated on to already troubled waters a torrent of hostility which finally engulfed him.'¹⁰ Forcibly expressing his determination to impose modern ideas, he was often photographed standing in front of a large picture of the American aviator Colonel Charles Lindbergh. Afghans openly denounced Amanullah as a *kafir* (infidel or non-believer), and spread rumours that he had renounced Islam and embraced Catholicism.

Unrest spread and open rebellion took hold of the country.¹¹ This was sparked off by the deeply religious and fanatical Shinwari tribe (literally 'Green Lords'), in the Khyber area, who were ordered to adopt European dress, pay taxes (which they had never done before), and to send a quota of their young females to Kabul for education. The tribe rose to a man and was subsequently joined by the Afghan Mohamand tribe. They first invested Dikka, and took up a position on the main road from Kabul to the Khyber. Next, they attacked Jalalabad on 19 November, plundering the royal palace and British consulate, cutting off the city's water supply and closing the Peshawar-Kabul road (which cut-off the British Legation in Kabul from road and telegraph communications).¹² Such actions were perhaps not unexpected. 'Among the Afghans theft is more or less praiseworthy, according to the skill and daring shown in its perpetration, and to the success in the subsequent evasion of pursuit.'¹³ Despite contrary counsel, Amanullah's ill-judged response was to bomb the rebels from the air, employing vintage Afghan Air Force D.H. 9s piloted by white Russian refugees. The deployment of aircraft flown by 'infidel' pilots to crush faithful Muslims inflamed the situation still further, resulting in outrage and widespread rebellion.

In the north, a charismatic and opportunist Robin Hood-style leader, Bacha-i-Saqao (literally the 'son of a water-carrier'),¹⁴ but more widely known as Habibulla Khan, rounded-up a *lashkar*

(tribal war party) of some 3,000 disaffected tribesmen and conducted a surprise attack on Kabul on 14 December 1928. His objective was to kill the King and set up an alternative administration of his own.¹⁵ Meeting only token resistance, Habibulla captured forts to the north-west of the city before advancing on the Asmai Heights. At just after 15:30 hrs, the rebels, pouring down the road from Kandahar, passed His Majesty's Legation, Kabul with its large colony of British and British Indians of both sexes. Rebuilt in 1926, after Afghanistan had gained independence, the Legation, situated away from the other foreign embassies, was a 'magnificent building, some three-and-a-half miles outside the walled city [of Kabul], and set in gardens and grounds of twenty-three acres.'¹⁶

Fearing for the safety of the Legation staff and their families, the Minister, Sir Francis Humphrys, ordered the large iron gates closed immediately. Fortunately for the residents, the tribesmen did not attempt to break in. Under the protection of the Union Flag, as the Afghan guard had fled, Humphrys, armed only with a plentiful supply of tobacco, confronted Habibulla through the gate, who, on a white horse, happened to be passing the entrance. Making it absolutely clear that they were guests of the Afghan people and had nothing to do with politics, Humphrys asked Habibulla to respect the Legation and leave them alone. The amiable outlaw assured the Minister in an impassioned dialogue that no harm or looting would come to those inside the Legation, stressing that he had no quarrel with foreigners. Humphrys had no reason to disbelieve Habibulla, but remained cautious. A man of considerable experience, Humphrys had already held a number of political appointments on the North-West Frontier, commencing in 1904, and knew the tribal mindset well. He also served as a pilot in the newly-formed RAF in 1918, before becoming Political Agent to the Khyber and subsequently Deputy Foreign Secretary to the Government of India. Such experience was to prove invaluable in the weeks ahead and his foresight paid off.

Humphrys ... had already anticipated possible danger to the Legation and its inhabitants when the first rumblings of rebellion against Ammanulla's reforms were evident weeks before the actual uprising, and on 3 December had approached [Air Vice Marshal Sir William] Geoffrey Salmond [RAF commander in India] with a request for an air mail service [bi-weekly] to Kabul to maintain communications, and with plans for a possible evacuation of the Kabul Legation's personnel, necessarily by air.¹⁷

Agreeing to Humphrys' proposal, Salmond took stock of the assets available to him in India. The only suitable aircraft immediately under his command were 24 two-seater World War I vintage D.H. 9As (from 27 and 60 Squadron) and 2 general purpose Wapiti machines 'on trial'.¹⁸ The nearest aircraft designed for carrying passengers were 10 portly twin-engined Vickers-Victorias of 70 (Bomber) Squadron stationed in Iraq.¹⁹ However, it was not known if the aircraft would be able to take off with a heavy load from the airstrip at Kabul, 6,000 ft above sea level, and then climb to a height of 10,000 ft shortly afterwards. The only large transport twin-engined aircraft in India, the Handly Page Hinaiidi Heavy Transport machine J7745,²⁰ piloted by Flight Lieutenant D.F. Anderson, was in Baghdad on 'special duty', conveying Sir Denys Bray, the

Foreign Secretary, to India. Salmond immediately requested that the Hinaidi return to India but, due to engine trouble, it was replaced by a Vickers-Victoria, piloted by Squadron Leader R.S. Maxwell, a dashing World War I fighter ace of exceptional ability. After a 2,800 mile journey that required numerous re-fuelling stops en route, the aircraft arrived at Karachi on 17 December and proceeded to Quetta the following day to conduct trials (the airfield at Quetta was at the same altitude as Kabul and the surrounding topography was similar to Kabul's). The aircraft demonstrated, once everything unnecessary was jettisoned, that its performance was up to the task ahead.²¹ Salmond immediately asked for reinforcement airlift.

On the ground, the situation in the Legation was tense. *The Times* recalls: 'It appears that the first rebel attack on Kabul was followed by several days' sharp fighting, during three days of which the British Legation and its occupants were exposed to considerable danger. The buildings were repeatedly hit by bullets; the Military Attaché's house was accidentally hit and wrecked by a field-gun shell from an Afghan battery that dropped short.'²² Humphrys recalled stoically:

We have all had charmed lives. My house looks like a radiator in places. Between the two windows of my upstairs study – on extreme left of photograph I sent you of Legation – there are forty bullet holes. None came through the window, in front of which I was constantly moving. On the other hand many came through my bathroom window, one hitting my shaving glass and singeing my moustache, while a shell missed my head by 9 inches and lodged in the wall. Others had more hairy experiences.²³

Despite very heavy cross-fire, the Legation continued to function relatively efficiently. Nevertheless, communications were almost nonexistent using the Afghan wireless (a regular medium for communiqués to India) and a rebel cordon, established between the city and the Legation, prevented routine movement. This prompted the Legation to arrange white sheets and turbans on the lawn to form the following message: 'DO NOT LAND. FLY HIGH. ALL'S WELL.'²⁴ Humphrys had rightly predicted that an RAF aircraft would be tasked to investigate the Legation's wellbeing after an orderly got through the battle lines to Kabul and sent a telegram stating that the Minister wished to evacuate all women and children as soon as possible. The interrupted message, broken off in the middle, was dated 16 December. The following day, all official communications were cut and Humphrys turned to an amateur wireless set, tapping out an experimental S.O.S. that, amazingly, was received in India on the evening of 17 December. Salmond realised that no time could be lost in trying to re-establish communications with the Legation.

On 18 December an unarmed²⁵ D.H. 9A (known as a Ninak) of 27 Squadron, piloted by Flying Officer C.W.L. Trusk, flew a reconnaissance mission over the Legation, with the aim of dropping a Popham Panel set²⁶ for the purpose of ground/air communication via Morse code. The flight distance of 280 miles there and back over snow-covered mountains restricted the loiter time over the Legation to just 15 minutes in order to preserve fuel for the return flight. The RAF

deemed that it was impossible to land anywhere in the mountainous country over which aircraft would have to fly on the return journey. The Ninak arrived over the Legation at 1,500 ft and quickly identified the warning message which was clearly visible on the lawn. However, the buildings looked deserted. Having dropped the first half of the Popham Panel set, 22-year-old Leading Aircraftman G. Donaldson, the wireless operator seated behind Trusk, recalled:

So Trusk said: "I am going to fly very low, and see if you can see any light in the building." So we got right down near the ground, really, and we tried to see in the windows. The windows were boarded up, because they had been smashed, I suppose. Anyway, I dropped the other half of the Popham Panel. I turned round to speak to Trusk – and he was covered in black oil. He said: "We've been hit! I'll have to land!"²⁷

Not recognising that the rebels had captured the forts on either side of the Legation, the Ninak became the target of accurate rifle fire from tribesmen on the ground, who no doubt thought it was one of Amanullah's aircraft. Hit in the engine sump, the aircraft attempted to gain height to achieve 'voltage' to employ the rudimentary radio to issue a warning (the aircraft had a small generator on the wing that required 'slipstream' to generate the 1,200 volts required for transmitting). While climbing, Donaldson tapped out the message: 'Been hit. Radiator burst. Landing Sherpur.'²⁸

Fortunately, Sherpur airfield was still under the control of the 'friendly' Afghan Air Force and was only two miles from the Legation. After landing at the airfield, the crew saw how lucky they had been – the aircraft was punctured by 14 bullet holes, the tyres were shot away and Donaldson had a bullet hole in his Sidcot flying suit.²⁹ Unsure of their fate, the crew were promptly arrested, accused of being spies and placed under special guard. After a short period of rough handling and confinement, Trusk and Donaldson were taken to see the camp commandant, '... a big, fat chap, in an ordinary jersey, and balaclava helmet, and a bandolier round him.'³⁰ Dismissing all allegations of espionage outright, the commandant invited the crew to lunch in his office and the atmosphere at once became good-humoured. Over the next few days, with safe treatment promised but by no means guaranteed,³¹ Trusk and Donaldson did their best to get news of the British Legation through contact with the other Legations and also tried to establish communications with India by means of the Afghan wireless and land line. During their attempts, a message got through to India stating that clearance had been obtained from the Afghan Government for an aircraft to land at Sherpur. Wisely, the request was not endorsed by Salmond, suspecting that any aircraft flying so close to Kabul could unhinge any negotiations with the Afghan Government that Humphrys might be undertaking at the time. After repeated attempts, Trusk and Donaldson, accompanied by an Afghan interpreter from the Afghan Air Force, managed to reach the surrounded Legation. This involved a dangerous journey through no-man's-land, moving when the firing between the opposing sides stopped. At the Legation, Donaldson hooked-up a long-wave

wireless transmitter, salvaged from their aircraft and employing a battery from Humphrys' Rolls-Royce, to re-establish a radio link with Peshawar and Miranshah. This shaky connection proved invaluable.

Salmond was already aware of the situation on the ground. After Donaldson's brief message was received in Peshawar on 18 December, Salmond sent another reconnaissance aircraft that same afternoon.³² Unsure if the first Popham Panel set had been received, Flight Lieutenant A.R. Prendergast was instructed to drop a second set on the Legation. The aircraft was heavily fired upon once over the locality, but saw the Union Flag flying and a message on the lawn: 'Don't land. All's well.'³³ Salmond now knew that the Legation was safe, but that the delegation was situated in the middle of opposing forces, and that Humphrys did not want aircraft to land at Sherpur or anywhere else. The following morning a Ninak, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Pelly, conducted another reconnaissance mission over the Legation. The same message was displayed on the lawn and a Popham Panel message confirmed: 'Sherpur Aerodrome Unfit. We are confined to the Legation.'³⁴ Conditions were still tense on the following day, but the situation started to improve. Subsequent pilots confirmed that it was still too unsafe to land and aircraft continued flying at high altitude. Despite the dangers, pilots dropped an Aldis lamp (used for signalling),³⁵ a wireless transmitting set and miscellaneous items (including butter, coffee, meat and vegetables)³⁶ into the Legation by parachute.³⁷ The Legation continued to display No. 12 on the Popham Panel (come again tomorrow).

Afraid that the security situation would change, Humphrys took advantage of a notable shift in the fighting on 22 December. After a number of counterattacks, Amanullah's forces managed to force the rebel force to retreat ten miles north-west. This made it possible for Humphrys to contact the beleaguered city of Kabul (the high road between the Legation and the city was now open to traffic) and regain reliable communications with India. 'Accordingly, he immediately sent a message requesting full evacuation to commence next day, using the nearby Sherpur airfield which was now in the hands of Amanullah's forces.'³⁸ Salmond's response was to dispatch a Wapiti with a radio for reconnaissance purposes to confirm that aircraft could land at Sherpur, the Vickers-Victoria troop carrier piloted by Maxwell and Pilot Officer Beasley, and three D.H. 9As to recover baggage early on 23 December. The evacuation had the endorsement and support of the Afghan Government.

The Kabul 'Run' Begins

The following day news reached London that the evacuation had started. Leaving Sherpur airfield at 09:45 hrs, the first passengers, seemingly none the worse for their air journey, arrived at Peshawar at 11.30 hrs.³⁹ 'The party consisted of four English women, three young English children, four Indian women, four Indian maidservants, and five young children, making a total of 20.'⁴⁰ Although many of the passengers were infants, this was a remarkable feat since it had been preciously decided that the normal load for the Vickers-Victoria would be only ten passengers. It later transpired that Lady Humphrys, the daughter of Sir Harold Arthur Deane,

who had himself been First Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province, was on the first airlift. Expressing deep thanks to 'our splendid Air Force,' she remarked: 'We did the journey from Kabul in record time, without a single bump.'⁴¹ After the initial evacuation, further flights took place on 24 and 26 December, despite intense firing around the Legation. Shortly thereafter, the aircraft at Salmonds' disposal were augmented by two additional Vickers-Victoria from Iraq and by the Hinaidi.⁴² The additional aircraft helped, and by 1 January 1929, a total of 132 people and baggage had been airlifted back to India despite a heavy fall of snow in Kabul.⁴³ Passengers included French and German ladies and the wives of some of the members of the Turkish Military Mission in Afghanistan.⁴⁴ In addition, the RAF flew in a spare engine and two fitters into Sherpur to fix Trusk's aircraft on an outward journey from Risalpur. Owing to the mistrust of the Afghan authorities every care was taken not to give any cause for suspicion. *The Times* notes: 'That the Afghans thought that advantage might be taken of the air operations to spy out the land is shown by the fact that on landing in Kabul all machines were closely inspected to see whether cameras were carried, but the Afghans found their suspicions baseless.'⁴⁵ By 1 January Humphrys happily wrote that all the women and children had been evacuated.⁴⁶

After the successful evacuation of the women and children, the RAF weekly airmail service continued. Amanullah granted permission for this on 9 January. The Russians, not prepared to regard the immediate future of Afghanistan as secure, had already evacuated their women and children in Kabul northwards using the commercial air service. However, the situation on the ground was about to change strikingly. Chaz Bowyer notes:

Within a week ... Habibulla's tribesmen had gained a victory over Amanullah's troops and were once more investing Kabul, including regaining control of Sherpur airfield. Then, on 14 January, Amanullah abdicated and fled the scene by car towards Kandahar [in his Rolls-Royce], renouncing his throne in favour of his elder [self-indulgent] brother, Inayatullah Khan. The latter, closely besieged in his own palace, with his garrison force outnumbered by nearly four to one, reigned for merely three days and on 17 January, on condition that he, his family and a small party of faithful officials might be evacuated by RAF aircraft, Inayatullah was handed over to the Amirate of Afghanistan (the rebel leader Habibulla, who had already styled himself Amir).⁴⁷

On 18 January, in bitter weather conditions, Squadron Leader Maxwell and Flight Lieutenant R Ivelaw-Chapman⁴⁸ flew to Sherpur airfield in two Vickers-Victorias. Although Sherpur was now in rebel hands and the two opposing armies were only 400 yards from each other, Habibulla allowed Ivelaw-Chapman to evacuate Inayatullah, other male members of his family and his court officials – a quality of mercy unusual in Afghanistan. Maxwell flew out Inayatullah's harem of ten wives and concubines. Both aircraft landed safely at Peshawar at 15:30 hrs.⁴⁹ The exiled court then proceeded by train and cars to join Amanullah at Kandahar. When the half-brothers united, Amanullah formally cancelled his abdication, again proclaiming himself King, before finally seeking asylum in Italy.⁵⁰ 'The same day Sir Francis Humphrys decided to close the Legation, resulting in all other embassies and legations to decide to evacuate Kabul completely.

Habibulla [who at no time displayed any personal animosity to the British] permitted two aircraft to land daily and one airmail aircraft to land on Wednesdays.⁵¹

On 29 January two aircraft took off from Risalpur for Kabul in testing conditions; only one aircraft was to reach its destination. Ivelaw-Chapman's Vickers-Victoria (J7926) suffered the only double engine failure of the evacuation, caused by solid ice forming in the petrol filters. The aircraft was flying westward at about 10,000 ft, just inside Mohmand territory and about 30 miles east of Kabul, when first one and almost immediately afterwards a second engine faded. Ivelaw-Chapman recalls the incident:

Nothing that I could do would get them [the engines] going again. Losing height rapidly I turned off course towards the Kabul river valley in the hope that I might find some less forbidding terrain than that immediately below me. But long before I even caught sight of the river I realised that I could not possibly reach it and that I should have to land somewhere, and that pretty soon. At that moment I spotted a piece of ground a mile or so ahead which looked slightly less precipitous than its immediate surrounds and I headed for it. As I glided towards it I could see that it was far from flat and boulder-strewn. But with no engine-power, losing height rapidly and the rocky side of a mountain as the only alternative I decided to 'have a go.' As I came up to it I found I had to 'side-slip' off my remaining height if I was not going to overrun this tiny 'plateau' which was only about 60 yards long and less in breadth. On three sides it dropped away steeply for a couple of hundred feet. Having got into about the right position I stalled my Victoria on to the ground from a height of about 10 ft – or, in less technical language, I deliberately lost all flying speed so that the aeroplane would drop by its own weight and more or less stay put where it arrived. The impact of course broke up the undercarriage and stove in the underbelly of the Victoria but did us no more damage than to bruise [Flying Officer A.R.S] Davies' knee. We were very lucky!⁵²

Quickly surrounded by a mob of heavily-armed and wildly-gesticulating Afghan tribesmen, Ivelaw-Chapman and Davies were initially mistaken for the hated Russians. The reason for this only came to light later; the tribesmen associated *khaki* with the British forces but, as it was winter and both pilots were wearing blue RAF uniform, the tribesmen had believed that they were Russians. Despite producing both a 'ghoolie chit' and a government note, as well as trying to explain their objective in pigeon Urdu, tempers did not calm down until a man (Noor Mahomed Khan) wearing a military-looking greatcoat arrived on the scene.⁵³ Posting sentries on the aircraft, the 'Brigadier' led the crew off the mountainside to a neighbouring village for green tea and *chapáttis* (flat cakes of unleavened bread, cooked over a *tauwa*, or flat piece of iron).⁵⁴ Concurrently, he allowed them to dispatch a letter explaining the situation. The letter was given to a messenger on horseback who left for an unknown destination.⁵⁵

Receiving a response the following day, Ivelaw-Chapman and Davies, mounted on ponies and with a heavily armed escort, travelled 25 miles or more to the camp of 'General' Ali Ahmed

Khan at Jagdallak.⁵⁶ Here they spent six days detained as political prisoners in a so-called rest-house. Conditions were basic and time passed very slowly; Ivelaw-Chapman composed crossword puzzles and arithmetical problems to keep Davies amused. On the fourth day, a reliable tribesman, one of 20 *sowars* (horsemen) sent out by the British Political Agent in the Khyber Pass, found the stranded pilots. The following day another tribesman visited the aircrew, this time from Kabul, with a letter from Humphrys and some fruit and cigarettes. The very next day they met 'General' Ali Ahmed Khan, who informed them that they would be moved by road to India. *The Times* reported simply:

According to a Reuter telegram from Delhi, Flight-Lieutenant [Ivelaw-] Chapman and Flying Officer Davies, belonging to the Victoria aeroplane which came down at Sarobi, in Afghanistan, on January 29, have been located and are being brought to the Barikad rest-house, on the road between Kabul and Jalalabad.⁵⁷

When they reached the consulate in Jalalabad, after a trying journey in a Chevrolet van, Ivelaw-Chapman and Davies found that the British consulate there had been forced to evacuate. Fortunately, the Consul, Khan Sahib Mohammed Jehangier Khan, were under the protection of the Pir Sahib of Baghdad, a devout and respected elderly religious leader, who lived in a fort about eight miles out of town. Arriving at the fort, the aircrew were welcomed right away by the Consul – a cheerful Muslim, six and a half feet tall and 26 stone in weight – and by the Pir Sahib's entourage. Meeting the Pir Sahib the following evening, 80-years-old but still active-minded, he advised strongly against trying to return to India via the Khyber Pass, due to the severity of the fighting there. Safe transit via the usual route was out of the question. The crew returned to their guest-tent, pitched in an orange-grove, to consider Pir Sahib's guidance.

The following morning reconnoitring the neighbouring countryside on horseback, Ivelaw-Chapman located a flattish piece of ground two miles away from the fort which, with work, could be made into an emergency airstrip. The pilot recalls: 'That night I wrote a letter to Sir Norman Bolton the Chief Commissioner in Peshawar, in which I asked that a Vickers-Victoria [due to its robust undercarriage] should be sent to my roughly prepared landing strip in a week's time to ferry the two of us back to India.'⁵⁸ Sending the letter by a reliable runner, Ivelaw-Chapman also requested that an aircraft, passing en route to Kabul, should fire off a Very light whilst in the vicinity of Jalalabad to acknowledge receipt of his proposal. Approximately four days later, this occurred, much to the delight of the stranded crew. The Very light provided a renewed vigour to improve the airstrip. Under the watchful gaze of Ivelaw-Chapman, the Pir Sahib's men cleared the area of major boulders and levelled out the surface, despite the ground being used as a regular battlefield by local tribesmen to settle disputes. Ivelaw-Chapman recalls: 'We had many interruptions of this sort during which I took cover in a near-by "fort" or, when in a more intrepid mood, at the top of an orange tree.'⁵⁹ By the end of the week, the airstrip was ready to receive aircraft.

Instead of the solidly built Vickers-Victoria requested, the aircraft that was sent to rescue the pilots was a relatively fragile Bristol F.2 B Fighter (known as a 'Biff' or 'Brisfit'), escorted by two

other aircraft.⁶⁰ The inevitable happened and the rough, undulating terrain proved too much for the tail-skid and rear end of the aircraft, which buckled on landing; the Pir Sahib now had another mouth to feed, Flying Officer Hancock. Over the next few days, with the assistance of a local carpenter and the leg of a broken chair, the aircraft was repaired for take-off. Concurrently and frequently interrupted by inter-tribal skirmishes, work was undertaken to improve the landing strip.⁶¹ With Davies' bruised knee in need of medical attention, Hancock and Davies returned to Peshawar with a note from Ivelaw-Chapman stating that he should be recovered in seven days' time, allowing him sufficient time to improve the airfield. *The Times* reported:

Flying Officer Davies, one of the two British airmen stranded in Afghanistan on Sunday, has been brought to Peshawar today in a small aeroplane piloted by Flight Lieutenant Hancock. The aeroplane could not carry more than two persons; consequently Flight Lieutenant [Ivelaw-] Chapman is remaining at Sultanpur, near Jalalabad, where he was detained by tribesmen who wanted a ransom for him. An aeroplane is to leave Peshawar shortly to bring him away.⁶²

Over the next week Ivelaw-Chapman worked on the airstrip, before being recovered to Peshawar on 18 February by Hancock.⁶³ Ivelaw-Chapman recalls: 'This time it [the Bristol Fighter] landed without incident and forty minutes later I was drinking beer in Peshawar Club. Then to the joyful application of a razor and a toothbrush, last used three weeks earlier.'⁶⁴ However, only days before, *The Times* cautioned:

There is, however, some anxiety in Service circles that the lives of airmen should be risked so much, as it is realized that the tribesmen are likely to detain all airmen who land when there is a chance of substantial ransom. It is also felt that other pilots' machines are likely to be endangered before the rescues from Kabul are completed, as flying conditions are still bad and are not likely to be better for a month.⁶⁵

Despite the concerns raised in *The Times*, the apprehension for the wellbeing of the downed aircrew and deteriorating weather conditions, the evacuation continued unabated with almost daily rescue flights to Sherpur airfield, whenever the weather made landing possible. This was made more achievable by the arrival of five more Vickers-Victorias in quick succession throughout February. Chaz Bowyer recalls: '... the D.H. 9A and Victoria crews continued their doughty efforts to evacuate Legation staffs, despite having to endure in their open cockpits dawn take-off temperatures as low as minus-20 degrees Centigrade on occasion, and a constant struggle to attain a 6,000 feet altitude by use of full throttle; the lowest height required to allow them to fly through the mountain ranges peaking at 10-15,000 feet en route.'⁶⁶ With requests for assistance pouring in, on 8 February nearly 40 passengers, piling on blankets and coats to keep warm during the flight, were flown to Peshawar. They included two Afghan *sirdars*, couriers of the Kabul Foreign Ministry, nine Persian and five Turkish women and children, an Australian and 20 British Indians.⁶⁷ Seven days later 43 passengers

were flown out of Kabul, including 32 British Indians, four Turks, three Germans, three Persians and an Afghan courier.⁶⁸

With temperatures dropping by the day and mindful of the reason for Ivelaw-Chapman's forced landing the on 29 January 1928, the RAF implemented measures to reduce the possibility of any further mishaps. They immediately overhauled the refuelling and storage arrangements at Risalpur and took the following precautions:

- All fuel was filtered twice before being passed into the tanks.
- On completion of the day's flying, all petrol filters were cleaned, and tanks filled up overnight.
- Before proceeding to Kabul, each aeroplane carried out a short test flight, flying for a few minutes on each tank, then landing, before all petrol filters were cleaned.
- In addition, an interpreter was carried on each flight in the event of a forced landing.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, circumstances at Sherpur airfield also posed significant challenges. 'Sir Geoffrey said that Squadron Leader Maxwell told him that one of the favourite "jokes" of the Afghan soldier was to advance towards him, pointing a gun, and at the last moment to fire it up in the air! Every journey was a test of self-control and good humour for our unarmed pilots and crews.'⁷⁰ Despite the ever present dangers, the evacuation proceeded with a degree of regularity until 20 February.⁷¹

Although the government had by now decided to withdraw all the Legation staff as a measure not of panic but of precaution,⁷² the cruel Afghan winter was to delay activities.⁷³ On 22 February Flight Lieutenant Anderson reported that he was unable to take off in the Hinaidi as the snow was too deep on the airfield in Kabul. As a consequence, the Vickers-Victorias following him were instructed to return to base immediately. Over the next few days, Humphrys, aware that the political situation was fragile, mobilised every available means of clearing the runway. This included local tribesmen, camels and even a few elephants to sweep and trample a runway 600 yards long and 20 yards wide. On 24 February the airstrip was reported fit for Vickers-Victorias. Four aircraft took off from Risalpur and arrived at Sherpur, rescuing a total of 27 passengers without incident. This completed the rescue of the French and Italian Legations, and a number of civilians. All that remained was Humphrys and his staff, and it was decided that the operation would be concluded in one day.

On the morning of 25 February, seven Vickers-Victorias, accompanied by the Hinaidi, crossed the snow-covered mountainous frontier for the last time. Leaving Risalpur at 07:45 hrs, they landed one-by-one, keeping their engines running, at the protected airfield. The sound of gunfire was ever-present as Habibulla's opponents began their bid to dethrone him and the city was in flames. Humphrys, carrying the Legation's Union Flag under his arm, led a small party of evacuees on foot to Sherpur airfield to meet the aircraft. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the last to climb aboard the waiting aircraft, ready to take them from danger to safety, were

Trusk, Donaldson and Humphrys. Flying over a route of sinister memories,⁷⁴ with few easily discernible landmarks, the aircraft landed in the orderly security of India at 12:30 hours. *The Times* reported simply:

Sir Francis Humphrys, the British Minister to Afghanistan, together with the remaining members of the British Legation, arrived here at 12:30 p.m. to-day by aeroplane from Kabul. This completes the work of evacuation undertaken by the Royal Air Force, and carried out successfully, in spite of many difficulties.⁷⁵

The following day *The Times* cautioned: 'To the principal passenger [Humphrys] no doubt the withdrawal was a bitter necessity, since it represented an admission that his life's work of the last few years has been shattered. He recalls that it was seven years yesterday [26 February] since he assumed his post, driving through the flourishing city and gardens of Jalalabad, which yesterday morning, seen through his glasses was a heap of dusty ruins.'⁷⁶

Overall, the RAF had evacuated a total of 586 men, women and children from many nationalities and conveyed 24,000 lbs of baggage⁷⁷ over 84 active sorties during the worst weather on record.⁷⁸ The total number of miles covered during the evacuations, without the benefit of modern-day navigational aids, was 28,160 (increasing to 57,438 if all journeys, including those of the Vickers-Victorias from Iraq to Risalpur, are included) through the unpredictable and treacherous air currents of the Hindu Kush. In the course of two months only one Vickers-Victoria aeroplane, J7926 piloted by Ivelaw-Chapman, was lost and the engine of one D.H. 9 machine, piloted by Trusk, was scrapped. More importantly, not a single life was lost during the two months' operation. Receiving numerous telegrams of best wishes, Humphrys responded to a congratulatory note from Trenchard with the following message:

Many thanks kind message we owe everything to magnificent achievements of RAF.

Francis Humphrys
Peshawar

Conclusion

The evacuation by air of the British Mission from a country which had no recognised government, and from a capital which controlled only a few square miles of territory, was regarded as clear-cut evidence that the British Government had upheld its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. It also demonstrated its friendship by avoiding any situation in which ground intervention, on behalf of its representatives, could have inflamed matters, and by ensuring that all aircraft had undertaken their duties totally unarmed. This achievement, as one historian has noted, 'could hardly have been undertaken by the Army without precipitating a fourth Afghan war.'⁸⁰ Moreover, the Vickers-Victorias, although primitive and of wooden construction, had proved to be an agreeable instrument of humanity and hope on the world stage, and had not been found wanting.⁸¹ The evacuation –

a purely civil one – won the RAF a reputation for humanitarian operations it still enjoys today. Equally, the daily reconnaissance flights over the Legation afforded hope and optimism for the beleaguered inhabitants. The D.H. 9As and Wapitis were a tangible expression of the RAF's readiness to reach the stranded personnel and gave a signal that the British Empire was standing by ready to help.

The operation also proved the resourcefulness and mobility of the RAF. The evacuation involved the three commands of India, Iraq and Egypt. India drew heavily on the air resources in Iraq to perform a task just across her border, while, in Iraq, temporary shortfalls were covered almost immediately by similar aircraft flown from Egypt, part of Middle East Command. Egypt in its turn was reinforced from Great Britain. The rapid reinforcement of Vickers-Victorias from Iraq took on average five days per aircraft to reach India, demonstrating the growing operational agility of the RAF. Moreover, the evacuation of Kabul was the first opportunity in the RAF's history for mutual cooperation between the different geographical air commands of the Empire. In so doing, Trenchard's vision of an independent Air Force, spanning the world, was coming true. It was a signpost of the utility and nimbleness of airpower almost every bit as significant as the Berlin Airlift of 1948.

However, the outstanding element of the evacuation was that 268 men, 153 women and 165 children were rescued by the RAF unharmed, apart from one German lady, who inadvertently walked into a propeller.⁸² In ungainly aircraft and flying in open cockpits, in some of the worst weather conditions outside the Arctic Circle, the skill of the pilots, defying rest and comfort, supported by dedicated crews, mechanics and riggers, accomplished a marvel of airmanship under the most testing conditions. The ability of the ground crews to prepare the aircraft each day, with practically no workshop facilities and only a handful of stores and spare parts, was equally as remarkable as the skill of the pilots. The Prince of Wales, talking as Honorary Secretary of the Empire Flying Services, paid tribute to the evacuation during a dinner at the Institute of Transport:

The Royal Air Force have performed a historical achievement. They have conveyed 586 in 84 aeroplanes [active sorties] without a single mishap to passengers over mountainous country in the depth of winter at an average height of 10,000 ft. Conditions have always been difficult, and for the last two days almost insuperable on account of the heavy fall of snow.

That is a very great tribute to our Air Forces.⁸³

Unsurprisingly, such an amazing feat drew considerable public admiration and state acknowledgment. Chaz Bower recalls in *RAF Operations 1918-38*: 'Recognition of the RAF's splendid achievements took the form of the award of Air Force Crosses (AFCs) to Squadron Leader Maxwell, Flight Lieutenants D.F. Anderson and Ivelaw-Chapman, and Flying Officers Trusk and Anness; while Leading Aircraftsman Donaldson [the only enlisted man] received an Air Force Medal (AFM).'⁸⁴ Additionally, in the summer of 1929, Humphrys and his wife

were decorated side-by-side at Buckingham Palace; perhaps the first time in history that a husband and wife had knelt before the King. Humphrys, for his coolness, ardour and diplomacy, became a Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (KCMG). Lady Humphrys, in recognition of her courage, became a Dame of The British Empire (DBE). Humphrys' untiring faith in the RAF's growing ability had not been misplaced.

Notes

¹ 'RAF Pilot on Libya Evacuations,' available at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/PeopleinDefence/RafPilotOnLibyaEvacuations.htm>

² 'Prime Minister Praises Military Effort in Libyan Evacuations,' available at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceOperations/PrimeMinisterPraisesMilitaryEffortinLibyanEvacuations.htm>

³ Kabul is: 190 miles from Peshawar through the Khyber Pass; 230 miles from Kohat through the Kurram; 320 miles from Kandahar via Ghazni; and 450 miles from Quetta.

⁴ P. Sykes, *A History of Afghanistan* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1940), 64.

⁵ In 1922, 19 Kurdish and Assyrian Levies were airlifted from Sulaimaniya to Kirkuk, Iraq to deal with political upheaval. However, this was solely a troop movement within the confines of one country.

⁶ A full overview of Amanullah's visit to London can be found in R. Wild, *Amanullah: Ex-King of Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1932).

⁷ 'A German Account,' *The Times*, 22 January 1929.

⁸ M. Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Policies* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 130.

⁹ *The Times* cautioned: 'King Amanullah's main perplexity is that he has the roughest of rough material on which to work, and it is probable that in his anxiety to see his people prosper and to adopt Western ways he has gone a little too fast and far in his initial experiments.' 'The Kabul Legation,' *The Times*, 24 December 1928. See also: 'Winter As The King's Ally,' *The Times*, 19 December 1928.

¹⁰ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul: The First Airlift* (London: William Kimber & Co. Ltd., 1975), 38-9.

¹¹ *The Times* suggested that 'the crux of the matter has been the recent failure of the Afghan regulars,' highlighting that the military budget 'has been so diminished that his [Amanullah's] troops have long and notoriously been in arrears of pay.' 'Winter As The King's Ally,' *The Times*, 19 December 1928.

¹² The Shinwari tribe were reported to have made three demands: (1) That no foreign Legation should be permitted to remain in Afghanistan; (2) That no more Afghan students should be sent abroad to study and; (3) That a party of 15 Afghan girls who had been sent to complete their education in Turkey should be recalled. 'The Rescue from Kabul,' *The Times*, 28 December 1928.

¹³ T.L. Pennell, *Among The Wild Tribes of the Afghan Frontier: A Record of Sixteen Years Close Intercourse with the Natives of the Indian Marches* (London: Seeley & Co. Ltd., 1909), 25.

¹⁴ Bacha-i-Saqao only robbed the rich and the Government – but left the poor alone.

¹⁵ 'Afghanistan,' *The Times*, 19 January 1929.

¹⁶ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 33.

¹⁷ C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38* (London, William Kimber & Co. Ltd., 1988), 191.

¹⁸ The Bristol Fighters did not have the range to reach Kabul. In contrast, the Wapiti's 550 hp nine-cylinder, radial, air-cooled Jupiter engine offered superior performance and range.

¹⁹ The Vickers-Victoria was a high commonality troop-carrying variant of the Vickers-Virginia bomber. The original Vickers-Victoria – J6868 – was flown in August 1922 and the first 15 production Victorias, made of wood and designated Mark III, were ordered in May 1925. They were designed to carry 20 soldiers with their kit.

²⁰ Handly Page Hinaiidi J7745 was a unique aircraft. It started life as an HP-24 Hyderabad Night Bomber, manufactured by the Handley Page Company of Cricklewood, Middlesex. It was modified, through the installation of two air-cooled Bristol Jupiter engines and became the prototype Hinaiidi. The aircraft was capable of carrying twenty passengers with little comfort.

²¹ The test load was 3 hours petrol and a useful load of 1,600 lbs. Landing and take-off were satisfactory. The take-off in a very light wind was 400 yards and the aircraft climbed well. During the subsequent evacuation flight, loads up to 2,200 lbs. were carried.

²² 'The Rescue from Kabul', *The Times*, 28 December 1928.

²³ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 63.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵ The aircraft had been stripped of all armaments, including crew sidearms, except for a Very signal pistol, in order not to provoke the Afghans in the event of a forced landing. This was the case for all flights involved in the evacuation.

²⁶ The 'Popham' Panel owed its original name (arising in the 1914-1918 war) to an RAF officer who at the time of the Kabul evacuations was Air Vice Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the Air Officer Commanding RAF in Iraq. First introduced in 1918, the panel weighed roughly 12 pounds and consisted of a sheet of dark blue American cloth about 10 feet by 8 feet with a white 'T' shape stitched to it. Branching off this were white panels, numbered 1-9. By exposing specific combinations, messages could be sent to the aircrew operating above.

²⁷ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 67.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *The Gazette of India*, Extraordinary, 7 October 1929, 138.

³⁰ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 69.

³¹ Accommodation was provided in the 'Café Wali,' a 'hotel' in the centre of Kabul.

³² All subsequent aircraft carried 'pamphlets' which were dropped over the major areas of disturbance, explaining the humanitarian mission on which the RAF were engaged, and conveying a warning against acts of aggression against the British Legation and Consulates.

³³ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁵ The lamp was wrapped in the latest papers, which were the first the Legation had seen since 8 November 1928.

³⁶ 'Story of Kabul Fighting', *The Times*, 5 January 1929.

³⁷ The aircraft, used in the operation to drop an Aldis lamp, piloted by Flight Lieutenant

Smetham, was hit nine times. One of these broke a flying wire, but the aircraft returned to Kohat safely.

³⁸ C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38*, 193.

³⁹ The initial phase of the evacuation involved walking through the battle zone to the Italian Legation, before transiting the short distance to Sherpur airfield by car.

⁴⁰ 'The Kabul Legation,' *The Times*, 24 December 1928.

⁴¹ 'Story of The Rescues,' *The Times*, 27 December 1928.

⁴² 'More Rescues From Kabul,' *The Times*, 31 December 1928.

⁴³ 'The Renewed Fighting in Afghanistan,' *The Times*, 11 January 1929.

⁴⁴ 'More Rescues From Kabul,' *The Times*, 27 December 1928.

⁴⁵ 'Kabul Legations,' *The Times*, 4 January 1929,

⁴⁶ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 117.

⁴⁷ C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38*, 193.

⁴⁸ Later Air Chief Marshal Sir Ronald Ivelaw-Chapman, GCB, KBE, DFC, AFC.

⁴⁹ 'Afghanistan,' *The Times*, 19 January 1929.

⁵⁰ During his 'Grand Tour' of Italy, Amanullah was invested with the Collar of the Annunciation by King Victor Emmanuel. As a 'cousin' of Italy, his request for asylum could not be refused. He died in Italy in 1960.

⁵¹ I.M. Philpott, *The Royal Air Force: An Encyclopedia of the Inter-war Years, Volume 1, The Trenchard Years 1918 to 1929* (London: Pen & Sword, 2005), 146.

⁵² A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 140.

⁵³ Every pilot carried a 'ghoolie chit' and a government note which stated: 'To the Friendly, Brave, Religious Nation, You are well aware of the fact that Britain has been friendly towards Afghanistan since a long time, and wished the country and its people well. She has always desired the progress of the country and its people for the good of both lands. Britain never intends, so long as her Embassy in Kabul and her consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar are secure according to Islamic and international practices, to interfere in the Afghan Rebellion. If the British Embassy and Consulates are violated by the people, the British Government would take any retaliatory action they would choose, and exact compensation for any damage or damages to their personnel, their buildings and the possessions thereof.'

⁵⁴ It later transpired that Noor Mahomed Khan was a 'Brigadier' in part of the Royalist Army loyal to Ali Ahmed Khan. He was apparently in the 'quartermaster branch' and was out 'touring' the villages to obtain supplies for the main army.

⁵⁵ *The Times* reported: 'The deserted machine was found after three days' search by one of several D.H. 9 aeroplanes of the Royal Air Force. A small tent, apparently unoccupied, was pitched beside the machine. The D.H. 9 flew over the villages of Sarobi and Doaba, but could see no trace of the missing pilots and no sign from the villagers.' 'More Kabul Rescues,' *The Times*, 4 February 1929.

⁵⁶ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 143.

⁵⁷ 'More Kabul Rescues,' *The Times*, 4 February 1929.

⁵⁸ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 151.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *The Gazette of India*, Extraordinary, 7 October 1929, 152.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² 'The Troubles in Afghanistan,' *The Times*, 14 February 1929.

⁶³ 'Rescues From Kabul,' *The Times*, 19 February 1929.

⁶⁴ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 156.

⁶⁵ 'Position of British Airmen,' *The Times*, 15 February 1929.

⁶⁶ C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38*, 194.

⁶⁷ 'R.A.F. Flights to Kabul,' *The Times*, 8 February 1929.

⁶⁸ 'Position of British Airmen,' *The Times*, 15 February 1929.

⁶⁹ Through the agency of the Chief Commissioner, North-West Frontier Province six Pathan volunteers were obtained and dispatched for this duty.

⁷⁰ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 173.

⁷¹ 'R.A.F. Flights to Kabul,' *The Times*, 21 February 1929.

⁷² And at the same time to assist in the withdrawal by aeroplane of the French, German, and Italian Diplomatic Missions.

⁷³ 'Withdrawal From Kabul,' *The Times*, 25 February 1929.

⁷⁴ The aircraft followed the traditional route of the Khyber Pass. It was often said that every stone of the pass was soaked in the blood of battle. In the winter 1842, the British lost nearly an entire column of 4,500 men in their retreat from Kabul to Jalalabad. The memory of this retreat was always in the minds of the British Army afterwards. E. O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars: Battles in a Hostile Land* (London: Brassey's, 2002), 29-49.

⁷⁵ 'Back From Kabul,' *The Times*, 26 February 1929.

⁷⁶ 'Kabul,' *The Times*, 27 February 1929.

⁷⁷ Passengers on evacuation flights were allowed to bring along only one suitcase each. For an adult this was to weigh no more than 20 pounds; a child was entitled to a 15 pound travel case. To overcome this restriction, passengers dressed in multiple layers of clothing.

⁷⁸ Of note, of the 586 personnel evacuated only 23 had British nationality; 344 were British Indians and the remainder came from 11 different foreign citizenships. C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38*, 196-7.

⁷⁹ A. Baker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul*, 178.

⁸⁰ M. Barthop, *The North-West Frontier: British India and Afghanistan* (Poole: Blandford Press, 1982), 168.

⁸¹ This was despite their Service 'ceiling' being several hundred feet lower than the Kabul aerodrome upon which they had to land.

⁸² Although the propeller was broken, the lady survived the incident. The damaged propeller was replaced by the one on Flying Officer Trusk's machine, and the aircraft returned to Peshawar the same day. *The Gazette of India*, Extraordinary, 7 October 1929, 140.

⁸³ 'The Prince on Transport,' *The Times*, 15 March 1929.

⁸⁴ C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38*, 197. Of note, Donaldson was subsequently commissioned. See also *The Gazette of India*, Extraordinary, 7 October 1929, 146-148.

A Greek Tragedy? The Royal Air Force's Campaign in the Balkans, November 1940 to April 1941

By Group Captain Alistair Byford

The campaign in Greece in the winter of 1940-41 was the last of three disastrous expeditionary campaigns mounted by British forces in the first fifteen months of the Second World War, following the intervention in Norway and the *blitzkrieg* in France and Flanders. While the campaigns were similar in nature – all were joint, fought in coalition and culminated in a desperate evacuation – each had a unique character, and this paper will suggest that the RAF's experience in Greece yields specific and valuable contemporary lessons about the employment of air power. Most importantly, success and failure were intimately connected to the degree of control of the air that could be achieved, in turn determined and constrained by the organisation of deployed logistics and support functions. However, the campaign is most notable as an example of the primacy of the political imperative above purely military considerations, and illustrates the unpalatable strategic choices that Commanders must subsequently make as they attempt to manage and mitigate the operational consequences.

Hitler always faces me with a fait accompli. This time I will pay him back in his own coin. He will find out from the papers that I have occupied Greece.

Benito Mussolini¹

Introduction

Greece represents the right-hand panel of the triptych of expeditionary campaigns that the Royal Air Force fought in the first fifteen months of the Second World War, following the disastrous operations in Norway, France and Flanders. All three campaigns were joint; combined, in that they were fought with allies or partners; involved an interplay of strategic and operational priorities that presented Commanders with agonising (and often impossible) choices about the allocation of patently inadequate resources; and finally, all ultimately culminated in failure and a desperate evacuation. However, while the campaigns were similar in nature, each had its own very distinct character, and this paper suggests that the particular circumstances of the RAF's operations in Greece yield many valuable lessons of much contemporary relevance: not least the difficulties of working within *ad hoc* and unplanned coalitions with non-traditional or unfamiliar partners; the absolute necessity for adequate deployed logistics support, infrastructure and force protection to enable effective expeditionary air operations; and finally, and perhaps most importantly, that political necessity will trump purely military considerations, so the real challenge for Commanders and planners is to accept this reality and mitigate and manage the consequences as best they can.

The First Phase: The Italian Attack and the Greek Response, November-December 1941

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Greece wisely sought to maintain its neutrality. However, this became increasingly difficult because of the bellicose stance adopted by Mussolini's Italy. *Il Duce* chafed at his subordinate position within the axis and wished to establish his independence from Hitler by matching the German military successes in Poland and France. Consequently, he decided to attack Greece, which he regarded as the easiest opponent within Italy's perceived sphere of influence, without consulting his German ally. Mussolini issued a deliberately unacceptable ultimatum to Athens on 28 October 1940, but had already ordered his forces to invade; the first Italian troops had already crossed the border from southern Albania into north-west Greece before the Greek Government could formally reject the Italian dictator's demands. Britain was obliged to assist Greece under the terms of a formal guarantee of sovereignty made in April 1939, which declared that 'His Majesty's Government would lend all the support in its power in the event of any threat to Greek independence'.² However, the reality of the geopolitical context in late 1940 was very different to the situation that had been envisaged when the treaty was signed before the war. The disastrous outcome of the first year of fighting meant there was no British strategic reserve in the Mediterranean, so any military assistance would have to be drawn from the Middle East, an area of much greater strategic priority than the Balkans where all available British and

Commonwealth forces were already heavily committed. Consequently, nothing could be done immediately to help Greece.

Fortunately, the initial Italian thrust made little progress. Despite being heavily outnumbered, the Greeks counter-attacked and had pushed their opponents back into Albania within three weeks. The Greek General Staff was, therefore, relatively sanguine about the lack of British military support on the ground. However, it was a different matter in the air. The Italian air force, the *Regia Aeronautica*, enjoyed a considerable quantitative and qualitative superiority over the tiny Greek air component, and was able to deploy at least 300 relatively modern aircraft into the theatre of operations, backed by adequate reserves readily available in Italy. In contrast, the Greeks entered the war with a polyglot collection of just 150 aircraft, of which only about 70 had any sort of combat capability. Most of the aircraft were French or Polish and, as these nations had been overrun by Germany, there were few spare parts available, particularly as there was no Greek aviation industry to act as an alternative source of supply. Additionally, the Greek air element was directly controlled by the General Staff, which regarded it solely as an adjunct to the army. Consequently, the few serviceable combat aircraft that were available were quickly expended in close air support missions that achieved little overall effect.³ Consequently, the *Regia Aeronautica* soon established total control of the air, capitalising on this luxury by bombing targets at its leisure, both in direct support of Italian operations on the battlefield and through a series of raids on Athens that were designed to sap Greek morale and undermine the civilian population's will to resist.

These virtually unopposed attacks increasingly alarmed the Greek Government, and intense pressure was brought to bear on the British Minister in Athens to provide air support. Air Chief Marshal Longmore, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Middle East, responded by sending No. 30 Squadron (a *Blenheim* squadron whose aircraft were a mixture of bombers and makeshift fighters equipped with a four-gun ventral pod) to defend the Greek capital. He cabled the Chief of the Air Staff that 'It seems that it has become politically absolutely essential to send a token force to Greece even at the expense of my forces here'.⁴ Churchill commented that Longmore had 'taken a very bold and wise decision.' Inspired by Greece's stubborn resistance to aggression, the British premier decreed that additional air support should be provided, so two more Squadrons of *Blenheims* and two squadrons of *Gladiator* single-seat biplane fighters were stripped out of the Middle East and sent to Greece. The chiefs of staff realised this would dangerously weaken the defence of Egypt, but accepted 'this risk would have to be taken in view of the political commitment to aid Greece'. This initial deployment reduced fighter strength in the Middle East by a third, bomber strength by a half and completely removed the air defence of the key base at Alexandria.

Air power's speed of response is one of its most important and enduring characteristics and by the time the designated air component commander, Air Vice-Marshal J.H. D'Albiac, arrived in Athens on 6 November, advance elements of No. 30 Squadron were already in place and ready for action.⁵ D'Albiac's main problem was the scarcity of adequate airfields; bases around

Athens had reasonable operating surfaces, but almost no accommodation or other infrastructure and were 300 miles away from the frontline, too distant to be of any use for the short-range *Gladiators*. However, the few available landing grounds located further forward were even more austere and also prone to autumnal flooding. The result was that 'while the enemy could make the most of his great numerical superiority by operating from hard runways only a few miles behind the front, our tiny force was thus handicapped by every consideration of weather, site and maintenance'.⁶ From mid-November until the end of December, only 235 bomber sorties were flown, or about one sortie per week per aircraft. Long-range *Wellington* bombers operating from Egypt were also sometimes available on an opportunity basis, but only if not tasked elsewhere, at night and during moonlit periods. The Greeks were disappointed by the scale of effort and agreed to build two all-weather airfields as a matter of urgency, but little could be done to increase sortie generation until this work was completed. Tension was also apparent within the chain of command, as Longmore was less than enthusiastic about having to maintain a significant force in Greece when he felt it could be better employed in Egypt, and the political-military relationship became strained when he learned that the British Minister in Athens had appealed to London for more air reinforcements without his knowledge.⁷



The Air Component Commander,
Air Vice Marshal John D'Albiac

There were also important conceptual differences about the most effective employment of air power. D'Albiac was continually pressed by his hosts to concentrate on close air support in accordance with Greek doctrine, even though the tiny Greek air element had wasted away to almost nothing after being used in this manner. Instead, D'Albiac argued that his limited bombing capability could be employed far more effectively in an interdiction campaign against Valona and Durazzo, the main Italian ports of disembarkation in Albania, and the communications hubs in theatre. This was eventually accepted by the Greeks, not least because D'Albiac had gained their trust by establishing a close and cordial working relationship after collocating his headquarters with the General Staff in Athens. A nightly conference was held every evening to discuss the day's air operations and to allocate tasks for the next day, often attended by both the Greek King and the premier, General Metaxas. D'Albiac thus gained influential and intimate access to the highest level of national command.⁸

The success of D'Albiac's interdiction campaign is difficult to measure with certainty. Valona was attacked seventeen times before the end of the year and the *Wellingtons* operating from Egypt also damaged the main embarkation ports on both sides of the Adriatic. Empirical evidence suggests that the bombing was effective, as captured Italian soldiers admitted that the supply situation was so bad that they received food only once every three or four days, although it is not entirely clear whether this was due to the RAF, inadequate Italian logistics or, most likely, a combination of the two.⁹ In contrast, the results achieved by the handful of

fighters were much more tangible. The mere presence of the converted *Blenheims* of No. 30 Squadron immediately deterred air attacks on Athens, while the single-engine fighters deployed further forward denied the *Regia Aeronautica* the freedom it had previously enjoyed to operate over the battlefield with impunity, with No. 80 Squadron, for example, claiming 42 enemy aircraft for the loss of only six of its own *Gladiators* by the end of 1940.

The Second Phase: Stalemate, January-March 1941

By December, it was becoming clear that Hitler was planning an intervention of his own to clear up the Balkans on behalf of his increasingly humiliated Italian ally. The *Wehrmacht* earmarked twenty-seven divisions for the operation, code-named *Marita*, with the stated aims of securing the southern flank of Germany's forthcoming offensive on the Soviet Union and removing any potential threat to the vital Romanian oil-fields from British bombers based in the Balkans. The selected course of action was to occupy both Greece and Yugoslavia, where a *coup d'état* had recently overthrown the pro-axis regime. Although the Greeks had previously been reluctant to accept British offers of token land forces for fear of provoking a German attack, the scale of these preparations encouraged the Greek high command to begin urgent negotiations about the deployment of a substantial British Expeditionary Force (BEF). After much soul-searching, General Wavell (the overall British Commander in the Middle East) decided that up to four British divisions could be made available (in fact, much of the force would consist of Australian and New Zealand troops), even though this put the security of Egypt and the rest of the Middle East at grave risk. Nevertheless, the first Commonwealth troops began to arrive in Greece on 7 March. In the meantime, Longmore, with equal reluctance, provided another five Squadrons to match the increased commitment of land forces, including a few more capable *Hurricane* eight-gun monoplane fighters to supplement the obsolescent *Gladiators*. The reinforcing squadrons were No. 11 and No. 113 (*Blenheims*), No. 112 (*Gladiators* and *Hurricanes*), No. 33 (*Hurricanes*) and No. 208 (*Lysander* army co-operation aircraft and *Hurricanes*).

D'Albiac now had to find even more bases in a country that was 'desperately short not only of airfields, but of general communications'.¹⁰ Grass airfields were still too soft or waterlogged for regular use, while the strips with harder surfaces were in 'wildly inconvenient' mountainous locations. It took two to three days for fuel and weapons to be transported to these airfields by road and providing functioning communications was a problem that was never satisfactorily resolved; an *ad hoc* early warning system was developed, using Greek observer posts connected directly by telephone to the nearest fighter base, but this usually



Flight Lieutenant Joe Fraser of No. 112 Squadron poses with his *Gladiator* at the forward operating base at Yanni in April 1941. Fraser was credited with ten victories during the Greek campaign.¹¹ This photograph gives some indication of the rugged terrain and difficult weather experienced at austere forward bases.¹²

monopolized the only landline available so that other priority calls could often take over six hours to get through.

Air operations throughout January and February were hampered by poor weather. This allowed the *Regia Aeronautica* to reinforce its fighter strength both numerically, and with more modern types than the *Fiat CR42 Falco* biplanes previously employed. Although the RAF's ability to maintain sufficient control of the air was threatened, D'Albiac finally agreed to switch his main effort to close air support to assist the Greeks in an all-out offensive aimed at taking the key port of Valona before a German intervention was possible. Once again, the psychological affect of bombing proved to be out of proportion to the physical damage inflicted, with the Italian garrison being shaken and visibly demoralized following a series of air attacks. In parallel, the arrival of the extra fighters – especially the *Hurricanes* – helped to restore parity in the air. The *Hurricanes* claimed four Italian aircraft on their very first sortie in theatre and on 28 February (in company with a *Gladiator* squadron) shot down 27 enemy aircraft without loss.¹³ The dogfight took place over the Greek lines, providing a marked fillip to morale and enabling each success to be confirmed from the ground.

Despite these setbacks, Italian air strength continued to increase, forcing D'Albiac to revert to an offensive counter-air campaign against the Italian Air Force's airfields and supply depots to avoid losing control of the air completely. The Greeks reluctantly accepted the change in emphasis, but the army-dominated General Staff never really understood the rationale behind it. D'Albiac's senior Staff Officer, Wing Commander Coote, reported that 'in vain we tried to explain the proper employment of an air force and the disparity between our strength and that of the enemy', but lamented 'at the end we gained our point, but the same discussion started again on the morrow'.¹⁴ The air component's need to secure sufficient control of the air as a necessary prelude to all other operations has been one of the most enduring sources of tension throughout the history of air-land integration; it has always been very difficult for soldiers to understand that air power is making an effective contribution to the joint campaign unless they can actually see it delivering tangible effects in direct support of the land component.¹⁵

The Final Phase: The German Assault, 6-25 April 1941

By March, the Greek offensive in Albania had stalled as a result of more bad weather and continuing Italian reinforcement of the front. A renewed Italian offensive made little headway and an uneasy stalemate developed as the *Wehrmacht* began its final preparations for Operation *Marita*. The German air effort would be the responsibility of *Luftflotte 4*, a self-contained, multi-role tactical air force fielding 1,200 aircraft of all types, supported by the 300 Italian aircraft still available for operations over Greece. In comparison, the Allies were heavily overmatched: D'Albiac's ten squadrons ostensibly comprised some 200 aircraft, but the logistical difficulties meant that only 82 were serviceable, while only a handful of Greek aircraft were left in action. The RAF component was split into three wings: a Western Wing supported the Greeks in Albania; an Eastern Wing covered the Anglo-Greek force facing the expected main axis of the German attack; and two squadrons were held in reserve around Athens.

The German assault began on 6 April. Following the pattern established in the campaigns of 1940, the *Luftwaffe's* first priority was to gain and maintain control of the air. This was initially hampered by poor weather and did not always go entirely to plan subsequently; for example, on one occasion, 12 RAF *Hurricanes* attacked a force of 20 *Messerschmitt Bf 109* fighters and claimed five without loss. However, the German offensive counter-air effort was remorseless and the few functioning allied airfields were obvious targets. On 15 April, a series of strafing attacks by *Messerschmitt 109s* at Larissa destroyed every single *Blenheim* of No. 113 Squadron. When D'Albiac visited the airfield later in the day, he arrived just as more *109s* bounced a flight of three *Hurricanes* as they took off, shooting down two of the British fighters before they could even retract their wheels. The third *Hurricane* managed to get airborne and shot down one of the German fighters overhead the airfield, but D'Albiac realised that the Eastern Wing's position was no longer tenable and he ordered its immediate withdrawal.

D'Albiac was now caught on the horns of an almost impossible dilemma. After just over a week of fighting, he only had 46 aircraft left in action, and these would almost certainly be destroyed if they remained at vulnerable forward bases. However, if they were withdrawn to the rear they would still provide a tempting target, as they would be concentrated at a few landing grounds around Athens that were devoid of anti-aircraft gun cover; in any case, they would also be too distant from the frontline for the short-range *Hurricanes* and *Gladiators* to protect either the *Blenheim* bombers or the allied troops. This problem was resolved as the heavily outnumbered Anglo-Greek army progressively disintegrated in the face of the German land offensive. On 17 April, the Greek king warned D'Albiac that a general collapse was imminent, so all of the surviving fighters were withdrawn to Athens and the remnants of the bomber squadrons evacuated to Crete. In the Western Wing, No. 208 Squadron had a lucky escape as it executed the order; the *Hurricane* squadron had just taken off *en route* to Athens when a German attack swept in at full *geschwader* strength, destroying the last few Greek *Gladiators* left on the airfield and effectively wiping the last of the Greek air component off the order of battle.

Now concentrated around Athens, the few remaining RAF fighters were scrambled repeatedly over the next few days to meet incoming *Luftwaffe* raids of fifty-plus aircraft. The climax came on 20 April in what became known as the 'Battle of Athens', when a force of almost one hundred German aircraft attempted to obliterate the RAF's main operating base at Piraeus. By now, only fifteen *Hurricanes* were flyable, but in a swirling dogfight they claimed 14 enemy aircraft (Greek observers counted 22 German aircraft shot down) for the loss of five of their own number, unfortunately including the inspirational leader of No. 33 Squadron, Squadron Leader 'Pat' Pattle. A South African by birth, Pattle is variously credited with between 40 and 50 victories flying *Gladiators* and *Hurricanes*, making him possibly the highest scoring British and Commonwealth ace of the Second World War.¹⁶



Squadron Leader Marmaduke St. Thomas 'Pat' Pattle, possibly the Second World War's leading British and Commonwealth air ace, lost his life in 'The Battle of Athens' on 20 April.

Another of the *Hurricane* pilots was Roald Dahl, later the famous author. In his autobiography *Going Solo* he vividly captures the chaos and confusion of the battle: 'Wherever I looked I saw an endless blur of enemy fighters whizzing towards me from every side. They came from above and they came from behind and they made frontal attacks from dead ahead. It was truly the most breathless and in a way the most exhilarating time I have ever had in my life.'¹⁷ In an interesting commentary on training and preparation during these desperate days, it is illuminating to note that Dahl had had just seven hours experience on the *Hurricane* (including the transit to Greece) when he arrived in theatre as a replacement pilot and had never flown in formation or fired the guns; nevertheless, he still managed to shoot down a *Junkers Ju 88* bomber on his first combat sortie. In his post-action despatch, D'Albiac summarised the nature of the fighting:

*Even after having been shot down, our fighter pilots would immediately take to the air in aircraft which had been riddled with bullets and were by normal standards totally unserviceable. The courage of these men never failed nor looked like failing. Each day they stepped into their battered aircraft not without a sensation of fear, but quite undismayed.*¹⁸

Dahl provides a somewhat different perspective: 'My hand was shaking so much I couldn't put the flame to the end of the cigarette. The doctor came up and lit it for me. I felt embarrassed, but when I looked at the other pilots, their hands were shaking as much as mine were. But I was feeling pretty good. I had stayed up there for thirty minutes and they hadn't got me.'¹⁹

Evacuation

Since 17 April, the British had been considering a complete evacuation from Greece in the light of the collapsing front. On 22 April, the Greek Army at Epirus laid down its arms after being outflanked and, with the *Liebstandarte SS* motorized division established at Yannina, there was a real danger that the Germans would take Athens from the west before the BEF could escape to the beaches. Immediate evacuation was the only possible option and the operation was planned for 25 April. By this stage, the only RAF aircraft left in Greece were 18 *Hurricanes*, comprising the remnants of Nos. 33, 80 and 208 Squadrons. These flew to Argos from Athens on 22 April to cover the evacuation, but the anti-aircraft detachment intended to protect them was sent to the wrong airfield. Consequently, thirteen of the fighters were destroyed on the ground in an intense series of *Luftwaffe* attacks mounted throughout 23 April. In response, Air Commodore Grigson, commanding the rear party, decided he had no choice but to withdraw the seven surviving aircraft to Crete. They departed at first light on 24 April, just eighteen hours before the first British troops were due to embark.

This meant that the only air cover for the evacuation was provided by 15 *Blenheims* flying from Crete in the long-range fighter role. D'Albiac – somewhat optimistically – considered that 'it was due largely to their efforts that such a large proportion of British Forces were evacuated.'²⁰ However, despite their shortcomings as extemporised fighters, it is likely that the *Blenheims* did have some effect. The evacuation fleet operated under the cover of darkness and left the Greek

coast early enough to ensure that they were out of range of the lethal, ship-killing *Ju 87 Stuka* dive-bombers by the time dawn broke. This meant they were also out of range of *Messerschmitt 109* fighters, so the *Blenheims* only had to contend with unescorted medium bombers over the fleet, although these could still often outpace the underpowered British aircraft. Nevertheless, the *Blenheims* were able to disrupt and distract at least some of the German bomber raids, and overall shipping losses were acceptable in an operation of this sort. Sadly, at least one *Blenheim* was mistakenly shot down by a British destroyer, although fratricide was almost inevitable at a stage in the campaign where any aircraft seen could more reasonably be expected to be German rather than British.²¹

Air mobility also made a significant, if somewhat melancholy, contribution to the success of the evacuation. *Sunderland* flying boats ferried over 900 soldiers and airmen from the Greek mainland to Crete and Egypt, including most of the Allied senior Commanders and the Greek King. One aircraft managed to lift 84 personnel, an extraordinary achievement given the *Sunderland's* toted maximum capacity of 30 passengers.



Air mobility and lift: Short *Sunderland* flying boats assisting with the evacuation.²²

Two civilian 'C-Class' flying boats of the British Overseas Air Corporation were also co-opted to assist with the airlift effort, bringing out another 469 troops in thirteen return trips. The method of loading was 'to allow the troops to file in until the forward door was so low that water began to pour in, then the door was slammed and the flying-boat took off as quickly as possible before it sank'.²³

The Reckoning

The first phase of the RAF's campaign in Greece was profitable, with nearly 200 Italian aircraft destroyed at the cost of 47 British aircraft. The air component also contributed to the success of Greek land operations through the interdiction of Italian supply lines and by providing direct close air support on a limited number of critical occasions. The final phase was a different matter, with the RAF losing another 151 aircraft during the German assault (including 87 unserviceable aircraft abandoned and destroyed in the various withdrawals and evacuations), although the Luftwaffe also admitted to losing 164 of its own aircraft, albeit mainly in operational accidents.²⁴ However, and more significantly, the air component's influence on the overall outcome of the campaign was negligible.

Analysis

Unsurprisingly and predictably, the RAF's successes and failures in Greece were determined by the degree of control of the air that was achieved. In the first and second phases, the air component was heavily outnumbered by the Italian air force, so nothing approaching any sort of a conception of 'air superiority' was possible, especially after the Italians reinforced their

air element in terms of numbers and improved equipment. However, a judicious offensive air campaign, coupled with concentration in time and space of the few available fighters, meant that the RAF achieved sufficient control of the air (on a temporary basis) to prevent the *Regia Aeronautica* from influencing the campaign decisively, while permitting other RAF air operations (such as interdiction and close air support) to be conducted without undue interference. This tends to support current British air doctrine, which measures control of the air against a sliding scale of freedom and denial rather than in degrees of superiority or supremacy. *AP3000: British Air and Space Doctrine*, for example, talks of 'the freedom, bound by time, to use a volume of airspace for one's own purposes while, if necessary, denying its use to an opponent'. In the case of the Greek campaign, additional doctrinal clarification that 'the required degree of control is achieved when a commander assesses that a planned surface or air operation will not be compromised by enemy action and that the risk to his own forces posed by enemy air is acceptable'²⁵ is plainly also pertinent.

Unhappily, none of the conditions for even temporary control of the air could be met after the Germans intervened in the third phase of the campaign. Even more heavily outnumbered than before, and now also qualitatively outclassed by the *Luftwaffe*, the RAF had to concentrate almost exclusively on battling for its own survival; this severely constrained its ability to make any sort of effective contribution to the joint campaign as a whole. After 17 April, when control of the air was completely lost and the last surviving *Blenheims* were withdrawn to Crete, this became an absolute reality: the only missions subsequently flown by the RAF in Greece were by its few remaining fighters in defence of their own airfields, sorties that were therefore irrelevant to the wider campaign. In these circumstances, the only real contribution that could be claimed was in diverting some of *Luftwaffe 4's* resources and sorties into the contest for control of the air and away from supporting the *Wehrmacht's* operations on the ground.

Underlining the doctrinal primacy of control of the air is not, however, the only important lesson of the campaign. At the simplest level, control of the air was lost because the RAF did not have sufficient fighters of good enough quality to contest it. But even had more, and better, aircraft been available, the paucity of suitable airfields, the lack of deployable command and control facilities and adequate, mobile, logistics support meant that it would have been very difficult to employ them effectively; as it was, well over 50% of the aircraft lost in theatre were abandoned because they could not be repaired or maintained adequately. In contrast, as the German offensive rolled south, the *Luftwaffe* brought sufficient deployed operating bases into service to meet its needs and was then able to successfully support and re-supply them from the air.

This was not just a question of materiel, but also a reflection of the differing philosophies between the two air forces: the *Luftwaffe* was organised into self-contained tactical air forces that were optimised for mobile, expeditionary warfare, including, for example, an organic allocation of transport aircraft, anti-aircraft guns and even mobile meteorological and catering services. In contrast, the RAF had complied with the interwar policy direction that there

would be no commitment of British forces overseas by organising itself into mono-functional commands (Fighter, Bomber, Coastal) intended to fight single-role campaigns from a static base infrastructure in Great Britain. There was little capability, equipment or training for deployed operations and the expeditionary air components used in the first two years of the war in Norway, France and Greece were therefore extemporised organisations, lacking a well-established structure for deployed command or support functions.²⁶ The ancillary support for the RAF in Greece, for example, was drawn from an *ad hoc* collection of seconded army units not under command. The RAF did not establish a genuine expeditionary capability – able to deploy tactical air power in the field effectively – until the creation of Tedder's Western Desert Air Force and, later, 2 Allied Tactical Air Force for the North-West Europe Campaign. The problem of adapting a structure configured for a particular expectation of the sort of war that will be fought is enduring; twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the RAF is still seeking to develop an organisational framework that adequately reflects the transition from a static, main operating base construct to a genuinely expeditionary posture. The current Expeditionary Air Wing concept, and the more recent separation of the responsibilities of Groups, Force Commanders and Station Commanders, are the latest manifestations of the attempt to square the circle between the demands of peace-time training and force generation on the one hand and deployed operational practice on the other.²⁷

Conclusion: Military Means versus Strategic Ends?

Ultimately, Britain's campaign in Greece was a political gamble that failed. It was criticised by members of Parliament in 1942 as 'a romantic and sentimental decision' while the acknowledged 'master of strategy', Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke (Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Churchill's principal military advisor), described it baldly as 'a strategic blunder'.²⁸ In purely military terms, it is difficult to dispute this judgement. Wavell, as overall Commander in the Middle East, simply had more commitments than resources and Greece was the straw that broke the camel's back. Military strategy is about bringing ends, ways and means into balance,²⁹ but this was impossible in the Middle East in the winter of 1940-41 given the number and extent of desired political objectives set against the scarcity of the forces available; even before the German invasion of Greece had begun, the British had already lost much of Cyrenaica, Malta was under heavy attack as a prelude to a possible airborne assault, there was burgeoning unrest in Iraq and a long and bloody battle was being fought at Keren in Italian East Africa. Consequently, the official history disputes the contemporaneous view of the Middle East Commanders-in-Chief that 'it was one damned thing after another' by dryly commenting that rather 'it was everything



The Middle East Commanders-in-Chief who 'got' the big picture but were forced into impossible choices: Admiral 'ABC' Cunningham, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore and General Sir Archibald Wavell.

in all directions at once.’³⁰ Without the diversion of forces to Greece, it is entirely possible that the war in the desert could have been shortened by as much as two years, because the British may well have been able to successfully conclude the North African campaign before Germany had the opportunity to reinforce the beaten Italian army in Libya with Rommel’s *Afrika Korps*.

Despite the compelling military case for non-intervention in Greece, the political imperative meant this was never a realistic option. As the last major democratic power surviving in Europe, it was unthinkable that Great Britain could - or would - shrink from its obligations to its Greek ally. At the very grandest of grand strategic levels, this was all a question of messaging. Churchill recognised that Britain’s only chance of ultimate victory was to engage the still neutral United States of America ever more closely in support of the allied cause. He calculated that this was far more likely to be achieved by being seen to help another ‘freedom-loving nation’ (especially the cradle of democracy, albeit currently ruled by a military *junta*) with all of the power at his disposal, even if the cause was hopeless, than by not attempting to help at all. The Middle East Commanders may not have liked this unpalatable strategic choice, but they understood it - even if it meant perpetuating the traditional British approach of ‘despatching inadequate forces to assert moral or strategic principles,’³¹ an observation that some commentators have also applied to the United Kingdom’s most recent military interventions in Basra and Helmand.³² This begs the question as to whether a Commander should ever endorse a course of action that does not make sense in strictly military terms; and on occasions, the answer is clearly that he or she will have to do so, although the advice offered to decision-makers must always be honest and the risks involved acknowledged and, if possible, mitigated.

Within four weeks of the end of the campaign in Greece, Admiral Cunningham was confronted with exactly this sort of choice after the successful German airborne assault on Crete. Cunningham was given the option to abandon the Army and break off the evacuation because of the unsustainable losses that were being inflicted on his ships by the *Luftwaffe*; but he assessed that the potential long-term damage to the Navy’s reputation outweighed the short-term benefit of preserving what was left of the Mediterranean fleet, ordering operations to continue with the famous comment that ‘It takes three years to build a ship; it takes three centuries to build a tradition.’³³ The ability to exert influence depends on reputation and prestige as much as on numbers and capability, a combination that would be currently understood within the vogue descriptions of *soft* and *hard* power. Cunningham recognised this intuitively and factored it into his decision-making; in contrast, arguably this is not as instinctive in current British military practice; for example, Frank Ledwidge argues persuasively that the decision to withdraw from Basra in 2007 may have made pragmatic military sense in the short-term, but took little account of the longer-term damage to Britain’s martial reputation and, therefore, its international standing and ability to exert international influence, particularly with its most important ally.³⁴

In the winter of 1940-41, all three Mediterranean Commanders-in-Chief regretted the need to divert any of their scarce resources to Greece, but they acknowledged the strategic imperative

and the political necessity; collectively, they 'took the big view and accepted the short-term consequences', acknowledging that: 'The war, in fact, was more important than the battle'.³⁵ Given this unpromising strategic context, it is difficult to envisage that the Air Commanders (principally Longmore, the Commander-in-Chief Middle East, and D'Albiac, the air component commander) could have played the almost impossible hand they were dealt in a much better way than they did.

Finally, the Greek campaign may have had one truly critical if serendipitous strategic benefit, although this could not have been foreseen at the time and is still the subject of academic debate. The German offensive in the Balkans set back Operation *Barbarossa*, the invasion of the Soviet Union, by at least four weeks; arguably, the time lost in Greece and Yugoslavia may have been the vital factor in the *Wehrmacht's* failure at the gates of Moscow with the onset of the Russian winter in late 1941, securing the Soviet Union's survival and paving the way for Hitler's ultimate defeat in Berlin four years later.

Notes

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⁷ Playfair, p.229.

⁸ *Flight*, p.98.

⁹ Richards, p.257.

¹⁰ Richards, p.310.

¹¹ Courtesy of 112 Squadron.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Flight*, p.98.

¹⁴ Air Vice-Marshal J.H.D'Albiac, Despatch to Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Middle East, 15 August 1941.

¹⁵ David Hall, *Strategy for Victory: the Development of British Tactical Air Power 1919-43* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), p.27.

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¹⁹ Dahl, p.153.

²⁰ D'Albiac, *ibid.*

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²² 112 Squadron.

²³ Richards, p.284.

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³⁰ Playfair, p.389.

³¹ Max Hastings, *Finest Years: Churchill as Warlord 1940-45*, (London: Harper, 2010), p.129.

³² See, for example, Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), p. 110.

³³ Quoted in Winston Churchill, *The Second World War Volume 3: The Grand Alliance*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p.265.

³⁴ Ledwidge, p.58.

³⁵ Playfair, p.389.

The Persian Gulf and British Defence Policy, 1956-1971

By Dr Ben Jones

In the fifteen years prior to Britain's military withdrawal from east of Suez in 1971, the defence of its protectorates in the Persian Gulf became a key focus for British defence policy, largely for economic reasons. This article charts the changing diplomatic situation in terms of Britain's relations with its allies and the threats which existed to them. The major focus is upon the resulting decisions with regards to the stance and readiness of Britain's military forces in the area. The concept of deterrence was crucial and contingency plans emphasised the need to act quickly and decisively. What changed was not Britain's interest in the region, but the practical issues of maintaining its defence posture and whether these commitments could be afforded. A wide range of original documents have been used to shed new light upon Britain's policy towards the Gulf during this period.

Introduction

Britain's defence commitments in the Persian Gulf can be traced back to around 1820 when the desire to stop piracy in the area led to agreements with a number of rulers on the Arab side of the Gulf in what became known as the Trucial States, today the United Arab Emirates. Formal agreements which resulted in British protectorates were signed with the Trucial States in 1853, Bahrain in 1861, Kuwait in 1899 and Qatar in 1916.¹ To give an example of the nature of these agreements, that with Kuwait forbade Sheikh Mubarak or any of his successors from meeting a representative of any foreign power or giving away control of any territory without prior British consent.² In return Britain would support these states in the event of external aggression. Other states such as the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman remained closely allied to Britain without any formal treaty. Britain's interest in the Gulf region was transformed by the discovery of oil. Before the First World War the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in Iran was a key supplier of fuel to the Royal Navy. The development of the oil industry in the smaller Gulf states was delayed by the Second World War, but by the 1950s significant quantities were being produced in Bahrain and Kuwait. Britain's focus on its protectorates in the Gulf was enhanced following the decision of Prime Minister Mossadegh of Iran to nationalise the assets of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1951.

There is no doubt that the main reason for Britain's continued interest in the Persian Gulf throughout the period covered in this article was economic. When examining Britain's policy in the region in mid-1958 the Chiefs of Staff placed oil supplies as of primary importance not only in terms of access to large quantities of oil, but also the contribution which they made to Britain's balance of payments. Of secondary significance was Britain's strategic position in the Middle East and her responsibilities under the Baghdad Pact.^{3,4} The air bases in the Gulf were also important staging posts to Britain's possessions in the Far East with the airfield on the island of Masirah off Oman highlighted by the Foreign Office's Steering Committee in November 1960 as being of particular value.⁵

Kuwait was by far the most important of the Gulf states supplying around half of Britain's oil. The production of oil in that country was the cheapest in the world and British Petroleum's (BP) share of Kuwaiti oil reserves alone was estimated to be equal to the total oil reserves of the United States. Kuwait produced ninety million tons of oil in 1962, more than any other Middle Eastern state. In comparison Saudi Arabia produced seventy-four million tons, Iran sixty-three million tons and Iraq only forty-eight million tons.⁶ In the aftermath of Britain's intervention in Kuwait in July 1961, Selwyn Lloyd, the Chancellor, advised Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that the annual profits of British oil companies in Kuwait amounted to about £100 million. However, in addition to these profits, oil production in the Gulf had a very positive impact on Britain's balance of payments. During 1961 Britain imported £400 million worth of oil and a further £100 million was used by British ships and forces abroad. Yet the net cost with regard to the balance of payments was only £117 million. This was because the Kuwaiti government accepted payment in sterling with foreign exchange only required for production costs and

the overseas sales of Shell and BP were seven times of those to the Britain. In addition the companies' British tanker fleets earned valuable foreign exchange by exporting oil abroad. If the Gulf states nationalised their oil production, as had occurred in Iran in 1951, many of these advantages would disappear resulting in a very detrimental effect to Britain's balance of payments estimated at a minimum of £200 million per year.⁷ In June 1963, the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, predicted that the whole of Western Europe, not only Britain, would become increasingly reliant on Kuwait as its principal source of oil.⁸ By comparison Britain's defence expenditure in the Middle East in 1961 amounted to around £13 million in Aden and the Gulf, £10 million in East Africa and £20 million in Cyprus and Libya, much of it as a result of Britain's commitments to Kuwait.⁹

Until the mid-1950s the emphasis on the defence of Britain's interests in the Middle East had focused largely on air power following the Royal Air Force (RAF) gaining responsibility for the defence of Iraq from the army in 1921 and for the Aden colony and protectorate from the army and the navy in 1928. In the early 1950s the main airfield was at Khormaksar in Aden. The long standing policy of air policing sufficed until clashes occurred in the Aden protectorate in mid-1955 with incursions from across the Yemeni border. The only British ground forces available were from the RAF Regiment and in early 1956 a battalion of British troops was sent to Aden, the first of a range of reinforcements to arrive in the region in the coming years.¹⁰ As far as the Gulf states were concerned the most visible forces were provided by the Royal Navy in the form of a cruiser and a number of frigates.

This article will examine the changing diplomatic situation and the associated military planning in the Persian Gulf in three phases. From the time of the Suez Crisis in 1956 to the intervention in Kuwait - Operation 'Vantage' - in July 1961 there was a substantial increase in forces east of Suez in line with assessments of greater instability in the region. The period from 1961 to 1967 saw initial improvements in contingency plans for the defence of Kuwait and an increasing dependence on air power, but the loss of bases in Kenya and Aden undermined Britain's ability to maintain a credible deterrent. After the announcement of Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf in January 1968 due to the need for defence cuts the priority was to ensure an orderly withdrawal by the end of 1971.

The Road to Intervention, 1956-1961

Due to the Suez Crisis, the Chiefs of Staff assessed in July 1956 that there was a greater risk of internal disturbances the Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. There was also a risk of external interference and subversion from Saudi Arabia.¹¹ Sir Bernard Burrows, the Political Resident, Persian Gulf, based in Bahrain, warned the Foreign Office the following month that '...if hostilities against Egypt endured for more than a few days... our whole position in the Persian Gulf would be affected for the worse and the loyalty of the local security forces in Kuwait would be particularly strained...'¹² In line with this assessment the Foreign Office warned that it may even be necessary to send forces into Kuwait without the ruler's approval and to face opposition from local security forces.¹³ At a meeting of the Local Defence Committee (Persian

Gulf) on 22 January 1957, Burrows commented that Britain's intervention in Egypt had had a more much negative effect in Kuwait than in other Gulf states owing to the prevalent Egyptian and Palestinian influence there. While many of the senior Sheikhs remained well disposed towards Britain, Burrows cautioned that '...the situation remained delicate and any new shock might cause a swift deterioration.'¹⁴ In the Gulf as a whole he said there was little that Britain could do to counter Egyptian propaganda. According to the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies who visited the Gulf the security situation in Kuwait was exacerbated by the absence of Sheikh Mubarraq, in charge of security, who was '...away in Lebanon with his latest fancy.'¹⁵ He gave a more positive assessment of relations with Muscat whose Sultan was very pro-British and with Bahrain whose ruler was delighted that Britain was assisting in the removal of convicted members of the Committee of National Union from the island.¹⁶

In terms of maintaining security in Kuwait the problems were rather different than those in other Gulf states, such as Bahrain, since there was no tradition of the presence of British forces and the Kuwaitis more jealously guarded their internal independence.¹⁷ The only land forces available in the Gulf itself was one company from the Aden battalion stationed permanently in Sharjah, one of the Trucial States.¹⁸ At a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 28 August 1956 Sir Gerald Templer, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, recommended that to intervene in Kuwait an equivalent of one battalion from the Royal Marines plus one infantry company from Bahrain would be adequate. In Bahrain a force of three companies was necessary and for Qatar landing parties from one frigate. Any extra reinforcements would come from the battalion in Kenya or perhaps from Aden. The Air Ministry was asked to open and stock the West African air route to permit forces to be brought in from Kenya.¹⁹ The Air Ministry confirmed that the logistic support required to operate the route would be in place within three weeks and this was completed by 11 September.²⁰ Burrows recommended the use of naval forces for the early stages of any intervention since a cruiser and frigates offshore would attract little attention prior to troops being landed.²¹ By November 1956 the preferred method of intervention was to send the King's Shropshire Light Infantry from Bahrain to Kuwait in a cruiser and two frigates. These forces could arrive within twenty-four hours of being ordered.²²

The perceived instability in some of the Gulf states was coupled with a greatly increased difficulty in flying in reinforcements from Britain. The Suez Crisis had resulted in the advent of the Middle East air barrier, with a number of states denying overflight rights to British military aircraft. For example in mid-1956 the only realistic option to send forces to the Gulf was the West African route via Algiers, Kano, Nairobi and Entebbe onto Aden. Forces coming from Britain were likely to take four days to arrive in Kuwait, but if a battalion was in Aden or Kenya this could be brought in within forty-eight hours. The Chiefs of Staff Committee submitted contingency plans on 26 September to move a battalion from Kenya and perhaps a brigade from the Britain to Aden using British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) aircraft in an emergency. However, this suggestion met with a sharp rebuke from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation who noted that there was nothing in the plans

to indicate how aircraft from Transport Command or independent operators would be used and that if all BOAC's Argonaut and Constellation aircraft were thus employed it would not be able to operate its international services for some weeks. He concluded that there was '... no sound basis on which to ask Ministers to face the extremely serious political consequences which would flow from the adoption of this plan.'²³

The radical Defence White Paper of April 1957 identified the need for a central reserve in Britain to be deployed to trouble spots around the world. To be effective these reinforcements had to be dispatched rapidly at short notice and this would require an expansion of Transport Command whose weaknesses were apparent during the Suez Crisis.²⁴ As a result Transport Command's capabilities were transformed from 1957 to 1961 including the introduction of the first of twenty-three Britannia long-range airliners in 1959 and a doubling in the number of Beverley heavy transport aircraft. For example in 1956 Transport Command's capacity was around fifty-five million passenger miles per month and this had trebled by early 1961.²⁵ However, pressure grew in the months following the White Paper that due to the problems caused by the air barrier the forces stationed permanently east of Suez should be increased. The need for a rapid response was highlighted after a revolt broke out in July 1957 in Muscat and Oman. RAF aircraft from Aden supported by a battalion from Kenya and an armoured car regiment from Aden were brought in following the Sultan's request on 21 July and by 16 August the rebellion had been quashed. In November 1957 Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Defence, announced that part of the central reserve would be stationed in Kenya for use in either the Persian Gulf or the Far East.²⁶ The initial force of two battalions marked the start of a significant build up of forces in the region and the Kenyan garrison had increased to three battalions plus the Headquarters of 24th Brigade by March 1960. During this period the Air Ministry considered that Aden was their preferred choice for a reinforcement base as this had an operational RAF station which Kenya did not.²⁷ However, there was more space for accommodation and training areas in Kenya and its climate was superior to that of the Arabian Peninsula. Beverley transport aircraft were based in Kenya from 1960 to improve the mobility of the forces based there. Britain's commitment was such that £7.5 million had been spent on facilities in Kenya by the end of 1961. What was not particularly apparent in the late 1950s was that Britain's position in Kenya was under threat, but a fast moving political situation in the early 1960s would rapidly undermine the prospect of stationing forces there.²⁸

The continuing limitations caused by the air barrier were apparent in the spring of 1958 when the three possible air routes from Britain and Cyprus to the Persian Gulf were considered. The first was via Malta, Libya, Sudan, and Aden, the second via Malta, Cyprus and Iraq (via Turkey) and the third via Gibraltar, Kano, Entebbe and Aden. If forces were being sent to Kuwait the Chiefs of Staffs believed that politically neither Libyan, Sudanese nor Iraqi airfields would be available. Therefore, it was essential that the third of these, the trans-African route, be improved. Current fuel availability at a number of locations along the route meant that only one battalion with light equipment could be moved along it in six days. In addition the best transport aircraft then available for carrying heavy equipment was the Beverley which was not designed for the

long distances of the trans-African route so equipment would have to be stockpiled in Aden and Bahrain.²⁹

The 1957 White Paper also signalled a change in naval policy which had a significant impact on the naval forces available east of Suez. Sandys did not accept the proposition that the navy could conduct a 'broken-backed war' following a nuclear exchange and the White Paper famously declared that 'The rôle of naval forces in total war is somewhat uncertain.'³⁰ Therefore, the navy's focus moved away from fighting a global war against the Soviet Union to more limited wars where naval forces could be brought rapidly to bear. The key area of operations would be east of Suez, including the Persian Gulf. In line with this new thinking the number of Royal Marine Commandos was increased from three to five from 1957 to 1961 and the aircraft carrier *Bulwark* converted into a commando carrier in 1959 with her sister ship *Albion* following suit in 1962.³¹ The Marines would be supported by carrier groups, whose role was reaffirmed in the White Paper, one of which would normally be stationed in the Indian Ocean. A few months earlier the Chiefs of Staff had agreed that in the current strategic situation '...the carrier is the most flexible and valuable unit of the Fleet and that, if economies in naval forces have to be made, these ships should be the last to be reduced.'³² Indeed Selwyn Lloyd, the Foreign Secretary, recommended to Prime Minister Macmillan in May 1959 that what was really needed was in the Gulf was a smaller version of the US 6th Fleet '...a force capable of deploying its striking power in a matter of hours. We cannot without affecting our political position count on basing adequate troops on land for reasons of Arab nationalism...'³³

By mid-1958 the forces in the Persian Gulf amounted to two rifle companies in Bahrain, an armoured car squadron in Sharjah, the navy's Persian Gulf Squadron and air support from Aden. The Chiefs of Staff planned that the main weight of land forces, a Brigade Headquarters plus three infantry battalions were to be based in Kenya with one infantry battalion, an armoured car regiment and artillery in Aden and two companies of infantry plus an armoured car squadron in the Gulf itself. The major air base was RAF Khormaksar in Aden with a Venom day fighter/ground attack [DF/GA] squadron, a Shackleton maritime patrol squadron, a Beverley transport squadron and a light transport squadron.³⁴ The most important air base in the Gulf was RAF Bahrain which comprised around five hundred personnel by mid-1959 including the Headquarters of RAF Persian Gulf, No.152 Squadron, the RAF Station Hospital, the Joint User Staging Post, and an important Communications Centre. The Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Dermot Boyle, assessed that due to improved relations with Bahrain and its importance as a mounting base for operations in Kuwait these forces were likely to increase.³⁵

The plans for additional stationed forces in the region were justified by important political developments in the Middle East. In February 1958 Iraq and Jordan formed the short-lived Arab Union under which they united their foreign policies. Kuwait was encouraged to join, but it was suggested that if Britain could not persuade her to do so '...it would be necessary for Iraq to take over control of a large part of Kuwait.'³⁶ Macmillan saw the Union as a means of

Iraq and Jordan gaining access to Kuwait's oil reserves. Far more serious was a coup in Iraq on 14 June 1958 in which a group of military officers led by Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qasim deposed King Faisal II, who had been a reliable ally of the west. During the unrest the British embassy was ransacked and set on fire. Five days after the coup, Iraq sent a clear political signal to the west by joining the United Arab Republic, a political union formed between Egypt and Syria in February 1958. Fears in Jordan and Lebanon that this revolution may provoke similar nationalist uprisings saw them appeal for western support and 1,700 United States Marines were landed in Lebanon and 2,000 British paratroopers were sent to Jordan. In the event that Iraq should threaten states in the Gulf, Britain tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to get a firm commitment from the United States to participate in military action to ensure they remained independent.³⁷

Further reinforcements were ordered to the Gulf by the Chiefs of Staff in the autumn of 1959 as insurance against the possible use of Iraqi armoured forces. The navy's Amphibious Warfare Squadron was sent to Aden and a Squadron of Centurion tanks despatched from Britain to Aden.³⁸ Half a squadron of tanks would be based permanently on board ships of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron in the Gulf ready to intervene in Kuwait at short notice. While the battalion of 1st Royal Warwicks would withdraw from Aden in March 1960 it would be replaced by 45 Commando maintaining the level of forces to undertake plan 'Cabrilla', the contingency plan to intervene in Kuwait, which was to take effect from 1 January 1960.^{39,40}

Under the 'Cabrilla' plan it was envisaged that intervention in Kuwait could take place at the request of the ruler with four days' or no warning, or alternatively in circumstances without the ruler's invitation, for example if he had lost control. Land forces were to comprise a brigade group and a parachute battalion with naval support ideally provided by aircraft carrier, cruiser and frigates. The air support comprised the two DF/GA squadrons, the first of which would deploy to Bahrain within twenty-four hours and the second within seventy-two hours, plus one Canberra Squadron and two Shackleton Squadrons. Four more Canberra Squadrons available from Cyprus. While extensive air offensive operations were possible, a coherent air defence system would be difficult to achieve since there was no radar equipment at Bahrain or Kuwait. A Cossor type 787 radar was subsequently sent to Bahrain, but this lacked a height-finding capability and obviously did not solve the problem in Kuwait. With four days warning there could be an immediate intervention by two battalions within twenty-four hours, building up to three infantry battalions, one parachute battalion and supporting arms within six days, four days quicker than under the previous plan – 'Alecto'. If no prior warning was given then at least one company would be in Kuwait on the day following the request, a parachute battalion within three days and the total build up in nine days. As far as the airlift of troops was concerned the move of the parachute battalion from Cyprus to Bahrain would remain a critical weakness until more Britannia aircraft were available. However, these timings could only be met if Turkey, Iran and Sudan gave approval for overflight rights within twenty-four hours.⁴¹ Due to a lack of suitable accommodation for the land forces in Aden, Macmillan asked whether the forces there might be reduced. Following an appraisal by

the Chiefs of Staff, Harold Watkinson, who had replaced Sandys as Minister of Defence in October 1959, was able to advise the Prime Minister that both the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office agreed that any reduction of forces in Aden would be strategically unacceptable as they would '...gravely prejudice our ability to intervene in Kuwait at short notice.'⁴²

Contingency plans were also put in place to ensure that two DF/GA squadrons, or equivalent, were always available. No.8 and 208 Squadrons were due to be re-equipped with Hunter aircraft and therefore only one of these Squadrons would be available between December 1959 and January 1960 and from April to May 1960. Air Chief Marshal Sir Hubert Patch, the Commander-in-Chief, British Forces Arabian Peninsula, requested that during the second period the east of Suez carrier should be deployed within his command or at least four days steaming from Kuwait.⁴³ A second Hunter Squadron, either 1 Squadron or 54 Squadron, would also be flown in from Britain, but would take some six days to arrive.⁴⁴

Preparations for the planned armoured support continued apace with the arrival of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron comprising Landing Ship Headquarters (LSH) *Meon* and two Landing Ship Tank (LST) *Dieppe* and *Reggio* and two Landing Craft Tank (LCT) in Aden in June 1960. After a month for maintenance and joint exercises the Squadron was expected to be fully operational by 24 July with the LSTs available to sealift tanks from Aden as soon as possible.⁴⁵ A trial was carried out from August to September 1960 with half a squadron of tanks embarked aboard at LST in the Persian Gulf for six weeks followed by an assault landing on their return to Aden.⁴⁶

The Foreign Office view of the threat in August 1960 was that whichever government was in power in Iraq the adverse reaction of the United Nations to any aggression against Kuwait was likely to substantially discourage any such action, but it reiterated that the most effective deterrent was the knowledge that Britain could intervene effectively. Given the insecure position of the Qasim regime in Iraq it was felt unlikely that substantial forces would be moved away from Baghdad, but it was acknowledged that Qasim was '...a master of secrecy and deception...'⁴⁷ Some consideration was also given in London to the option of evicting an occupying Iraqi force from Kuwait, rather than just forestalling it. Discussions to this effect took place between the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Home, and Watkinson, the Minister of Defence, in the spring of 1961. Home believed that planning such an operation could not be undertaken without prior consultation with the Americans while Watkinson thought that planning such an undertaking would take so long that '...world opinion would deter us from completing it.'⁴⁸ At a meeting of Ministers on 27 April to discuss possible action if Iraq had occupied Kuwait Macmillan acknowledged that while it would be very difficult to keep adequate forces at continuous readiness there should be some planning to assess how this might be carried out with the forces available.⁴⁹

By the end of 1960 certain improvements had been made to the intervention plan which was renamed 'Vantage' in November. These included an increased number of Britannias from

Transport Command and the stockpiling of Kuwaiti owned tanks for use by British forces. With four days notice, a tactical Headquarters, two battalions with half a Squadron of tanks and armoured car Squadron supported by one DF/GA Squadron and two frigates would be in Kuwait within twenty-four hours. Additional air support comprising a second DF/GA Squadron, a Canberra photographic reconnaissance (PR) detachment and a Shackleton Squadron would be based in Bahrain and a Canberra Squadron at Sharjah. The main build up of the reinforced brigade group would be completed on D+4 with the other half Squadron of tanks arriving on D+9. This represented an improvement of a couple of days over previous plans.⁵⁰ If no prior warning was given then at least two infantry or parachute companies would be in place by D+1. By the end of D+2 the land force would comprise a tactical headquarters and two battalions plus half a Squadron of tanks. The only outstanding elements to arrive after D+6 were a battery of field artillery on D+9 and the remainder of the armour from Aden on D+12.⁵¹ The first exercise of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron, 'Awex One', comprising LSH *Meon*, LST *Striker*, and LCTs *Parapet* and *Bastion* with half a Squadron of the 3rd Carabiniers' tanks in *Striker*, a troop of 45 Commando and a company from 2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards were due to take place on the Sir Abu Nu'Air and Yas Islands between 21-28 April 1961.⁵²

Plan 'Vantage' in Action, July 1961

The major test for the years of planning was shortly to be at hand following Kuwait's declaration of full independence in an Exchange of Notes on 19 June 1961. The Note from Sir William Luce, the Political Resident, Persian Gulf, included the proviso that 'Nothing in these conclusions shall affect the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the Government of Kuwait if the latter request such assistance.'⁵³ Six days later Brigadier General Qasim announced at a press conference that he was going to appoint the Sheikh of Kuwait as Qaimaqam of Kuwait in the Liwa of Basra. The same day Radio Baghdad asserted Iraq's true right to Kuwait and stated that Kuwait was part of Iraq.⁵⁴ As far as predicting the movement of Iraqi military forces were concerned, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, the British Ambassador to Iraq, signalled London to state that he could not guarantee to give warning if Iraqi forces were moved from south of Baghdad to the Basra area.⁵⁵ On 27 June Trevelyan advised that Qasim's original plans may be at a more advanced stage than previously thought and '...may have included an early internal coup supported by military action, perhaps timed for July 14 under cover of the usual troop movements.'⁵⁶ If circumstances permitted it, he recommended that any action to defend Kuwait be undertaken by Arab states since British intervention would allow Qasim to claim that Kuwait's independence was a sham and make it easier for him to conduct anti-imperialist propaganda. Moreover, he warned that if Britain put troops into Kuwait as a precautionary measure Qasim might break off diplomatic relations and accuse Britain of invading part of Iraq.⁵⁷

In the light of Trevelyan's assessment of Iraqi planning, the commando carrier *Bulwark*, which was at Karachi carrying 42 Commando and sixteen Whirlwind helicopters, was ordered to proceed to Kuwait at maximum speed on 28 June and to wait offshore out of sight. The LSH *Meon* and LST *Striker* carrying half a Squadron of tanks and frigate *Loch Alvie* sailed from Bahrain the following day.⁵⁸ The aircraft carrier *Victorious* which was en route to Hong Kong

was told to proceed to Bahrain instead where she was expected on 8 July. The two Hunter Squadrons were moved into position with 208 Squadron flying from Nairobi to Bahrain where they it was joined by 8 Squadron from Aden. Twenty aircraft had arrived there by 1135 on 1 July. A Canberra bomber squadron was ordered to reposition from Germany to Bahrain and elements of the land forces including 24th Brigade in Kenya were put on alert.⁵⁹

'Vantage' was formally put into action by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, Air Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy at 0700 on 1 July 1961 following a formal request from the Amir of Kuwait the previous day.⁶⁰ The fortuitous availability of *Bulwark*, not included in the original 'Vantage' plan, enabled 42 Commando to start going ashore by helicopter at 1100 hours and despite sand storms which gave rise to poor visibility, 500 men were ashore with five hours. Simultaneously two companies of the Coldstream Guards based in Bahrain were flown in. *Striker* also landed her tanks, a process which was hindered because the landing ramp had been removed. The poor weather conditions precluded much activity by either the Hunter or Canberra aircraft and would have greatly limited their ability to attack any Iraqi ground units if any invasion had been taking place.⁶¹ 45 Commando was flown in from Aden, arriving on 2-3 July, albeit in a rather disorganised fashion, together with 150 men of 'A' Squadron, 11th Hussars, whose armoured cars and other vehicles were landed by LCT *Redoubt*. On 2 July another half Squadron of tanks were landed by the LST *Empire Gull* and twelve Canberras from Germany had also arrived.

The ability to intervene quickly was crucial if 'Vantage' was to be successful and a key element in this was securing overflight rights along the three strategic air routes for the operation; Britain to the Gulf (Bahrain or Kuwait) via Aden, Britain to the Gulf via Cyprus and Kenya to the Gulf via Aden. The Middle East air barrier comprised Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Therefore it was crucial to obtain permission from Turkey and Sudan within twenty-four hours. At 1035 on 29 June the Foreign Office instructed Sir Bernard Burrows, Britain's Ambassador in Ankara, to ask the Turkish Government for immediate blanket clearance for overflight rights for approximately fifty British aircraft to be spread over several days.⁶² However, it was not until 2342 on 30 June, some thirty-seven hours after the initial request, that Burrows confirmed the agreement of General Gursel, the Turkish President. This was subject to certain restrictions, the main one being that flights over Turkey could only take place at night.⁶³ It was clearly a sensitive issue for the Turks and Burrows strongly recommended that this co-operation be given as little publicity as possible. In the event news leaked out and the Turks re-imposed their ban on 4 July. Sudan gave its approval on 1 July and Macmillan subsequently sent President Abboud a personal message to thank him 'I have no doubt that its [Vantage's] successful conclusion owes much to the good relations which happily exist between our two countries.'⁶⁴

The delay in receiving permission from Turkey and Sudan led to a change to the airlift plan at 2230 on 30 June. The 2nd Parachute Battalion from Cyprus had been due to be one of the first units into Bahrain, but as its air route was not available it was decided to accelerate the

departure of forces from Britain instead. When the move of the parachute battalion was reinstated, this resulted in servicing and movements personnel who arrived in Cyprus being brought off the aircraft without any clear plan for getting them to the Gulf. Most of these personnel were subsequently sent to Kuwait or Bahrain without any clear appreciation of where they were actually needed. Furthermore the parachute battalion was not in place until the early morning of 5 July.⁶⁵

The main element of the land forces were flown in from Nairobi in Kenya, comprising the Headquarters 24th Brigade, 1st Royal Inniskillings, 1st Kings, 34th Field Squadron Royal Engineers and 210 Squadron. These began moving into Kuwait on 4 July and the Brigade, totaling 2,100 men was operational on 9 July.⁶⁶ Bahrain was main staging post for strategic aircraft and tactical aircraft en route to Kuwait and equipment stockpiled there was flown into theatre. By 9 July there were 4,112 army, 596 RAF and twenty-three naval personnel plus 960 Royal Marines in Kuwait after what Sir David Lee has called '...perhaps the most comprehensive, realistic and valuable movement exercise ever carried out by the three British services.'⁶⁷ Indeed with little evidence of Iraqi moves by 3 July and the build up proceeding, the Foreign Office politely declined an offer by Dean Rusk, the US Secretary of State, to send two destroyers and an LST to join two American destroyers already in Bahrain. The Foreign Office's main concern was that any American intervention would give '...the Arabs and Russians a pretext for making accusations of joint imperialist manoeuvres and even, conceivably, for Russian intervention in some form.'⁶⁸

'Vantage' was an undoubted political success as the swift deployment of forces, which was at the heart of Britain's policy of deterrence, was largely achieved. Some of the plans which had been put in place since 1957 were vindicated, such as the decision to place part of the central reserve east of Suez, especially 24th Brigade in Kenya. The build up of Britain's air transport capabilities were apparent with the use between 30 June and 13 July of six Comets, twenty Britannias, thirty-one Hastings, twenty-five Beverleys and four Valletas from the RAF supplemented by three Canadairs from the Royal Rhodesian Air Force and seventeen charter aircraft.⁶⁹

However, unsurprisingly given the complexity of the operation there were a number of lessons to be learned. The availability of 42 Commando from *Bulwark* fortunately masked the delayed arrival of the 2nd Parachute Battalion from Cyprus and suggested that more than two companies should be stationed in the Gulf to reduce the limitations of the air barrier. The priority given to getting fighting units into Kuwait, which was apparent from the changes made to the airlift plan, resulted in the air logistic system being disrupted to such a degree that it would have been very difficult to support the force in action.⁷⁰ It highlighted the importance of carrying through previously agreed plans, if at all possible. While equipment stockpiled in Bahrain could be airlifted into Kuwait relatively easily, the recently constructed Kuwait New airfield was found to be lacking in terms of unloading, refueling and handling facilities and some aircraft had to return to Bahrain with some of their cargo.⁷¹ Improvements to the airfield were obviously

required and together with stockpiles of equipment in Kuwait. If enough tanks could be based there this largely avoided the need for such these to be brought in by Amphibious Warfare Squadron which had been at a particularly high state of readiness for 'Vantage'

As far as air defence was concerned the lack of radar facilities in Kuwait was partially offset by the fact that *Bulwark* had retained her radar when converted to a commando carrier and gave limited radar cover to a distance of eighty miles. Nevertheless the Hunters could only provide a limited day fighter capability. It was not until *Victorious* began air operations on 10 July that round the clock air defence was available with her all weather Sea Vixen fighters. Rear Admiral Smeeton, the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, commented that despite *Victorious'* capabilities had there been serious Iraqi air opposition it would have been difficult to defend both the carrier together with Kuwait New airfield and land forces.⁷² The need for radar facilities in Kuwait itself was another crucial lesson drawn from this experience.

One unavoidable issue was the weather with temperatures exceeding 140°F in the cockpits of aircraft on the ground, high humidity and sandstorms which caused the loss of one Hunter of 208 Squadron, which made the build-up all the more remarkable. To partially offset these conditions, parties of two hundred men at a time were flown onto *Bulwark* to recuperate in her air conditioned accommodation for twenty-four hours.⁷³ In the longer term further air-conditioned accommodation was constructed in Bahrain.

Holding the Line, 1961-1967

By the middle of July 1961 it was apparent to Trevelyan, the Ambassador in Baghdad, that Qasim's inept handling of the situation meant that he had gained little credit from it. More worrying for Britain in the long term was that Iraq's claim to Kuwait '...will remain a permanent feature of the political landscape in Iraq. The belief is strong here, even among Qasim's bitterest opponents, that Kuwait and Iraq should be eventually united...'⁷⁴ He recommended that British forces should be replaced by an Arab force as soon as possible since the presence of even a token British force in Kuwait would prove an increasing liability to the future of Kuwait and Britain's interests in the region.⁷⁵ Over the next few months British forces withdrew from Kuwait to be replaced by one from the Arab League which provided a crucial political deterrent to any Iraqi aggression.

Within a few days of Britain's intervention Harold Watkinson, the Minister of Defence, recommended that Britain should provide the Kuwaitis with equipment to defend themselves in future with enough equipment for an infantry brigade, a regiment of tanks and some modern aircraft for reconnaissance and ground attack.⁷⁶ Sir Norman Brook, the Cabinet Secretary, urged Macmillan to be cautious 'After all the tanks which we sold to Iraq were used first to overturn the regime and are now threatening our own troops. The Sultan of Muscat... is firmly of the opinion that no Arab should be promoted above the rank of Major because "revolutions are always made by Colonels"'.⁷⁷ Macmillan agreed with Brook '...I doubt if it would be wise to entrust them with large quantities of modern arms; after all the tanks which we sold

to Iraq were soon used to overturn the Hashemites.⁷⁸ Despite these reservations, the build up of the Kuwaiti army and to a far lesser extent its air force was an element in Britain's strategy over the next couple of years.

Watkinson was more successful at getting a major change in the existing arrangements for the defence of Kuwait in the autumn of 1961. Under current instructions the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East could only act on receipt of authorisation from London. Since the delay from the first reports of an Iraqi invasion to receiving this authorisation was about fifteen hours, Watkinson suggested that the Commander-in-Chief be given the authority to act more promptly. He was concerned about the ability to achieve a favourable air situation as well as the need to attack Iraqi ground forces.⁷⁹ The Cabinet approved early intervention involving the use of a DF/GA squadron on 5 October 1961. This was soon extended to cover the introduction of a parachute battalion and crews for eight stockpiled tanks into Kuwait. The parachute battalion group was moved from Cyprus to Bahrain, to avoid any airlift delays, and would be air-dropped into Kuwait in two waves with close air support and possibly naval gunfire support to secure Kuwait New Airfield and the Kuwait army reserve. If the parachutes and heavy drop equipment were already stockpiled at Bahrain the first drop would take place within twenty-seven and a half hours and the second five hours later.⁸⁰

In December 1961 intelligence was received from a Kuwaiti source, albeit an unreliable one, regarding Iraqi troop movements in the Basra and Shaiba areas. As a result six Britannia aircraft and seventy-five army personnel were brought to twelve hours notice. Within thirty-six hours of authorisation to proceed, 1,455 army personnel would be in Kuwait including two infantry battalions, the advance headquarters of 24th Brigade, thirty-two Centurion tanks plus armoured cars and artillery. There would be 277 RAF personnel manning one Hunter DF/GA Squadron and radar facilities. Also available would be two Canberra PR aircraft at Bahrain, twelve Canberras bombers in Sharjah and one frigate off Kuwait.⁸¹

The spring of 1962 brought a new assessment from the Joint Intelligence Committee of potential airpower which Iraq could bring to support an attack on Kuwait. This was believed to be two jet fighter Squadrons and one jet light bomber Squadron. The acquisition of more advanced types of Russian-built MiG fighters was judged to have altered the military balance in the region. The major concern of Earl Mountbatten, the Chief of Defence Staff, was the vulnerability of transport aircraft each carrying 90-110 troops. If one of these was lost he felt an intervention in Kuwait would be completely disrupted.⁸² Under the rules agreed in October 1961 the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East could only authorise the pursuit of Iraqi aircraft to fifteen miles inside Iraq. However, to achieve a favourable air situation, airfields in the Basra and Shaiba areas would have to be swiftly attacked. The delegation of such authority was approved, although the Dominions Office recommended that in such circumstances the Prime Minister should inform Commonwealth governments as to what justifications Britain had for doing so, in case some saw it as an act of aggression.⁸³

To ensure that two Hunter DF/GA Squadrons were always available for deployment to Bahrain, a rotation programme was devised in the autumn of 1962 involving the two Khormaksar-based Squadrons being sent to Bahrain for two month periods with Hunters from Cyprus and those from 38 Group in back in Britain be added to the rotation programme between September 1962 and December 1963. It was eventually hoped to equally distribute responsibility between the Air Force Middle East, the Near East Air Force and 38 Group. In addition between four and six Canberra bomber aircraft would be sent from Cyprus to Sharjah for two week stints every two months the first of which began on 16 July 1962. More than half the Beverley transport force was permanently deployed overseas and in future it was likely that half the Belvedere, Argosy and Avro 780 Squadrons together with all Wessex helicopters would be based abroad.⁸⁴

The need for radar coverage in Kuwait had been addressed by the installation of an RAF Type 'T' convoy radar situated near Kuwait New Airfield. However, the difficulties of maintaining air cover over the country were demonstrated on 21 and 28 March 1962 when single aircraft were detected, presumed to be Iraqi on photographic reconnaissance. They flew from the Shaiba airfield in southern Iraq, across the whole length of Kuwait from north to south and then into the neutral zone at a speed of 600 knots and a height of 25,000 feet. It was presumed that the aircraft returned to Iraq over the sea. Sir William Luce, the Political Resident, Persian Gulf believed there was considerable advantage in stopping such flights and that the interception of Iraqi aircraft would be a clear demonstration of the alertness of British forces and provide a further deterrent to Iraqi action.⁸⁵ The view of the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East was that given current arrangements there was little chance of conducting a successful interception and Earl Mountbatten, the Chief of Defence Staff, recommended that the Amir of Kuwait should not be told because "...if we do inform the Ruler and he requests military counteraction, it would be humiliating to have to admit that we can do nothing effective."⁸⁶ The Type 'T' convoy radar was capable of early warning to a range of 130 nautical miles at 30,000 feet and 90 nautical miles at 40,000 feet. The Kuwaitis had agreed to the installation of a superior Marconi 264 radar to take place in mid-1964.

Possible air defence options for Kuwait were considered by a team from the Central Fighter Establishment which visited Kuwait in December 1962. A short term solution to improving fighter capability would be to equip the Hunter Mk.9 with a simple air-to-air missile such as the Sidewinder which with the Type 'T' convoy radar could provide some degree of air defence at medium and high altitudes during daylight. But little defence was available at aircraft at low altitudes or attacks at night. The ideal air defence aircraft was the Lightning, but there was a risk of losing some on the ground if deployed forward area and adequate servicing facilities would have to be provided. As far as potential surface-to-air missile (SAM) defence was concerned the first overseas deployment of a Bloodhound Mk.2 Squadron at Singapore was to commence in early 1965. While this Composite Squadron was equipped with air portable sections with a view of sending them to the Middle East the problem was that no current transport aircraft was capable of carrying a single launcher over the long ranges from RAF

Butterworth near Singapore to staging post at Gan and then on to Masirah. Only the Short Belfast due in service in 1966 would be capable of performing this role. The Central Fighter Establishment's team thought that the Bloodhound was the wrong type of SAM for Kuwait because of the difficulties with airlift and the time required to set it up. What was needed was a portable weapon-pack which could be flown in with the first wave and provide a modicum of immediate air defence.⁸⁷ A report by Fighter Command's Research Branch a few months later confirmed that given the Iraqi Air Force's capabilities and the lack of high performance radar and adequate navigational facilities for fighter aircraft there would be serious medium level air defence problems.⁸⁸

While the issue of air defence continued to be an issue, in other respects Britain's preparedness for intervention in Kuwait reached a peak in the spring of 1963. By this time the Kuwaiti army was 5,000 strong and was equipped with Centurion tanks and Vigilant anti-tank missiles, but was weak in air power terms, the Kuwaiti Air Force possessing only six armed Jet Provosts.⁸⁹ Attacks against enemy airfields in the Basra and Shaiba areas in addition to engaging Iraqi ground and air forces in and over Kuwait could quickly take place given the delegated authority to the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. It was estimated that Iraqi forces would take eighteen hours to cover the seventy miles from the border to the Kuwait New Airfield, but a parachute battalion from Bahrain could land there within thirteen and a half hours to secure the airstrip and stockpiled equipment. Two battalions plus armoured car and tank support would be in position within thirty-six hours and with a force of four battalions supported by thirty-two tanks, artillery and air support in place on day five no difficulty was anticipated in defeating an Iraqi incursion. A carrier task group and a commando carrier would also be ordered to Kuwait, if available within a reasonable timescale.⁹⁰ Plans were also drawn up for more extensive air operations against Iraq as a last resort. These included attacks on Iraqi airfields, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence General Headquarters, other military installations and interdiction targets. To augment the Middle East Air Force, Canberra Squadrons from Cyprus and two V-bomber Squadrons from Malta would be utilised. While the Chiefs of Staff believed that such attacks had the potential to make the Iraqi air force ineffective by seventy-two hours and even force Iraq to cease hostilities within ninety-six hours, they recognized that air operations on such a scale were likely to be politically unacceptable.⁹¹ The key issue was intelligence and both Peter Thorneycroft, who had replaced Watkinson as Minister of Defence, and the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Home, assured Macmillan that all possible actions were being taken to improve intelligence coverage of Iraqi intentions.⁹²

There had been a significant change in the political situation in Iraq on 8 February 1963 when the Qasim's government was overthrown in another military coup. Qasim himself was executed the following day and Colonel Abdul Salam Arif was appointed acting President by the National Revolutionary Council.⁹³ The threat to Kuwait was deemed to have reduced because the new government had a considerable amount of work to do in order to improve conditions in the country. In the same month the Arab League Forces were withdrawn from Kuwait. A major step forward in relations between Kuwait and Iraq occurred on 4 October

1963 when Iraqi Prime Minister Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr signed an agreement recognising Kuwait's independence. Despite a reduction in the immediate threat level, the Foreign Office's advice to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee was that no overt action should be taken to reduce the deterrent value of forces in the region.⁹⁴ There was a minor scare two months later when a regiment of tanks was moved from Baghdad to Basra. While the regiment was considered to be of low operational capability and was not accompanied by infantry units, the Joint Intelligence Committee took a number of steps to improve surveillance including cancelling the plan to remove the Canberra PR aircraft from Bahrain.⁹⁵

One military option that was finally ruled out in May 1963 was the possibility of evicting Iraqi forces which had already occupied Kuwait. On 24 April the Directors of Plans reported that such an operation would take up to twenty-eight days to mount. Given the existing forces in the Middle East it would begin with a simultaneous airborne and seaborne assault with a parachute battalion and a helicopter-landed commando. These would be followed in on D-Day by two infantry battalion groups and armour with a further battalion group plus administrative units landing on D+1. Apart from any Iraqi resistance, the major limiting factor for this operation was the assembly of the brigade group's heavy vehicles and equipment in chartered merchant shipping and logistic support including ammunition, petrol and water at Bahrain. In their final analysis the Directors of Plans recommended that the best option was to maintain a reinforced brigade group capable of intervening within five days and providing an effective deterrent and to cease planning for an eviction operation.⁹⁶ This assessment was endorsed at the subsequent meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Home agreed that 'The political difficulties of mounting an assault in cold blood after such a long waiting period where the Iraqis might have captured the Amir or set up a puppet government seems likely to be insuperable.'⁹⁸ In fact Prime Minister Macmillan also had his doubts over the option for intervention 'If "Planning for eviction" is to be abandoned, I feel doubtful whether planning to **intervene** will be realistic. However I will agree [to continued planning for intervention].'⁹⁹

Macmillan's scepticism over the probability of being able to intervene in the future was no doubt influenced by the knowledge that Kenya, which had played a pivotal role as a base for units of the central reserve since the late 1950s, would become independent at the end of 1963 and British forces withdrawn by the end of 1964. As early as the autumn of 1960 the Official Committee on the Middle East discussed whether Britain could realistically maintain a capability to intervene in Kuwait in the event of the loss of facilities in Kenya or Aden. The Committee assessed that if facilities in Kenya were lost current plans to reinforce the Persian Gulf would be impossible to achieve. Watkinson, the Minister of Defence, commented that if facilities in both Kenya and Aden were lost the cost of an alternative strategy would be so great that it may exceed the net profits from oil revenues and thought it unlikely that a deterrent largely dependent upon forces in Britain would be an effective.¹⁰⁰ Sir Norman Brook, the Cabinet Secretary, advised Macmillan in September 1961 that Britain's traditional policy towards Kuwait of extracting oil concessions from an autocratic ruler in return for military

protection was no longer viable since the number of locations where British forces would be tolerated was in, as he put it in '...irrevocable decline.'¹⁰¹

In September 1963 the Acting Chief of Defence Staff recommended the major changes regarding the basing of forces to take place the following year. Of the four battalions available in 1963, one parachute battalion was in Bahrain, a commando in Aden and two infantry battalions in Kenya. Both the Aden commando and the two Kenyan battalions would be withdrawn by the end of 1964. One of the battalions from Kenya plus the Headquarters of 24th Brigade, an artillery regiment and brigade administrative units would be transferred to Aden. Therefore, from the end of 1964 the forces for a Kuwait operation would comprise a parachute battalion in Bahrain, two infantry battalions from Aden including the one earmarked for internal security, and a further battalion from outside the theatre or afloat. There were obvious problems with acclimatising troops if the fourth battalion to be flown in directly from Britain and it would be extremely difficult to hold a unit in Britain at very short notice indefinitely.¹⁰² In addition the assumption that both Aden battalions may be available was soon proved incorrect. A positive development as far as potential air support was concerned was that the Chiefs of Staff agreed in October 1963 that in future two aircraft carriers were being deployed east of Suez with one carrier earmarked for the Middle East and the other for the Far East. The carrier allocated to the Middle East would be within seven days steaming of Kuwait.¹⁰³

The forthcoming loss of bases in Kenya had caused attention to switch to Aden, which was especially apparent with the decision in 1961 to build accommodation for 2,500 troops and 1,000 civilians at a cost of £5 million at Little Aden.¹⁰⁴ The problem was that the Aden Protectorate, especially the Radfan region, was a hotbed of insurgent activity, especially following the revolution in Yemen in September 1962 when supplies of arms and money flowed freely over the border.¹⁰⁵ Sir Robert Scott, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, predicted in May 1963 that if Aden was lost the impact upon Britain's position in the Gulf would be profound 'We should lose our ability to influence by threats of force the profitability of our Middle East oil operations, to prevent rival Arab nations trying to take over Gulf sheikdoms, Oman and Muscat or Aden...'¹⁰⁶ The situation in Aden came to a head in December 1963 with a grenade attack on the British High Commissioner at Khormaksar civil airport. A state of emergency was declared and large scale military operations began in the Radfan area at the beginning of 1964.

The operations in the Radfan not only involved some of the forces based in Aden which were earmarked for use in the Gulf, but called on those stationed in the Gulf. In May 1964 the second of four parachute companies stationed in Bahrain was withdrawn for operations in the Radfan. The Acting Political Resident in Bahrain agreed to a reduction of two companies, but only for a short period. The Ambassador in Baghdad warned that such a reduction for more than a month would risk sending a signal to Baghdad that Britain was reducing its commitment to the Gulf.¹⁰⁷ The following month, the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East was given the

authorisation to deploy one company of the Parachute Battalion Group from Bahrain to anywhere within the Middle East Command with the agreement of the Political Resident, Persian Gulf. Earl Mountbatten, the Chief of Defence Staff, gave an assurance that as long as the extended state of readiness for 'Goodwood', the latest reinforcement plan for Kuwait, remained in force the deterrent posture in the Gulf would not be affected.¹⁰⁸ The 'Goodwood' plan called for the first troops to arrive in Kuwait within twelve hours and within six days a force of four battalions, an armoured regiment and armoured car regiment would be in place. A stockpile of equipment, including tanks, was now maintained in Kuwait. Hunter aircraft based in Bahrain would provide the immediate strike capability and three frigates were stationed at Aden.¹⁰⁹ Early in 1965 the principles governing the deployment of carriers and commando ships east of Suez were changed so that one carrier and one commando ship would be within twelve days of Kuwait, rather than the previous limit of seven days. This would allow the carrier to visit the Subic Exercise Area if necessary with the agreement of the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East.¹¹⁰ The fact that various forces were being used in Aden and others were at extended readiness can be explained by a perceived reduction in the direct threat posed by Iraq. According to Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, in mid-1965 the most likely threat to Kuwait was an internal coup d'état, possibly with backing from Iraq or Egypt, followed by an Iraqi intervention. The possibility of a direct Iraqi attack as had been feared in 1961 was deemed as somewhat remote.¹¹¹

While an Iraqi attack was judged unlikely it is interesting that Denis Healey, the Secretary of State for Defence, requested that the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East should have delegated authority to order air attacks on Iraqi ground forces inside Iraq south of Zubair.¹¹² Existing authority, dating from April 1963, was limited to engaging Iraqi air and ground forces in Kuwait, pursuing aircraft thirty miles over the border and attacking airfields in southern Iraq. Healey believed that such air attacks, especially on armoured units, would disrupt their invasion plan and sought delegated authority for attacks on ground forces south of Zubair. At a meeting of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee on 28 July 1965 the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, was duly granted such authority.¹¹³ This was another signal that Britain's strategy of deterrence was increasingly dependent on air power.

The situation was changed dramatically given the decisions in the famous Defence White Paper in February 1966. It was announced that Britain intended to withdraw from Aden when South Arabia became independent in 1968. This would result in the loss of RAF Khormaksar and bases for the infantry battalions which were so important to an effective response in the Gulf. However, the White Paper identified that this would be counter-balanced to a limited degree by increasing forces stationed in the Gulf to the tune of one fighter Squadron and one infantry battalion which would be stationed at Sharjah. The Government wanted to send a signal to its allies in the region including King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and the Shah of Iran that its determination to defend its interests in the Gulf would not be diminished by the loss of Aden. Indeed during the summer of 1966 the expansion of facilities at Bahrain and Sharjah proceeded as planned.¹¹⁴ However, by the end of the year consideration was being given to

reverse the decision to station a battalion at Sharjah and the Acting Chief of the Defence Staff concluded that to do so '...would disillusion our friends, encourage those who wish to make trouble, and diminish the chances of achieving stability.'¹¹⁵ Sir Stewart Crawford, the new Political Resident, Persian Gulf, reported that the sending of reinforcements would calm the nerves of the Gulf rulers in the short term, but that a British withdrawal from Aden would be followed by 'a period of intense anxiety' in the region and this would be made worse if there was not an orderly transition to a stable South Arabian government.¹¹⁶

While Britain may have been keen to demonstrate a continued commitment to the Gulf in general, the defence review undertaken by the Labour government in 1965-1966 marked a landmark in the policy of military assistance to Kuwait. A statement in the White Paper that Britain that it would not try to maintain defence facilities in an independent state against its wishes was clearly a criticism of Kuwait which had long refused to have British forces in the kingdom while benefiting from British protection.¹¹⁷ The Amir of Kuwait was informed that from 1 January 1967 Britain would not be making any special provision for the use of ground forces in the country. Any request for ground forces could not be met for several weeks as a significant proportion of these forces would have to come from Britain or the Far East. This marked the end of the policy of rapid response which had evolved since 1957 and provided a stark contrast with plan 'Goodwood' a few years earlier when the first forces were due arrive within twelve hours and reinforced brigade group within six days. Stockpiles of army equipment in the Gulf would be reduced and the tanks maintained in Kuwait sold to the Kuwaitis. Therefore in practice future British military assistance would be limited to air support only. The Amir could do little, but agree to the new arrangements noting that the greatly reduced external threats to Kuwait were acceptable.¹¹⁸

In practice the new 'air only' concept came into effect on 1 February 1967. This involved daylight patrols with Hunter DF/GA aircraft based in Bahrain along the Kuwait/Iraq border and Kuwait town within one hour of a request. A second Hunter Squadron from Aden would be available within twenty-four hours. In addition two Squadrons of Canberras could move from Cyprus to Sharjah with thirty-six hours and a Squadron of Lightnings from Britain to Bahrain in six days. The policy of delegating increased authority to local commanders was also reversed with an insistence that targets within Iraq could only be engaged with specific ministerial authority from London.¹¹⁹ In the event such plans for a revised defence posture in the Gulf were rapidly overtaken by events. The final withdrawal from Aden took place in November 1967 which left South Arabia in the hands of the communist National Liberation Front. This was hardly the smooth transition likely to give confidence to Britain's Gulf allies who were visited that same month by Goronwy Roberts, a Foreign Office Minister and reassured that it had no intention of withdrawing its forces.¹²⁰

Withdrawal, 1968-1971

Despite Roberts' assurance withdrawal was inevitable given the financial pressure on the government since devaluation of sterling on 18 November 1967 which increased the cost

of maintaining Britain's forces overseas by £50 million annually and the Ministry of Defence was ordered to make cuts of £100 million in 1968-1969. On 16 January 1968 Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced that Britain would withdraw from the Far East and the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971. All the navy's aircraft carriers would be withdrawn at the same time.¹²¹ The 1968 Defence White Paper acknowledged that if reductions in capabilities had to be made then they must be accompanied by a corresponding decrease in commitments 'We have no intention of allowing a repetition of the situation which existed in 1964 when, because of the lack of balance between military tasks and resources, our forces were seriously overstretched.'¹²² Two days later George Brown, the Foreign Secretary, informed the House of Commons that it was essential to withdraw from the Gulf at the same time as the Far East if the reductions in forces and therefore financial savings would be achieved. He highlighted the carrier force as an example of a capability which would have to be retained if Britain's commitments in the Gulf persisted. To give an example of the savings, the estimated cost of defence commitments Gulf in 1965-1966 was £25 million.¹²³

Reactions from the Gulf States who were given prior warning of the announcement were varied, albeit largely predictable. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister believed that while Kuwait could manage the transition, other Gulf states would be left in chaos.¹²⁴ After contrary British assurances only a few months he forecast that the announcement would destroy confidence in the British government. The ruler of Bahrain expressed his extreme unhappiness at the decision and urged the Britain not to set a specific withdrawal date which he felt would result in an 'Aden' type of catastrophe.¹²⁵ King Feisel of Saudi Arabia also saw significant dangers in announcing a firm date.¹²⁶ The ruler of Qatar predicted that the Gulf States 'would be eaten up either by Saudi Arabia or by Russian and Arab Revolutionary Governments. This was not what the people wanted.'¹²⁷ Such risks were recognized in London and Paul Gore-Booth, Head of the Diplomatic Service at the Foreign Office expressed concern to Sir Burke Trend, the Cabinet Secretary, that in comparison with South-East Asia, predicting the political future of the Persian Gulf was rather more uncertain.¹²⁸ This was particularly the case of smaller states such as Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial states.

Aware that Britain's decision was largely an economic one, the rulers of Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Bahrain offered to make financial contributions which might induce Britain to retain its forces. In the case of Bahrain this was to waive the payments which Britain made to use military facilities in the country, estimated at £350,000 a year.¹²⁹ The offer from Abu Dhabi was to contribute in any way to ensure a continued British presence. Such offers became publicly known and did not go down well with Denis Healey, the Secretary of State for Defence. When asked by Robin Day on the BBC's 'Panorama' programme what he thought of a reported offer by the Sheikhs of the Persian Gulf to pay for British forces, Healey replied 'Well I don't very much like the idea of being a sort of white slaver for Arab sheikhs... it would be a very great mistake if we allowed ourselves to become mercenaries for people who would like to have a few British troops around.'¹³⁰ Perhaps the most significant indication of displeasure at Britain's decision came from Washington where US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk declared he was

'deeply disturbed' at an acceleration British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf since the United States placed Britain's position there as one of very high importance.¹³¹

As far as military advice on the withdrawals was concerned, the Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Charles Elworthy, advised against leaving the Persian Gulf before the Far East as this would jeopardise the main air route to the latter and result in the withdrawal from Malaya and Singapore having to be made by the 'Westabout' route.¹³² If the RAF was asked to take over the task of covering the final withdrawal from Bahrain from the Royal Navy then a theoretical study that estimated ten Phantoms and seven tanker aircraft would have to be based at Masirah to provide two aircraft on continuous daylight patrols over a ten day period.¹³³ In the event it was confirmed that the aircraft carriers, whose phasing out had been announced in 1966, would remain in service until the withdrawals from the Gulf and the Far East were complete. The assumptions made by the Commander Air Forces Gulf in March 1968 were that the 'air only' commitment to Kuwait would cease six months before withdrawal and that neither Phantom fighters nor Rapier SAMs would be deployed to the region.¹³⁴

By the autumn of 1969 air power assets available included two Squadrons of Hunter DF/GA aircraft and six tactical transport aircraft at Bahrain. Assets in Sharjah, one of the Trucial States, comprised four long range maritime reconnaissance aircraft, one Squadron of tactical transport aircraft and one Squadron of support helicopters. While no aircraft were permanently stationed at either Masirah in Oman, the importance of this staging post for the withdrawal from the Far East was evident from the concern which Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, expressed to Healey in April 1970 over the rebellion in Dhofar, a region in the south of Oman.

The major withdrawals of RAF assets were to start from Bahrain and Sharjah in May 1971 with closure scheduled for December. From 1 September an aircraft carrier would be at fourteen days notice and from 1 November would be available as required. A commando carrier was to be at fourteen days notice for Gulf operations from 1 July, at eight days notice by 1 October and would be supplemented by an assault ship from 1 November.¹³⁵ If further reinforcements were required at very short notice then the Spearhead battalion would be sent from Britain. This unit was at seventy-two hours notice with the lead elements ready to go within twenty-four hours. Aircraft from Air Support Command were also on twenty-four hour standby to move the Spearhead battalion.¹³⁶ The force which remained by the beginning of October were required to protect the installations and personnel in Bahrain and Sharjah until the final withdrawal two months later.¹³⁷

In the event this element of Britain's withdrawal from the Middle East was relatively smooth, certainly compared with the debacle in Aden. Agreement was reached with Kuwait that the 1961 accord would be terminated on 13 May 1971 and Sir William Luce, who had previously been Political Resident, Persian Gulf, was appointed to represent Britain in the negotiations between the Gulf states to try to ensure long term political stability. He recommended a loose association of states, but a closer union of the Trucial states which became the United

Arab Emirates. This was to be accompanied by continued British co-operation in term of training and equipping the forces of the Gulf states and visits by British naval and air units to demonstrate Britain's continued unofficial support.¹³⁸ The logistics of the actual withdrawal were made easier because Britain retained access to the airfields at Masirah and Salalah at the behest of the Sultan of Oman until 1977 during which time Britain provided assistance against the Dhofar rebellion.

Conclusion

Britain's renewed interest and commitment to its Gulf protectorates, especially Kuwait, from the mid-1950s unfortunately coincided with the repercussions of the Suez Crisis. In diplomatic terms these amounted initially to the fear of external subversion or internal unrest and following the Iraqi revolution in 1958 the possibility of a direct military threat to Kuwait. Militarily the Middle East air barrier posed a serious problem for the dispatch of reinforcements from Britain. In the short term it became possible to circumvent this to some degree, albeit at great expense, by expanding the facilities in Kenya and later in Aden and the capabilities of Transport Command. The Royal Navy also became far more focused on operations east of Suez in the late 1950s.

By 1960 the intervention plans, involving a brigade group with air and naval support had been honed considerably and these were largely vindicated when British forces were put into Kuwait in July 1961. A number of valuable lessons learned from this operation including the need for stockpiles of equipment and a radar capability in Kuwait. In light of the continued Iraqi threat, delegated authority was given to local commanders to intervene and this was ultimately extended to include attacks on airfields and ground forces in Iraq itself. It was fortunate that a change of government in Iraq in 1963 brought about an improvement in relations since contingency plans were substantially undermined by Kenyan independence and the loss of bases there in 1964. Subsequently a large scale insurgency also forced Britain out of Aden in 1967. While Britain remained dependent on Kuwaiti oil the difficulties in maintaining a balanced intervention force meant that an 'air only' plan was instituted in early 1967. Throughout the whole period under review political sensitivities precluded the presence of meaningful numbers of British forces in Kuwait and while Britain had been able and willing to make a considerable effort for several years by 1966 this was no longer the case. Promises that forces would be maintained in the long term elsewhere in the Gulf were swiftly broken when British announced its withdrawal from the region in 1968. Britain still felt it had important interests in the Gulf when its forces withdrew forty years ago, but the problems of maintaining forces which constituted an effective deterrent coupled with an economic crisis meant it had no choice other than to relinquish its formal defence commitments. It is unsurprising that it has maintained close relations with its former protectorates in terms of political support and the training and equipping of their military forces in the decades which have followed.

Notes

¹ The UK National Archives, Kew [TNA] AIR 38/399, Report No.9/62 'Operation Vantage' by Research Branch, Headquarters Transport Command, January 1962, Preface, 2-5.

² TNA PREM 11/3427, Annex to Exchange of Notes regarding Relations between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the State of Kuwait, 19 June 1961.

³ The Baghdad Pact was signed by Britain, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey in 1955 to prevent Soviet infiltration into the Middle East. It was renamed the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in 1959 when Iraq had withdrew from the organisation.

⁴ TNA DEFE 13/307, Memorandum 'United Kingdom Policy in the Arabian Peninsula' by Chiefs of Staff, 9 June 1958.

⁵ TNA FO 371/152118, Second revision of planning paper 'Future Policy in the Persian Gulf' by Steering Committee, 3 November 1960.

⁶ TNA CAB 21/5901, Appendix to Memorandum 'Future Defence Policy' by Cabinet Secretary, 7 June 1963.

⁷ TNA PREM 11/3452, Report 'Kuwait and Middle East Oil' from Chancellor of Exchequer to Prime Minister, 2 August 1961.

⁸ TNA CAB 21/5901, Memorandum 'Future Defence Policy' by Cabinet Secretary, 7 June 1963.

⁹ TNA PREM 11/3452, Report 'Kuwait and Middle East Oil' from Chancellor of Exchequer to Prime Minister, 2 August 1961.

¹⁰ Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 89-91.

¹¹ TNA DEFE 11/77, Report 'Responsibility for the Persian Gulf' by Chiefs of Staff, 30 July 1956.

¹² TNA AIR 8/2109, Brief 'Possible Implications of Operation Musketeer in the Middle East' from Acting Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Policy) to Chief of Air Staff, 21 August 1956.

¹³ TNA AIR 8/2109, Brief 'Reinforcement of the Persian Gulf' from Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Policy) to Chief of Air Staff, 17 September 1956.

¹⁴ TNA AIR 8/2109, Extract from minutes of Local Defence Committee (Persian Gulf) meeting, 22 January 1957.

¹⁵ TNA AIR 8/2109, Extract from letter by Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, January 1957.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ TNA DEFE 11/77, Telegram from Political Resident, Persian Gulf to Principal Officer, Middle East Forces, 30 August 1956.

¹⁸ TNA DEFE 11/77, Joint Operation Instruction 'Reinforcement of potential centres of unrest in the Persian Gulf' by Chiefs of Staff, 23 August 1956.

¹⁹ TNA DEFE 11/77, Confidential Annex to Chiefs of Staff Committee (56) 85th meeting, 28 August 1956.

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- ³² TNA ADM 205/184, Memorandum by Chiefs of Staff, 19 February 1957.
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⁶¹ Speller, 'Naval Diplomacy', 169.

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⁶³ TNA PREM 11/3427, Telegrams Nos. 944 and 945 from Ankara to Foreign Office, 2342, 30 June 1961 and 0053, 1 July 1961.

⁶⁴ TNA PREM 11/3430, Telegram No.1128 from Foreign Office to Khartoum, 2200, 29 September 1961.

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Non-Kinetic Operations: Information Operations, Air Force Style

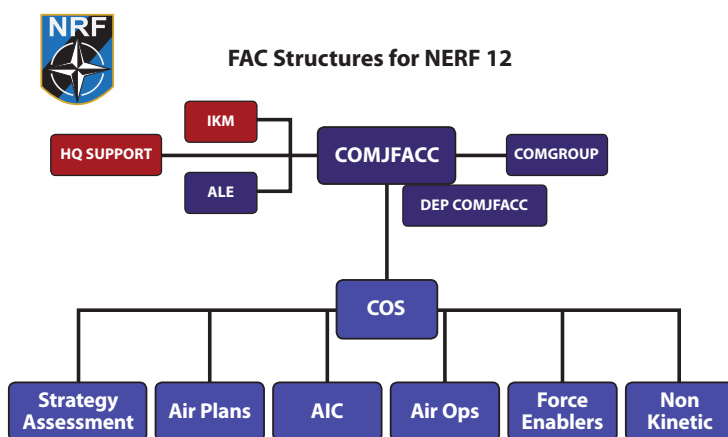
By Colonel Bruno Mignot

The air operations carried out by the French Air Force are characterised by a global approach, in that they fully integrate non-destructive operations described as “non-kinetic” and include the whole range of information operations in the broadest sense. Typical of this approach, which has already received international recognition during joint and combined exercises, is that it takes account of the political, military, cultural, economic and social environment of a country in crisis at the time of an external operation. This article examines non-kinetic operations firstly by looking at the various players in the operational theatre, then by asking what is meant by “non-kinetic”. Information operations and the strategy of influence are examined and then the eight basic functions of non-kinetic ops are described with the article ending on a description of the organisation of a non-kinetic cell.

Today, the air operations carried out by the air force are characterised by a global approach, in that they fully integrate non-destructive operations described as “non-kinetic” and include the whole range of information operations in the broadest sense. Typical of this approach, which has already received international recognition during joint and combined exercises, is that it takes account of the political, military, cultural, economic and social environment of a country in crisis at the time of an external operation.

Introduction

Over the course of some years, the French Air Force (FAF) has been developing a new capability known as “non-kinetic operations”, which covers nearly the whole spectrum of information operations. There is nothing really new in this for the air force, since this type of operation is hardly a novelty, apart from the impetus given to it by the air defence and air operations command (CDAOA) to acquire and maintain sound capabilities in the area. This impetus has led to the setting up of a dedicated cell, which has operated within the JFACC (*Joint Force Air Component Command*) during major exercises conducted successfully by the air force since late 2008.¹ Consequently, the global approach taken by the FAF when handling a crisis now admits France to the exclusive club of nations that have a complete C2 tool, bringing together the essential functions of intelligence, situational assessment, operational planning, real-time conducting of operations, theatre logistics and control of information. Before describing these new capabilities, we should examine the whole background to the global approach in operation.



The exercises carried out as part of the JFACC structure allow the air force to develop its global approach and retain its place in the inner circle of nations that have a complete C2 tool

The Global Approach in Operation

Over time, as the UN took on the role that it would have had since 1945 had it not been for the Cold War, coercive military actions gave way to operations aimed at maintaining or restoring peace, usually divided into six phases: force generation, deployment, intervention, stabilisation,

normalisation of relations and, finally, withdrawal of troops. As experience showed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, stabilisation and normalisation can last for many years. However, the success of any operation, whether peacekeeping or pure coercion, does not depend solely on military action because the problems generally result from an accumulation of security, cultural, historical, political, economic and social factors that have interacted and thus sparked off the conflict. This is why a “global” approach to the situation is needed, to gain a better understanding of its complexity, untangle the threads, weave a new fabric and restore balance so that the parties can live together in a manner that they find acceptable. The military commander therefore needs tools that are not specifically military, so that he can effectively operate all the levers available to him. The slider for action has therefore moved towards manoeuvres that are much less military-centred, involving a number of players whose presence sometimes complicates the task of the Force Commander.

The Various Players in Theatres of Operation

Since the theatre of operations has moved into the urban environment, the inhabitants have become the centre of gravity of any concerted action. To get a sympathetic welcome, it is necessary to guarantee security and establish the conditions for a return to normal life. Much is therefore expected of the international community, as initiator of the operation, source of legitimacy and holder of financial resources that are – often incorrectly – thought to be unlimited.

However, it is by no means the only player in the theatre since it rubs shoulders with international or regional organisations like the Red Cross, the European Union through its agency ECHO² or the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, governmental organisations such as the French Development Agency or USAID, non-governmental organisations such as *Médecins Sans Frontières*, Handicap International or *Human Rights Watch*, and finally private security agencies benefiting from the frequently observed phenomenon of outplacement of protection functions within the Force.³ The task of resolving a crisis then involves joint, or at least coordinated, action by all these bodies, which do not necessarily share the same values, are often present in the theatre of operations long before the Allies, but have to act in synergy in order to avoid duplication and to share effort.

What is more – and this does not make things any easier – the media is everywhere. The Force’s image has become crucially important and determines the legitimacy of the operation, this legitimacy being conferred by the media according to the turn of events. For instance, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the military to justify the use of armed violence because



For operations to be successful, the local population has become a crucial factor. Civil-military action can win sympathy and confidence

it is so easy for journalists to challenge the logic of bombing infrastructure that may have to be rebuilt a few weeks later... In this respect, the example of Gaza in early 2009 is convincing.⁴ Accordingly, military command is under pressure to reduce strikes to their simplest form and consequently find other means of action. While armed action still has a useful life ahead of it, for dealing with hotbeds of unrest or terrorism the world over (Afghanistan, Burma, Kashmir, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Mali, Pakistan, Palestine etc.), annihilating a potential enemy is now no longer the final solution sought. Any action of coercion and peacekeeping must be organised and made coherent by using a global strategy that, as we have shown, is no longer military-centred.⁵ This naturally leads us to examine the concept of “non-kinetic” operations. We shall now see what is involved.



The image of the forces determines the legitimacy of their action. In this respect, the presence of journalists in the theatres of operation plays an important part in how the action is perceived

What is Meant by “Non-Kinetic”?

“Non-kinetic” is an American expression that is difficult to define because of its multiplicity of interpretations. Some consider that it refers to the use of non-destructive means, others think it means non-lethal weapons, and for others still it refers to means that do not use energy. *A priori*, non-kinetic operations are the opposite of operations of pure violence using speed combined with mass, and therefore kinetic energy $E = \frac{1}{2} mV^2$. However, air strikes, which are said to be “kinetic”, are sometimes intended to achieve effects that are not kinetic, which complicates matters.⁶ We should note, therefore, that non-kinetic operations includes measures aimed at producing effects without the use of force; not renouncing force but using all fields opened up by information operations.

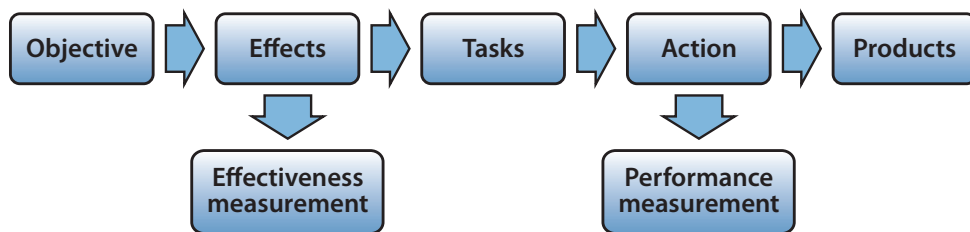
If we refer to recent American documentation, such operations derive from a precise assessment of the environment and culture of the country in which the operation takes place.⁷ In France, it was when the Directorate of Military Intelligence was set up in 1992 that the military extended the field of useful intelligence to what was known as intelligence “of military value”, which went beyond simple knowledge of enemy forces and dealt with the environment of the theatre of operations. While the intelligence services look at enemy forces, those dealing with “non-kinetic” matters are interested in culture, habits, lifestyles, customs, traditions, charismatic personalities etc., in other words anything that matters to a country,⁸ in so far as this knowledge is essential to the phase of stabilisation after action. Let us examine in detail the core activity of information operations.

Information Operations and the Strategy of Influence

In global action, information operations are usually conceived at the political and military (or strategic) level, owing to their sensitive and delicate nature. They are then implemented

through a strategy of influence led and directed at an operational level. Targets fall into three categories: firstly, opinion multipliers in France and in coalition countries, which need to be nurtured in view of the importance of retaining the support of public opinion; secondly, host countries and regional partners where their support is essential; finally, the enemy, i.e. political and military forces, opinion multipliers and the general population. The idea is to influence ideas, plans of operation and action, and even to destroy, pervert, interrupt, hinder, deceive and exploit the enemy's decision-making process and his information systems.

Each strategy can be broken down into objectives that each include effects to be achieved through tasks to be defined and action to be taken. Their effectiveness and performance can be measured by using appropriate indicators.



“Each strategy can be broken down into objectives that each include effects to be achieved through tasks to be defined and action to be taken.”

The first goal of the “non-kinetic” cell of a JFACC is to implement the directives issued by superiors, with whom he is in constant contact, in order to maintain the coherence of the action of the Force with regard to information operations. The second is to be proactive. For tactical air command, non-kinetic operations can be divided into eight complementary functions, which are put into effect as circumstances demand and depending on the level required of the JFACC,⁹ the capabilities available at the time and the priorities given: psychological operations, civil-military cooperation, electronic warfare, cyber warfare, protection of information, internal communication, communication with the media and *Key Leaders Engagement*. We shall now review these and specify the areas covered by each one.

Eight Basic Functions

Psychological Operations or “Military Influence Operations”

The range covered by psychological operations is very wide. Their objective is to influence minds, mislead opinion or provoke emotions and thereby change behaviour. For example, they use the collateral damage caused by a force to discredit its action or create discord within a coalition – although this type of effect is not the sole prerogative of psychological operations. Most frequently, these operations are controlled at the operational level – FHQ (*Force Headquarters*) or CJTF (*Combined Joint Task Force*) – which implements them either through a specially dedicated unit – such as the JPOTF (*Joint Psy Ops Task Force*) of the US forces – or by Special Forces. However, the head of the air component must have such

resources available, even at reduced levels, around deployed operating bases (DOBs) or forward operating bases (FOBs) so as to be able to contribute to the enduring good image of the air force perceived by the local population.

Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC)

Civil-military operations are carried out for the benefit of the population or local State organisations, in parallel with the action of regional, international or non-governmental organisations present in the theatre. In a way, they institutionalise the types of intervention that were once the domain of NGOs alone; long considered by the military deployed on the ground to be disruptive, their action is nowadays fully recognised.



CIMIC nowadays forms a fundamental part of any operation, demonstrating the importance of a global approach. As an example, this type of action allowed Kabul International Airport to be rebuilt.

The term “civil-military cooperation” (CIMIC) is now preferred over what was for a long time known in French as “actions civilo-militaire” (ACM). Mastery of the “action” aspect is mostly the concern of the army, which occupies the land and is mostly concerned with winning over the sympathy of the local population that it rubs shoulders with and among whom it has to operate. The air force is more interested in concentrating on what is vital to it: airspace and airport facilities. Thus, the work of CIMIC operatives in the non-kinetic cell is to bring together the local civil aviation authorities in order to facilitate the entry of the air force into airspace that is foreign to them, and to deal with the deployment of aircraft and air personnel on existing airports or bases. This cooperation can continue through aid with the reconstruction of airport infrastructure and the training of air traffic controllers or ground staff, both specialities of the air force. Finally air CIMIC teams contribute to the economic development of villages located around FOBs and DOBs, so as to establish good relations with the local authorities and find out how neighbouring populations feel about the Force.

Electronic Warfare

It might be thought that the “electronic warfare” function mentioned here is not a function naturally entrusted to a cell that deals more with influence than with electronic protection or prevention measures. This is partly true but we should not forget that troublemakers can use the media to inflame locals or incite them to reject the presence of the Force. For example,

radio can be used to broadcast messages of hatred, give mass disinformation and call for insurgency by the people; ground-or air-based offensive jamming means should therefore be available, to counter enemy propaganda. Even better, it may be useful to broadcast favourable messages on an appropriate frequency.¹⁰ While ground-based electronic warfare facilities generally belong to ground units, aerial facilities can constitute a useful temporary means, sometimes in an emergency, for achieving the effect sought.

Cyber Warfare

It is not unusual for attacks to be recorded on civilian or military information systems by highly ingenious hackers. Now, air operations command and control systems are totally computerised and therefore vulnerable. Guarding against this threat and achieving effective protection requires mastery of cyber-attack techniques and an ability to use them. This working method is known as a CNO, or *Counter Network Operation*,¹¹ examples of which are infiltrating an



The pre-eminence of ICT in operations demonstrates the need to train service personnel so that they can respond to cyber attacks.

enemy network, hacking into a malicious web site, flooding an e-mail account, placing logic bombs, or simply introducing computer viruses. These operating methods are nowadays used solely by the intelligence services, although they should be mastered by the military because of the pre-eminence of ICT¹² in operations nowadays. I would therefore suggest that there is a need for these capabilities to be developed within the JFACC, while remembering that the values defended by the Force always need to be respected.¹³

Protection of Information (OPSEC)

It is as urgent to acquire means for cyber-defence as it is appropriate to conceal useful information, particularly intentions, operational plans, strategy adopted, effects to be produced, operational messaging etc. Protection of information is consequently a completely separate function combining respect for classified documents, screening of mailing lists, security of information systems, network security and personal measures for protecting information distribution means. This does not mean taking over the information system function from within the non-kinetic cell but rather keeping a watchful eye over what goes into the JFACC and what comes out.

Internal Communication (*Info Troops*)

Keeping up morale among the air force personnel engaged in a theatre of operations is not a secondary function: far from it. Indeed, it is absolutely essential to keep the “troops” informed in order to counter any rumour or enemy propaganda circulating within the Force. This internal communication can take several forms: formal memos signed by the head of the

air component, addresses from the Force Commander himself, occasional simple messages relayed by the base commanders, individual booklets reminding the troops why they are there, COMJFACC blog, text messages, notices etc. For example, it is vital for all service personnel to be notified of the rules of engagement and instructions about behaviour towards the locals, and for them all to understand and apply these: collateral damage from an inaccurate air strike or something that undermines the self-esteem of the population near a base always sends a negative signal about the whole Force, which it is very difficult to put right.

Media Communication (*Public Affairs*)

The media can be an ally one day and undermine the legitimacy of the Force the next. Consequently, their usefulness should not be underestimated, and neither should their nuisance value, when they relay inaccurate or incomplete information. Since transparency constitutes the first principle that should be adhered to where they are concerned, media information requires constant attention, which is handled within a permanent Press Centre managed by press officers.



To legitimise an operation, the military needs to deal with the issues presented by communication.

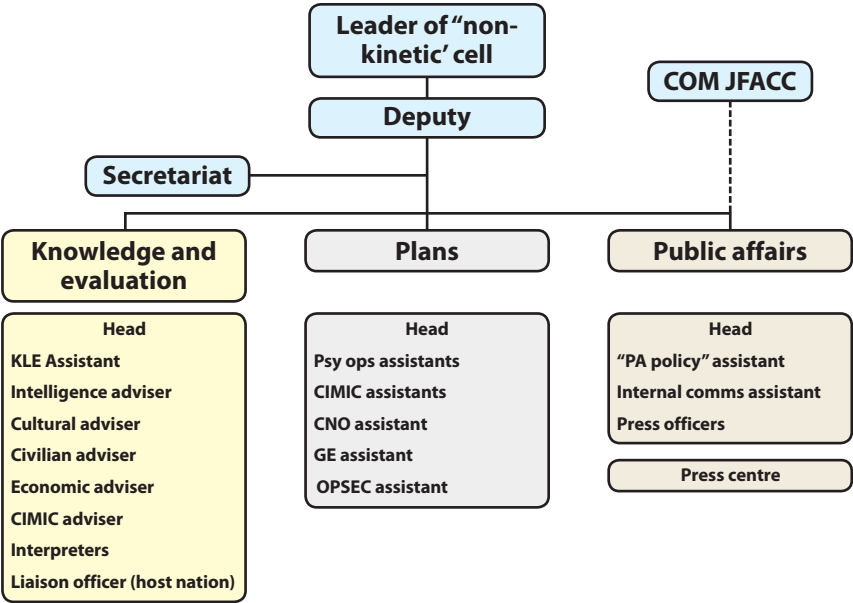
Knowledge Development for the Purpose of Key Leaders Engagement

The concept of knowledge development has been worked on by NATO since August 2009 and multinational experiments (MNEs) have been conducted for France by the CICDE.¹⁴ The role of this fully-fledged function – it could almost be described as a means of action – is to enter isolated data in the areas of politics, the military, economics, social issues, infrastructure and information (PMESII) into a structured database containing and linking all knowledge on organisations and key figures (*Key Leaders Engagement*) present in a theatre of operations. It includes the relationships between the players as well as power struggles. Any component commander must have an accurate picture of local structures and decision-makers so that he can adjust his own strategy of influence. For instance, the COMJFACC is concerned with five principal targets: the ministry of defence, particularly with regard to relations with the local air force chief of staff, the ministry of transport for relations with the head of local civil aviation, the ministry of the interior for relations with prefects and mayors of towns and villages near the planned bases, the local, regional, national and international media, and finally organisations with a presence in the theatre (international, governmental, non-governmental etc.).

The Organisation of a Non-Kinetic Cell

The division of labour within a non-kinetic cell can be represented in a coherent organisation chart with three divisions working in close collaboration. The reader will find that a non-kinetic

cell contains a pool of high-level advisers with skills allowing them to deal with all cultural, economic, civilian and even legal matters. Their contributions make it possible to organise very useful war games to test the consequences of any planned action on the population, local decision-makers or the media. These *war-gaming* sessions serve to identify potential side effects, minimise risks, guide the scope of the action or even cancel it altogether. Because of the diversity of its members, their qualifications and ability to work in collaboration, the non-kinetic cell constitutes a real *think tank* available to the leader, an outstanding tool for brainstorming and assisting with decision-making. Finally, it is through the non-kinetic cell that knowledge about the environment is disseminated within the air forces, and this knowledge is vital for all involved in preparing, planning, leading and supporting air operations within a JFACC.



“The division of labour within a non-kinetic cell can be represented in a coherent organisation chart with three divisions working in close collaboration”.

Every year, the air force is training more personnel capable of serving in a non-kinetic cell. This function was created only recently and there is still some way to go in working out how the air force community should take ownership of the issues. The seriousness of the challenges is clear and is increasingly a concern of the CDAOA command, which inspected the cell during the most recent major exercises in which it participated. This is why the non-kinetic function is being taught as a subject in its own right at CASPIAN,¹⁵ so that any trainee can be made aware of what is at stake in the global approach. It is necessary to have taken command on the ground or in a major exercise in order to understand its incomparable added value.

Colonel Bruno Minot, deputy chief of air staff at operational headquarters, CDAOA

Notes

¹ These were the joint exercises *Noble Ardent* (October 2008) and *C2 Natex* (November-December 2009) in Solenzara, and the combined exercise *Austere Challenge 2010* with United States European Command (EUCOM) in April-May 2010 in Ramstein.

² Through its agency ECHO (*European Community Humanitarian Office*), the European Union is the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world.

³ At the end of August 2010 the Afghan President Karzai requested their withdrawal from Afghanistan.

⁴ The Sharm-El-Sheikh Conference of donor countries for the reconstruction of Gaza took place less than two months after Israel's operation *Cast Lead* against Hamas in Gaza (27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009).

⁵ In his closing speech at the joint defence college on 22 June 2010, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Edouard Guillaud quoted Lyautey – “Someone who is purely a soldier is a bad soldier” and told the graduates of the class of 2009, named after the general: “So do not simply be military-centred service personnel”.

⁶ Let us take two examples. In February 1986, the American raid against Colonel Gaddafi's main residence in Tripoli, which killed his adoptive daughter and wounded two of his sons, led him to revise downwards his anti-American policy. Similarly, in spring 1999, the bombing of the family and friends of the Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic persuaded him to go back to the negotiating table. In the march towards an ideal world, humanity will go through a stage where non-kinetic operations alone will be sufficient and ultimately, we may hope, a zero level of violence will be achieved...

⁷ Through the process of cultural evaluation or *Knowledge Assessment*.

⁸ The peacemaking campaigns of Lyautey in Morocco and Galliéni in Madagascar demonstrated that the French armed services took an interest in this well before 1992.

⁹ Level 1 + around 100 sorties/day; level 2 = 200 sorties/day and level 3 = up to 600 sorties/day.

¹⁰ For this, the US air force has specially equipped *C130* aircraft called *Commando Solo*.

¹¹ In French, LID (*lutte informatique défensive*) and LIO (*lutte informatique offensive*).

¹² Information and communication technology.

¹³ There is a legal void in this area, which the armed forces are reluctant to take over.

¹⁴ Joint Forces Centre for Concept Development, Doctrine and Experimentation.

¹⁵ The French analysis and simulation centre for air operations, established at the Lyon Mont-Verdun air base in September 2010.

Viewpoints

The Renaissance of Air Power

By Flight Lieutenant Sandy McKenzie

Introduction

Martin Van Creveld's characteristically provocative assault on air power, published earlier this year in the *RUSI Journal*,¹ is consistent with his intellectual iconoclasm in the field of military affairs.² His argument, namely that the utility derived from air power is diminishing, comes at a significant time. Financial constraint, and ongoing reflection on a decade of costly 'small wars'³, would appear to lend weight to the assertion that modern air forces have become little more than expensive and baroque arsenals. This analysis offers potentially comforting, but ultimately misleading, recommendations to policy makers keen to untie themselves from expensive future equipment programs. However, the argument is also ideologically pre-determined and reliant on the use of a selective data set. Arguing that air power spiralled into terminal decline in the era of nuclear weapons Van Creveld fails to credit feats of deterrence achieved by air power during conventional conflict⁴ and underplays the role of air power in enabling counterinsurgency operations in the past 60 years. For example, as James Corum argues, 'while there is no air power solution to counterinsurgency, there is certainly a large role for air power. Air power can bring firepower, transport, reconnaissance and constant presence to the fight; and these are all things that the counter-insurgency force needs.'⁵ The subsequent analysis will support this, and will further argue that air power is enjoying a renaissance in contemporary fields of conflict and is likely to offer wide employability in future expeditionary endeavours.

Contemporary Conflict

Like many naysayers, Van Creveld's pessimistic interpretation of military intervention in Libya appears to have been somewhat premature;⁶ indeed, serious commentators are already talking

about Libyan operations as a 'blueprint for the future'.⁷ The absence of a requirement for costly and perhaps counterproductive western military occupation; the genuine desire for (limited) external support from an established local resistance; regional endorsement and broader legal legitimacy via the UN; and pragmatic European military co-operation within the NATO alliance have provided a steady foundation for qualitative and 'game changing' western military support.⁸ The establishment of a transitional government has not been achieved by air power alone; but importantly air power has provided the critical enabler to local ground forces. Vitally, this has been provided at range by a combination of land-based and maritime air assets that have *inter alia*; supplied Libyan rebels and civilians; evacuated foreign nationals; denied military equipment to the Gaddafi regime; and provided critical intelligence to rebel forces. As recent RUSI analysis suggests, 'the Libya campaign has been a salutary reminder of how a broad spectrum of military capabilities are usually required to address any modern conflict. In this one, air power, and the assumption of air superiority, has re-emerged as a critical factor'.⁹ Of course, this model of intervention is not unique; indeed there are important parallels to be drawn when comparing recent events in Libya with other conflicts.

The initial intervention in Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11 is perhaps the most representative comparison. The combination of air power, clandestine intelligence and special-forces delivered impressive results in routing the Taleban and providing political space in what remained a deeply divided country.¹⁰ Subsequent political engagement has failed to generate the necessary consensus, and western hubris has arguably complicated the prospect of a 'solution' in Afghanistan,¹¹ but that is not the fault of air power *per se*. Indeed having been the most suitable means to bridge Afghanistan's numerous and challenging dimensions of strategy during the overthrow of the Taleban,¹² air power has remained a vital tool in the subsequent pursuit of counter terrorism and counter insurgency objectives. Tactical outposts are often dependant on helicopter resupply, partnered units rely on air-delivered precision guided munitions and intelligence collection increasingly relies on a range of sophisticated systems attached to persistent platforms loitering in the Afghan sky. Indeed as the strategist Colin Gray attests, air power is quite literally essential in counter insurgency warfare.¹³ Clearly there are occasions when civilian casualties, caused by air delivered munitions, undermine ISAF's population-centric approach; but the means of delivery is often irrelevant, the effect of aggressive house searches or collateral damage caused by ground forces is equally as damaging. Ultimately, whilst 'unintended wars of choice',¹⁴ such as the ambitious ongoing counter insurgency efforts in Afghanistan, may be of questionable strategic logic, they would be exponentially more difficult, and costly, without the critical contribution of air power.

The likelihood that such 'wars of choice' will become as unaffordable as they are unpopular illuminates the likely future utility of air power assets operating discretely and at range. Devoid of a nationally embraced political compromise, air power will likely be the key force multiplier that will define NATO's enduring partnership with Afghanistan, along with Special Forces and military trainers. This commitment, representing a much smaller footprint than current force levels, will offer two primary functions. First, it will satisfy the political lobby

in Kabul that have consistently demanded the enduring means to qualitatively overmatch insurgent capability.¹⁵

In tandem with Special Forces and legacy indigenous forces, air power will provide this. Second, and linked to the ongoing campaign against Al Qaeda-linked extremists operating in the largely ungoverned spaces of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, air power (in tandem with clandestine human intelligence and national signals intelligence) will remain the means of choice for gathering intelligence on and taking action against those that continue to threaten global security.¹⁶ Far from being marginal to the ongoing and future mission in central Asia, it is almost impossible to conceive of any future engagement in the region that doesn't utilise the capabilities offered by air assets. Indeed, turning to the Middle-East, should Iran continue to pursue a uranium enrichment project contrary to the will of the International Community, air power will be a central pillar of contingencies generated by military planners responsible for delivering interdiction or deterrence based responses. This should hardly surprise members of the RAF who have contributed to coalition air operations in the Middle East for over 20 years.

Lessons from History

Given the self-evident utility of air power in contemporary conflict, it is worth considering its role in post-Cold War conflicts other than the headline grabbing campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Such a consideration exposes both the wide employability of air power and reminds us of some of the axiomatic limitations that are as true now as they were at the dawn of manned flight. The air campaign in Kosovo neatly fulfils both criteria. The 78 day air campaign aimed to coercively change the behaviour of Milosevic's government. However, critically, it was the explicit threat of committing ground forces, as well as an implicit understanding that Russia would not intervene on their behalf, that wielded most leverage on an embattled Serbian leadership.¹⁷ However, critiques of air power's supposed failure to deliver strategic effect through coercive bombing are guilty of tactical thinking.¹⁸ Ultimately, air power helped as a contributing means to a joint campaign that achieved the desired strategic effect; regardless of the 'pyrrhic' nature of NATO's eventual victory.¹⁹ Devoid of the wider political and military context, air power could achieve little more than isolated tactical effect. The same can be said for the contribution of air power in the initial stages of intervention in the Bosnian conflict. This serves to remind us that air power is essentially a dimension of strategy in its own right; one that cannot achieve strategic effect in isolation, but one that must be resourced when considering the military means necessary to achieving policy ends.

Indeed air power has been a pivotal ingredient in force packages designed to achieve a myriad of effects over the past 20 years. Whilst the first Gulf War is often viewed as the 'last hurrah' of inter state industrial conflict,²⁰ the efficacy of air power in routing Saddam's military capability ensured air superiority for ground forces. Such relative freedom of action has arguably been taken for granted by ground forces in the 2 decades that have passed. Other militaries, operating in more 'conventional' environments, have been more cognisant of the requirement.

For example, Russia's adventure in Georgia in 2008 was supported by considerable air power assets.²¹ Indeed, also in 2008, the unique combination of qualities offered by air power resulted in its selection as the strategic lever of choice by the Israeli military against a clandestine nuclear facility in Syria.²² Less evident but nonetheless relevant examples also abound. British intervention in Sierra Leone relied heavily on the manoeuvrability offered by air power whilst humanitarian assistance in Central Asia and South America has depended heavily on recourse to air mobility. In short, air power continues to be in high demand across its four fundamental roles; control of the air, air mobility, intelligence and situational awareness and attack.²³

Renaissance of Air Power

As outlined above, the 'New World Disorder' that unfolded in the aftermath of the Cold War has provided numerous examples in which the utility of air power is evident across the spectrum of conflict. However, it is in the future that air power is likely to prosper most as postmodern governments shy away from expensive, inconclusive and arguably counter-productive counter insurgency campaigns. Air power will never succeed in delivering policy ends in isolation, but given the necessary preconditions, as illuminated in Libya, and hard headed objectives, it will offer politicians the opportunity to seize 'relative advantage' in crises that are too important to ignore, but too costly to fully resource. Change will be necessary in order that a true renaissance can flourish. Indeed 'algorithmic warfare' and data exploitation will become far more challenging than, for example, operating remotely piloted vehicles in high threat environments. Nonetheless, air power will remain the primary means of operating at range, in support of indigenous forces, interdicting a belligerent's military capability, or containing rogue states.

As events in Libya have proven, the renaissance may just be beginning. Recent analysis has concluded that, in Libya, 'foreign air power comprised the rebels' asymmetric advantage, without which their uprising would almost certainly have been quelled by Gaddafi's forces. For proponents of air power, the outcome illustrated its judicious application, showing the way for foreign intervention in future local conflicts in spite of the general fatigue with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.'²⁴ Indeed, the current Chief of the Air Staff appears to have been particularly prescient when arguing in early 2010 that:

'Unfortunately, it's only too easy for a foreign contingent to be portrayed as an alien and occupying force; it's much better for the majority of 'boots on the ground' to be indigenous, supported and assisted by appropriate and highly trained specialists and Special Operations Forces with access to the higher-tech capabilities – including air and space power – that are difficult for local security forces to acquire and operate.'²⁵

Ultimately, air power will never remove the requirement for complimentary land and maritime components; however to suggest it is in decline fails to grasp the new dawn of strategic calculation that confronts us. Alexander de Seversky famously argued that 'air power speaks a strategic language.'²⁶ He could have had no idea how correct he would be.

Notes

- ¹ Van Creveld, Martin, 'The Rise and Fall of Airpower' *RUSI J* 156:3, Jun/Jul 11, pp 48-54.
- ² See McKenzie, Alexander, 'New Wars Fought Amongst the People: Transformed by Old Realities', *Defence Studies* 11:4, 2011, forthcoming.
- ³ Chalmers, Malcolm, 'Keeping our Powder Dry? UK Defence Policy Beyond Afghanistan', *RUSI J* 156:1, Feb/Mar 11, pp 20-28.
- ⁴ For example, the limited resistance offered by the Iraqi Air Force in 1991 and 2003 was largely the result of coercive deterrence.
- ⁵ Corum, James, 'Air Power and Counter-Insurgency: Back to the Basics' in Hayward ed, 'Air power, insurgency and the War on Terror', *RAFCAPS*, 2009, pp 205-220.
- ⁶ Van Creveld, Martin, 'Lets Drop the Big One Now', *Infinity Journal* online, 21 Jun 11. Available at: http://www.infinityjournal.com/article/25/Lets_Drop_the_Big_One_Now?message=Welcome%20back.%20You%20have%20successfully%20logged%20in.
- ⁷ Ashdown, Paddy, 'Ray-Bans and pick-ups: this is the future', *The Times*, 26 Aug 11.
- ⁸ Zakaria, Fareed, 'How the Lessons of Iraq Paid Off in Libya', *Time Magazine*, 25 Aug 11.
- ⁹ Accidental Heroes. Britain, France and the Libya Operation. An interim *RUSI* campaign report, Sep 11.
- ¹⁰ The most readable account of this remains: Schroen, Gary, 'First In', *Presido Press*, New York, 2005.
- ¹¹ For a fascinating insight into this see: Morgan Edwards, Lucy, 'The Afghan Solution', *Palgrave*, London, 2011.
- ¹² On Dimensions of Strategy see: Gray, Colin, 'Modern Strategy', *OUP*, Oxford, 1999, pp 16-47.
- ¹³ Gray, Colin, 'Understanding Air Power Bonfire of the Fallacies', *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, winter 2008, p 79.
- ¹⁴ Milevski, Lucas, 'A Collective Failure of Grand Strategy', *RUSI J*, 156:1, Feb/Mar 2011 pp 30-33.
- ¹⁵ A familiar lament from security ministers such as Bismullah Khan is the Afghan Army's lack of airpower.
- ¹⁶ Inkster, Nigel, 'The Death of Osama Bin Laden', *Survival*, 53:10, pp 5-10. Inkster concludes with the sage recommendation that, 'the focus should be on how the capabilities and skills which delivered the successful operation against Osama bin Laden, which needs to be seen not as a lucky one-off but rather as an outstanding example of what good intelligence can achieve given time and adequate resources, can be maintained and deployed on a generic basis against a range of potential threats and risks.'
- ¹⁷ Jackson, Michael, 'Soldier', *Transworld*, London, 2007, p 247.
- ¹⁸ For a concise consideration of both arguments see Byman, Daniel and Waxman, Matthew, 'Kosovo and the Great Air Power Debate', *International Security*, 24:4, 2000, pp 5-38.
- ¹⁹ Wyllie, James, 'The Kosovo Intervention and European Security: NATO's Pyrrhic Victory', in V. Koutrakou (ed), 'Contemporary issues and debates in EU policy The European Union and international relations', *Manchester : Manchester University Press*, Manchester, 2004, pp 23-37.
- ²⁰ Smith, Rupert, 'The Utility of Force', *Allen Lane*, London, 2005.
- ²¹ Vendil Pallin, Carolina and Westerlund, Fredrik, 'Russia's war in Georgia: lessons and consequences', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 20:2, p 406.

²² 'Israel strike 'targeted Syrian nuclear reactor', The Telegraph, 14 Oct 07.

²³ AP3000 4th ed.

²⁴ IISS Strategic Comments 17:34, 'Early Military Lessons from Libya', Sep 2011.

²⁵ Dalton, Stephen, 'Dominant Air Power in the Information Age', IISS Address 15 Feb 11.

Available at: <http://www.iiss.org/recent-key-addresses/air-chief-marshal-sir-stephen-dalton/>

²⁷ De Seversky, Alexander, 'Victory Through Airpower', Simon and Schuster, New York, 1942.

Viewpoints

War at a Distance – An Alternative Perspective

By Dr Rob Wheeler

Introduction

Gp Capt Blount in the last issue of *Air Power Review* raised sundry moral issues associated with Remotely Piloted Air Systems (RPAS). He concluded that “a failure to properly justify remote warfare may severely constrain the use of otherwise war-winning systems” and called for a debate. This article argues that, far from raising any moral difficulties, the benefits of RPAS may even impose a moral duty on commanders to employ them when a choice presents itself.

As in the original article, it will be assumed here that the conditions for a just war apply. The use of lethal force is therefore acceptable in principle; what is at issue is the manner in which it is employed.

It may be helpful to start by setting out six principles which it is intended to establish. These will then be discussed in turn.

1. *A man is responsible for his actions, including unintended consequences.*
2. *Remoteness is irrelevant.*
3. *Autonomy does not in principle change anything.*
4. *Nor does risk to the actor.*
5. *Empathy has its dangers.*
6. *Narrative is a matter of tactics, not of morals.*

Responsibility

That a man is responsible for his actions is a fundamental tenet of all moral systems. There are exceptions: we speak of the 'age of discretion', meaning that those below that age may lack the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong; likewise insanity may be held to render a man guiltless. The main difficulty in this case concerns unintended consequences.

If I walk out into the street, point a gun at a person going about his normal business and kill him, I have committed murder. If I fire a gun into the air on a whim and the round in falling to earth kills that man, I am guilty of manslaughter. I had not intended to kill him, but I am still responsible for the consequences of my reckless action.

At this point proportionality comes into play. If I fire a weapon in self-defence and the round ricochets off some hard object and kills that same innocent bystander, I should, I trust, be judged to have acted in a morally acceptable manner; the poor victim was simply unlucky. If, on the other hand, I spot someone aiming a catapult at me and I call in a nuclear strike against him, then I might well be judged to have acted disproportionately, and be held responsible for any collateral damage caused.

Gauging proportionality requires a degree of judgement. The level of judgement expected will depend on the experience of the person exercising it. A policeman accustomed to restraining malefactors is expected to cause them less harm in the process than a householder who apprehends a burglar.

Remoteness

Members of armed forces engaging in combat may do so at varying degrees of remoteness. The Roman legionary was expected to kill with his sword an opponent who was a foot or less in front of him. The Second World War Typhoon pilot might be firing his gun at a tank several hundred yards away. The present-day Tornado pilot may have occasion to employ a weapon against an adversary several miles away whom he can see only by the monitor of his targeting pod. And the Reaper pilot may be sitting in another continent.

At no point in this sequence does anything change in principle. The Reaper pilot probably has more time than the others to consider all the consequences of his action. He is certainly at less personal risk. He should be in reasonable comfort, whereas the Roman legionary was liable to be cold, tired and hungry. A greater degree of judgement might therefore be expected of him. But the principle has not changed.

Autonomy

All actions start a chain of consequences that cannot wholly be predicted. For the Roman legionary wielding a short sword, the immediate effect of his blows was very predictable. As soon as ballistic weapons were employed, there was doubt about where they would land and who would be in the impact area. Commanders at every level have always faced more

complex responsibilities than the men doing the fighting. They issue orders. They may assume that the men they direct will follow those orders but they have a duty to ensure that the orders they issue are as clear as conditions allow and take such account as is feasible of any change in circumstances that may occur. The Charge of the Light Brigade is the most famous example of ambiguous orders causing needless deaths to their recipients, though this is not the place to address the question of who in this case was negligent and to what degree.¹ Similar issues arise where ambiguous orders lead to unintended harm to non-combatants.

The recipients of orders may be presumed to moderate their actions in accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict. But the use of technology which is unable to exercise discrimination goes back to the Bronze Age.² The anti-personnel mine may perhaps be considered inherently immoral, but guided weapons have been with us for more than half a century; their ability to distinguish between different types of target is often rudimentary, and it is the duty of those who employ them to exercise such judgement in their use that proportionality between intended and unintended consequences is maintained.

Autonomous unmanned vehicles represent something of an intermediate case, being able to apply more complex algorithms than a missile but without the moral sense of a man. It is difficult to see how something that is intermediate between two existing cases can introduce any new principle.

As for the engineers who program such devices, they owe a duty of care, as does anyone building and selling any equipment. Such a duty cannot guard against all eventualities, any more than the most skilled Roman smith could guarantee that the sword he produced would not shatter and kill the man who wielded it. Proportionality in the employment of complex weapons must include consideration of the possibility that they will not perform in the expected manner.

Personal Risk

The view is sometimes expressed that the morality of killing animals for sport depends on a balance of risk between the hunter and his prey. Thus tiger hunting might be thought acceptable, because a clever tiger can drop out of a tree onto the hunter, whereas in pheasant shooting the only risk to the sportsman is from the other guns. But whatever might be the morality of killing for sport, war is not a sport.

It has been noted earlier that the degree of judgement to be expected is diminished when the person exercising that judgement is under stress. Cold, fatigue and hunger were mentioned. But one of the greatest sources of stress is enemy action, seeing one's mates killed and injured and fearing the same outcome for oneself. Counterinsurgency demands particularly good judgement and the Vietnam war offers some of the classic cases. Gp Capt Blount mentions My Lai; there was an outstanding book written by a USMC officer who was tried for murder

before a military court in Vietnam,³ and who tries to describe the nature of that stress. Lest the reader suppose that these effects are limited to particular individuals, or can be avoided by the British way of war, he should read some of the studies of British operations in Palestine prior to 1939,⁴ which make it clear that whole units regarded 'firmness' as a licence for indiscriminate maltreatment of the subject population.

Given this phenomenon, there is perhaps a moral duty on the commander to employ RPAS in preference to 'boots on the ground' whenever the choice presents itself.

Empathy

The soldier is frequently required to kill his opponent. Empathy has often been seen as a danger to military discipline.⁵ It is commonly countered by demonising the other side, by inculcating the idea that they are subhuman, or barbarians, or savages. That too can lead to errors of judgement. Far better to inculcate a *Play Station* mentality.

One aspect of this is that RPAS operations, like computer games, can be re-played. Rules can be laid down and enforced by reviewing questionable episodes. It is true of course that during the replay the final outcome is known, whereas during the original episode lives may have been at risk. However, the same applies to Air Traffic Control, and has never been regarded as an impediment to the review of decisions on the basis of a replay of the tapes.

Constructing Narratives

Finally one must face the accusation that it is not manly to wage war by sitting at computer screens in an air-conditioned office. This is not a consequence of fighting remotely but rather a consequence of not fighting on equal terms. We have no intention of fighting on equal terms, because that would imply equal casualties and we have more concern for the lives of our soldiers than our opponents have for theirs. So this is an accusation to which we will always be vulnerable.

Against that, the RPAS can be presented as all-seeing and just, a righteous avenger of the wicked actions of its victims. There is evidence that such a narrative has made some progress in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.⁶ It helps, of course, that the inhabitants of such areas have experienced the Land-based alternative and can compare the discrimination of an RPAS against that of an artillery barrage.

Ultimately, this article is about morality. Whether a particular tactic or a particular course of action lends itself to the conduct of information operations is not a moral question.

Conclusion

Remotely Piloted Air Vehicles raise no new moral issues.

If the conclusion really can be stated in one line, it raises the question of why so many authors

find so much to write about the ethics of technologically-based warfare. It may be helpful to stand back from the moral argument itself and look briefly at the causes of confusion. A recent piece by Sanderød⁷ is helpful for this, by posing the question: Does 'collateral damage due to incorrect bombing' indicate that there is a mismatch between the perception of air power and its usage in recent wars? He cites the use of terms like *surgical* as evidence of popular perceptions.

There is actually a double misperception here: a lot of surgical procedures – open-heart surgery, for example – involve the infliction of major trauma in order for the surgeon to get at the problem. War is similar, in that much harm is done to innocent people, to economies, and to the environment, in order to rectify an evil that is seen as so great that this trauma is justified. That is why the tests for a just war laid down since the time of Thomas Aquinas include *necessity* – there must be no viable alternative – and an expectation of success.

Sanderød suggests that the ability of Air power to offer a 'clean war' lowers the threshold for war. In other words, nations are prepared to embark on wars which they would have avoided had Air power not been available. The recent operation in Libya would appear to provide an excellent example. Air power offered a means of intervening to avert imminent catastrophe. When that decision was taken, it was difficult to foresee the exact manner in which the problem would finally be resolved. There were hopes that the regime might collapse through internal pressures. But the assessment was made – one presumes – that, even in the absence of such collapse, there were exit strategies that would leave the citizens of Libya happier and more secure than if intervention had not occurred. In the event, that assessment proved correct. Military intervention proved a 'force for good', and most certainly would not have been undertaken at all had it required a land-based invasion.

What concerns Sanderød – or the authors he quotes – is that a misperception of the efficacy of Air power might cause nations to embark upon wars which are not morally justified, either because the harm that will be caused is out of proportion to the benefits, or because the chances of success are over-estimated. He is right to be concerned. False optimism is a very great danger. It is incumbent on nations contemplating military action to examine in advance the likely effects of their action. This requires prior preparation. Just as one cannot wage war without building and honing armed forces, so one cannot assess effects without developing, within academia or elsewhere, a body of mathematicians, social scientists and historians able to undertake such assessments when occasion requires.

None of this affects the ethics of air power as such, still less does it affect the ethics of RPAS. But it is close enough to the matter to explain the unease which clearly afflicts so many writers on these topics.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Reason why*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).

² "They have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves" – Psalm 57 v6.

³ Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1996).

⁴ M Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality: British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-39", *English Historical Review*, Vol. CXXIV, No. 507, pp 314-354.

⁵ See Richard Holmes, *Redcoat*, (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 373-4, on Anglo-French fraternisation during the Peninsular campaign. That and the famous Christmas truce of 1914 suggest that such concern may have been unnecessary.

⁶ Farhat Taj, "The year of the drone misinformation", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21(3), 2010, 529-535.

⁷ Steinar Sanderød, *The use of Air Power Today: Have new Ethical Challenges occurred?*, in Joel Hayward (ed), *Air Power, Insurgency and the "War on Terror"*, (RAF Centre for Air Power Studies, Cranwell: 2009).

Book Reviews

British Naval Aviation: The First 100 Years

By Tim Benbow

Reviewed by Group Captain Alistair Byford

Introduction

The Strategic Defence Review of 1998 was unashamedly interventionist in outlook and aspirational in philosophy. It was, therefore, not entirely surprising that it mandated the acquisition of a fleet aircraft-carrier capability for expeditionary power projection, resulting in the two-ship *Queen Elizabeth* programme that is currently underway. However, the strategic environment has changed fundamentally since the project was instigated: the global recession ushered in an era of austerity in UK defence spending, with inevitable scrutiny of the most expensive planned capabilities, while a decade of enduring, land (and air-land) centric operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have called into question the degree of priority that should be given to the procurement of new carriers in an already overheated equipment programme. The result has been an acrimonious and very public debate about both the carriers and the Joint Strike Fighter planned as their primary combat capability, conducted within a context of fierce inter-service competition for limited resources. Although the issue was settled by the prime ministerial decision - taken immediately prior to the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review - to build both carriers (although only one is likely to enter service), this was offset by the imposition of a 'capability holiday' in carrier-based naval aviation through the early disposal of *HMS Ark Royal* and Joint Force Harrier. The SDSR debate, and the way it was conducted, has arguably created a legacy of inter-service distrust that is only likely to be dispelled by the demonstration of good faith and the development of mutual empathy over a protracted period of time; but from an RAF perspective, this is essential, as JSF will represent the core of the air component's future top-end combat

air capability beyond 2020, so close and harmonious engagement with the Navy is a necessity, not a luxury.

Against this backdrop, the publication of this collection of essays charting the theory and practice of British naval aviation is timely, as it provides a useful context for developing a better understanding of the roles, requirements, opportunities and sensitivities involved with the delivery of air power in the maritime and littoral environments; and while many of the papers are ostensibly historical, the themes they highlight are of absolute contemporary relevance. The editor, Tim Benbow, may be known to some RAF personnel through his role in the Defence Studies Department of King's College London at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham. As a maritime historian, he has followed a broadly chronological approach in assembling this volume, but key issues emerge repeatedly across the chapters: particularly the long-standing controversy about the control of naval air power (and the ownership of ship-based air assets) and the interplay between strategy, capability and service politics at the most crucial turning points in British defence policy.

In this respect, Edward Hampshire's paper about the cancellation of CVA01 in 1965 provides a useful counterpoint to Lee Willets' concluding essay on the politics around the current *Queen Elizabeth* class carriers, with both pieces providing an insight into the Navy's thinking and sensitivities. The 'traumatic shock' of the CVA01 decision is so firmly embedded in the RN's institutional psyche that (at least subliminally) it still affects its relationship with the RAF today, and certainly shaped its approach to the recent SDSR. As Hampshire points out, there has never been any hard evidence that the Air Staff nefariously moved the position of an island airbase on a map of the Indian Ocean to support its argument for land-basing aircraft over carrier acquisition, but the fact that this myth still has such widespread currency within the Navy is instructive in itself. The Navy's visceral sense of betrayal was further heightened by the Falklands War, where the RAF was unable to provide land-based air cover for the fleet (as the RN believed it had promised to do when CVA01 was cancelled) and the RN felt it would have suffered far fewer losses if it had been able to deploy a large, fleet carrier with a much bigger and more capable air wing than was possible with the small VSTOL carriers that were available. As an aside, it is interesting to note that the RAF made an effective case in 1965 by 'restraining its firebrands' and adopting a moderate, logical argument that was regularly updated by the Chief of the Air Staff's office and articulated by all of its senior leadership, enabling a single, consistent message to be delivered that could be easily understood by politicians and decision-makers; arguably, the same clarity of thought and messaging has not always been evident in subsequent defence reviews.

The recent focus on air-land integration in Afghanistan and the dissolution of the maritime patrol aircraft force means that air-maritime integration has become something of a neglected competency in the UK; for example, it is barely mentioned in the current iteration of *AP3000: British Air and Space Doctrine*, although this omission will be addressed in the forthcoming edition. The examples of the practice of maritime air power and air-sea cooperation in this

collection are therefore welcome, including new insights on the role of naval aviation in limited wars and crisis management, and areas that have previously received scant attention, such as the contribution of British naval air power in the Mediterranean and Pacific theatres in the Second World War. Geoffrey Till's analysis of the Singapore campaign is particularly useful in highlighting the problem of competing visions of air power and the consequent requirement for effective integration through the employment of mutually supportive – rather than independent – air and maritime capabilities.

Taken as a whole, this volume offers a comprehensive survey of a key aspect of air power as well as shedding new light on the way that Britain's defence policy, strategy and military capabilities relate to one another. Airmen may find some of the views offered by enthusiastically maritime-orientated academics challenging, while more careful copy-editing would have removed minor irritations such as the misspelling of 'air marshal'. Nevertheless, there is still much here that bears careful consideration. The Development, Concept and Doctrine Centre's *Future Character of Conflict* work predicts that future wars are most likely to be fought in the littoral, while Libya has pointed the way to an air-maritime strategy as an alternative to the 'boots on the ground' commitment of land forces for future interventions. Air-maritime integration will, therefore, be an inescapable part of the RAF's future, especially as so much of the air component's combat capability will be capable of being ship-based. In a sense, the relationship should be instinctive, as doctrinally air and maritime power are very closely linked; for example, the principles of sea control and control of the air have much in common. However, as this book amply demonstrates, effective integration has proved to be elusive in the past, often for reasons of personality and because of issues of ownership rather than the actual practice of aviation from (and over) the sea. Airmen and sailors need to work together as a matter of urgency to develop their thinking about the employment of air power in the maritime environment; this volume provides the necessary background to start the process, and is recommended whole-heartedly for the purpose.

Book Reviews

Seven Pillars of Wisdom

By T E Lawrence

Reviewed by Wing Commander Greg Hammond

Introduction

TE Lawrence's classic book of the Great War, 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom', is not primarily a book about air power. However, in passing it throws some interesting illumination on the development of air power and its growing utility. After describing many tortuous journeys across the desert by camel, journeys which often took weeks rather than days to accomplish – and which were so graphically illustrated in David Lean's 1962 film 'Lawrence of Arabia' – in July 1917, after the capture of Akaba, Lawrence is taken by air to a meeting with King Hussein, the titular head of the Arab Revolt. In Lawrence's words, "we crossed comfortably at sixty miles an hour the hills learned toilsomely on camel-back." Thereafter, air mobility becomes an accepted part of the war, with Lawrence frequently referring to flights to and from important meetings with his superiors. In addition to air mobility, there are also descriptions of the effects of attack from the air, both by the Ottoman Turks against the Arabs and by the RAF and its forebears against the Turks, while at one point Lawrence witnesses an aerial battle.

Air power, however, is incidental to 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom'. For the military the book's importance is in its exposition of the techniques of irregular warfare. All of its chapters are short and Chapter XXXIII stands alone as a conceptualisation of Lawrence's alternative to the attritional warfare of the Western Front. Rather than attacking Turkish trenches with banners flying, Lawrence considers how the Arab Revolt might be "an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head... a regular soldier

might be helpless without a target, owning only what he sat on, and subjugating only what, by order, he could poke his rifle at." Lawrence calculated that his nearly 50 000 adherents could pin down a regular Ottoman force of more than ten times that number by attacking their infrastructure, notably the railways.

What influenced Lawrence in developing these views? At no point in the book does he make clear his exact status with the Arabs, or indeed the British. Despite winning a DSO for "splendid leadership and skill"¹ in a specific action which resulted in the capture of 300 prisoners, two field guns and 23 machine guns, and his attaining the addressable rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1918, Lawrence was not a professional soldier. In a book published in 1969 using newly-released public records evidence, Philip Knightley and Colin Simpson² postulate that Lawrence was the British political officer to the Arab Revolt, rather than military liaison officer, and, despite wearing Army uniform, was working in a predecessor organisation to the Secret Intelligence Service. How else can one explain Lawrence's being created a Companion of the Bath in 1917, a somewhat unusual honour for a Temporary Major, even under the different rules applied to the award of State Honours nearly a century ago? Other theories about Lawrence abound, but it seems that his military knowledge was self-taught, largely at Oxford where he says that he read Napoleon's despatches, Clausewitz, Moltke, Jomini and others, while spending his holidays travelling around France to examine battlefields and medieval fortifications. In Lawrence's case a First Class Honours degree in History was his command and staff training.

Reading between the lines of 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' and applying other evidence, Knightley and Simpson further postulate that Lawrence started as a member of a clique whose objective was to capture the whole Arab world for the British Empire. Many of his actions can therefore be explained not by the Arab nationalist position overtly expounded by Lawrence in the book but by a need to undermine the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement; this was a secret arrangement between the United Kingdom and France in which the Ottoman Empire would be divided between the two countries, with Syria – the scene of much of the action in 'Seven Pillars' – allocated to France. Whether this theory is convincing or not, Lawrence's references to French colleagues in 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' are almost invariably barbed – far more so than most references to the 'official' (Turkish) enemy. However, in counterpoint, as well as his British Honours Lawrence was also awarded two French decorations in the course of the Arab Revolt³ and it was the Sykes-Picot arrangement which largely emerged – with ultimately unhappy results – from the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Many other controversies surround 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom', not only in other aspects of its content but also in the location of much of the original manuscript which Lawrence apparently lost at Reading railway station in late 1919; he had to re-write the missing chapters from scratch having, in the interim, destroyed his field notes. What a find the original would be!

The final, unabridged version of the book, which was only published for sale to the general

public after Lawrence's death in a motorcycle accident in 1935, is well worth reading on several levels. It is a cracking adventure story, written in an engaging style; its descriptions of desert living and travel, and Arab food and customs, are fascinating; it covers important developments in military thinking, in particular in irregular warfare, but also – in passing – it illustrates the emergence of air power; and it covers a remarkable period of history, although the political narrative expressed in the book should be treated with extreme caution. However, for all the extensive historiography⁴ surrounding Lawrence's life and career, what better place to start than with his original work?

Notes

¹ Supplement to the London Gazette, 13 May 1918.

² Philip Knightley and Colin Simpson, *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Limited, 1969).

³ Chevalier of the Legion of Honour (1916) and Croix de Guerre (1918).

⁴ Including well over a dozen full biographies.

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