



RAF Air Power Conference 2013
- Chief of Air Force: Air Marshal Geoff Brown AO –
- Transition to Contingency: A view from the Indo-Pacific -
Wednesday 17 July 2013

SALUTATIONS

Our topic of discussion this afternoon, and the subject of my presentation, is **“understanding our world and enabling the decisions of tomorrow”** set within the context of the broader discussion we have enjoyed so far in this conference of ***Transitioning to Conflict***.

This is a tremendously important topic for examination and it follows very naturally from the discussion we have had so far this morning regarding *Global Strategic Trends*, both from a *security and industry perspective*, and the *Future Operating Environment and Security Challenges*.

How we as air forces know, shape and respond to our environments is a prime concern of mine, and has been of utmost importance to air forces since World War One. From the day in August 1914, when RFC aircrew, Captain Lionel Charlton and Lieutenant Vincent Wadham of No.3 SQN, discovered a huge column of Von Kluck’s German First Army making their right hook through northern France, the ability to sense the environment from the unique perspective of the third dimension has been one of the most important and leading edge capabilities offered by air power. Today it is of greater significance than at any time before. I say this for a number of reasons.

Deep in the Cold War years elements of national defence planning and of policy-making of many of the countries represented here today was predicated on the notion that ‘strategic warning’ was a useful planning concept affording some measure of preparation time ahead of any major conflict. Coupled with concepts of capability warning and crisis warning, this strategic warning period was estimated to be somewhere in the order of 10 years. In other words, we proceeded to plan, to some degree, on the assumption that we were so in tune with our surroundings and knew our world so well, that we believed we would be alerted

with sufficient warning time of any impending upset to the relatively peaceful and stable conditions we enjoyed.

That world, if it ever really existed, has long since evolved into one more unpredictable, unstable and more difficult to 'know'. It is the world as we now understand it to be. It is, as seen in recent events, a world where conflicts are not always loudly heralded by years of strategic warning. A world where contingencies can and do quickly arise, often violently, and frequently with few of the warning signs we would have traditionally expected. These contingencies, be they conflicts or the result of natural and humanitarian disasters lead us into situations and places we might scarcely have imagined possible not that long ago. The potential therefore, for strategic surprise in the face of unforeseen contingencies is one that challenges us today perhaps like never before. There is here both an opportunity and a responsibility for air forces.

How we **understand the world today** and how we **enable the decisions for tomorrow** is often critically dependent on capabilities and roles provided by effective air power projected by capable air forces. Importantly then from an Air Force view, our decisions on capability and force posture development today, will in turn impact on the range of options we can offer to governments as they make decisions in response to future crises which we can in only the most limited sense confidently predict. In essence, we must prepare to be **proactively responsive to the unknown**. Yes I know, something of a contradiction of terms along the lines of an *IT Support Department*, but it is a conceptually valid construct. By this I mean that we, as professional masters of air power, need first to understand our own government and national objectives, we must come to appreciate the security environment in which we are expected to operate and the opportunities open to us for capability development. Then, and only then, can we begin to invest in the balanced force needed to respond to the spectrum of operations in which our national policy and security environment would suggest we may become involved. The important distinction is that we cannot realistically prepare for specific contingencies; instead we must design in to our capability the flexibility and the agility necessary to be able to provide options to the decisions makers when and as contingencies develop.

If I might offer an example from RAAF history. In the years leading up to war in the Pacific, the Australian and New Zealand governments initiated steps to form a line of advanced

operational bases, as they became known, in the Pacific islands as an outer defence ring to the mainlands. From 1939, sites were surveyed and the development of suitable bases was undertaken. The object was to form a chain of bases through the islands to the north of Darwin, extending through New Guinea and the island archipelagos to the east as far as New Caledonia. These advanced operational bases came to be used primarily as bases for flying-boat operations. Catalina aircraft of the RAAF's Nos 11 and 20 Squadron conducted early ISR, search and rescue and eventually some strategic strike missions across an enormous stretch of waters to the north and east of Australia and New Zealand.

The efforts of the Australian and New Zealand Governments at this time were an attempt, and a fairly successful one it must be said, to not only form an advanced defensive line but importantly to **better understand their near environs to enable decisions concerning their immediate future**. For Australia and New Zealand, understanding the world in the late 1930s - early 1940s in the Asia Pacific meant maintaining surveillance and reconnaissance of the maritime approaches to the north. It meant building up a tactical and operational picture of the environment and importantly it led to an Air Force presence across the region connecting with the extensive coast-watcher network.

Regional understanding in the war years took on an imperative and urgency not witnessed before. Time was short, but the foresight in establishing a forward regional presence, even if woefully underfunded, afforded at least some measure of 'knowing the environment' to be established, **allowing decisions to be based on sound evidence and intelligence** facilitated by the actions of the RAAF in sensing the environment from the air. I might add that it was while operating from AOBs that Australian Catalina aircraft first located the Japanese Carrier Group moving into the Coral Sea ahead of that crucial battle in World War II. When coupled with the inputs from other ISR systems in the region, the reports from the RAAF Catalinas contributed to establishing a theatre wide understanding and thereby informing critical decisions during the opening phase of the Coral Sea battle.

The commitment to operate in our northern region and to develop understanding of the region still has piquancy for the RAAF. Today, as in the past, regional engagement is vital to us understanding our potential operating environment. Where in 1939, understanding our region was achieved through AOBs, today we achieve those same goals through strong relationships with our near neighbours. There is no substitute I believe for close personal

relationships for fostering trust and understanding between nations and between air forces. In seeking to find common cause, the dividends for all nations can be significant. In Australia's case I would point to our enduring bonds with New Zealand. So profound is our shared history and mutual interests, that the relationship has become part of the fabric of our national heritage in the form of the ANZAC tradition. Some would say that the origins of ANZAC can be found in the common British heritage we both share, and I suppose that is true. However, shared heritage is not the sole basis for Australia's regional engagements.

As the British Empire withdrew from the Far East in the decades following World War II, the governments of Australia and New Zealand both recognised that their security was inextricably bound with that of South East Asia. When in 1967 Britain announced its intention to withdraw military forces from territories to the 'east of Suez', the need for a re-evaluation of military involvement in South East Asia prompted talks between the five major players in the region—Australia, Britain, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore. These talks concluded in a defence cooperation agreement called the Five Power Defence Arrangement in April 1971.

The operational cornerstone of this arrangement was a single headquarters which would organise the air defence of Malaysia and Singapore as an indivisible whole. The Integrated Air Defence System, or IADS as it was known at the time, has for over forty years formed the architecture of a close 'air-centric' engagement arrangement which now includes land and sea participation in major regional exercises. Most importantly, it has been the nucleus and conduit of meaningful and fruitful multilateral engagement, cooperation and confidence-building in the region.

So then what is the connection between FPDA and understanding our world today? What was perhaps not fully appreciated at the time, but is well understood today, is that in setting up the framework of the FPDA the five countries involved created a reliable and consistent avenue for engagement, information sharing and joint situational awareness building. The FPDA has demonstrated what I think might be a tenant of diplomatic relation building - if you want to really understand your world, including your near and regional neighbourhoods, then you must invest in long-term relations and long-term engagement. Relationships, it goes without saying, are built on trust, and trust comes only with time. It follows I would suggest that situational awareness is built upon the sure foundations of engagement. It is a

slow and cumulative process in which there is no substitute for 'being there'. Air forces make an important contribution to 'being there' and so by extension play an important role in understanding the world today.

There is another and vitally important way in which air power and air forces contribute to **understanding the world today** and to **enabling the decisions of tomorrow**. I refer here to the role of air power in the **rapid build-up of situational awareness in the event of a contingency**. In this regard I have already mentioned the role of the RAAF in the Battle of the Coral Sea, however a more recent example can be found in the regional response to the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004. When a magnitude 9 earthquake occurred off of northern Sumatra it triggered a tsunami that killed over 200 000 people and caused widespread destruction across Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and on the east coast of Africa. At the time of the tsunami, the RAAF had 35 personnel stationed at the Malaysian Air Force Base at Butterworth as part of No 324 Combat Support Squadron. That unit immediately began reporting back to Australia the extent of the damage across the region while making preparations to support the inevitable influx of additional personnel and equipment. Through the specialists we already had on the ground providing the base support at Butterworth, our staff within the IADS Headquarters and via the long standing working relationships we had already established within regional air forces, especially those in Indonesia, we were able to quickly establish the air picture necessary to start planning relief flights into the worst hit areas around Banda Aceh. As we were able to put more personnel into the disaster zone, our understanding of our operating environment was even further enhanced. Deployable air traffic control teams, combat communications specialists, an air terminal squadron and aeromedical evacuation teams all contributed to the constantly growing stream of information and data required to first mount and then sustain relief operations.

That we were able to respond to a short notice humanitarian crisis particularly effectively was because we had already been proactive. We had invested in a balanced expeditionary force capable of mounting a broad range of operations and had also invested in relationships within the region which readily informed the decision making process. At the national strategic level, we had made long term investments in building trust and mutual interests with our neighbours and we were able to predict our own Governments' reaction

to such a crisis, simply because we truly understood the deep seated need to be a responsive international partner.

While I have stressed the need for close relationships in our region as key to knowing and understanding the operating environment, it is clear that this is not something restricted to Air Force alone. Elements from across the Australian Government are all part of our international engagement landscape. So if the human dimension is not the unique talent which RAAF brings to the table, what is? As I mentioned earlier, the ability of air power to sense our environment from the third dimension provides us with an almost unparalleled perspective of the world, and it is a perspective particularly useful when you consider the large portion of the earth's surface the RAAF is expected to know.

The latest Australian Defence White Paper reflects the interests we have in the Indian Ocean to our west across the north of Australia and into the Pacific region to our east. When we include the Australian territories in the Great Southern Ocean and Antarctica, the magnitude of our area of responsibility becomes clear, and at times a little daunting. To meet our responsibilities in delivering the ISR product over this area the RAAF, as part of a wider national surveillance system, is integrating multiple ISR nodes to enable complex operating pictures to be produced and to make available information necessary to inform decision makers.

Through the Jindalee Over the Horizon Radar systems, Wedgetail AEW&C aircraft, emerging UAS options such as the Heron, the Vigilare networked command and control system and the Joint Operations Command—Air Operations Centre, we are bringing together a recognised air picture of our areas of responsibility to a fidelity not seen before. While very good, I believe we have some way go to realise the full potential possible, and the level of detail necessary to properly inform the stakeholders along the chain of command. Clearly, I wish to further exploit the perspective of space and the ubiquity of the cyber domain in order to expand the boundaries of our awareness.

With integration of our discrete systems I am keen to maintain the flexibility we have come to expect from our existing capability. For example, in our more recent past we have relied heavily on our long serving AP-3C Orion fleet to maintain a degree of surveillance and response options within our area of responsibility. While this platform is aging, the investment into new and enhanced sensing and communication systems has ensured that

the weapon system as a whole has remained relevant in today's operating environment. Our recent experience with the AP-3s in the MEAO, where tasking ranged from maritime surveillance to overland ISR and stretched from Iraq to Afghanistan, highlights the Orion's flexibility. Let me give you an example.

In 2006 a RAAF AP-3 was tasked to provide overhead ISR in support of a counter IED mission in Iraq. One hour in to the mission and the aircraft was urgently retasked to assist troops in contact in an adjacent city. On completion of the that new task, the aircraft was again moved to another area, this time to provide route clearance for ground forces transiting a high threat area by road. It then responded to an overwater task, when suspicious activity was detected near coalition vessels. Before returning to base, the aircraft was called on to provide overhead ISR to another ground engagement 50 miles away. In one sortie, the aircraft and crew were able to complete their pre-planned mission as well as several time critical, short notice tasks. This one mission in many ways illustrates the flexibility we need in our ISR systems and the agility necessary in our personnel in order to bring options to the table when planning contingency responses. The capability of the AP-3Cs and the capacity of their crews did not just happen. They were the result of a long term commitment to building and sustaining RAAF ISR in the modern environment and the investment in training our personnel. Looking ahead to Force 2030, we are planning to enhance our ISR capability by replacing the AP-3C with a combination of P-8A Poseidon aircraft and a long-range, long-endurance UAS. Importantly, the P-8A capability will not be limited to the ISR role only, but will include an anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare capabilities as well—one weapon system, but multiple response options.

My example of the AP-3C I think not only highlights the benefits of proactively building capability for maximum responsiveness, but introduces my next point. Throughout the mission completed by the aircraft in Iraq, it was under the tactical control of a multinational coalition. In Australia's comparatively short history of involvement in international conflict, it has always operated as part of a coalition. It has become the norm for us to think in terms of issues such as interoperability, combined command and control arrangements and joint exercises. In other words, the RAAF thinks in terms of marrying our technology and capability with the elements of a coalition force and of the complexities of making such coalitions work. We have also come to realise the opportunities such coalitions bring to shared strategic, operational and tactical awareness of current and future operating

environments. It is clear then, that with all the technology available to us, once we begin to think in terms of operations, we will inevitably start to think in terms of the wider implications and the partners we need to work with. Which I think brings me back to the importance of relationship building.

In conclusion, for the RAAF, understanding the world today is first and foremost about being out there in the world. It is about establishing relationships and building trust with neighbours and those nations with similar security interests. Shared knowledge and experience brings shared understanding and common expectations. Once we have a clear picture of our world it becomes necessary to confidently operate within the areas of importance with the capability necessary to continually expand on that understanding—thereby being best positioned to inform the decision making process, while also offering the right response options.

Thank You.