

**AIR POWER STUDIES CENTRE**

**PAPER 7**

**October 1992**

**GRADUATED RESPONSE BY AIR POWER:  
THE ART OF POLITICAL DISSUASION BY MILITARY  
MEANS**

**By**

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## **About the Author**

Group Captain Hamwood joined the RAAF in 1967, trained as an Air Electronics officer and completed nine years of maritime flying. From flying operations he became involved in training which led to staff appointments in recruiting and then intelligence. He was appointed Commanding Officer of Base Squadron Point Cook in 1986, and subsequently took up a similar position at Tindal in the Northern Territory two years later. As the first CO at the new base at Tindal he was involved with much of its development.

He has attended RAAF Staff College and the US Air War College, and was appointed as the Director of the Air Power Studies Centre in August 1991.

## INTRODUCTION

As Australia proceeds into the uncertain world of the 1990s, it realises that eruptions of conflict in various parts of the world are a constant occurrence. The collapse of communism has not had the effect of reducing the number of smaller, less-than-global causes of trouble. On the contrary, it is producing more of them.<sup>1</sup> The rivalry of past decades that created global division through superpower alignment has been succeeded by the individualistic aspirations of many nations seeking to enhance their future. Although trade, natural resources and economic concerns continue to dominate international relations, a new set of factors creates division. Abuses of the environment and human rights, and the problems of economic refugees and forced migration have become the catalysts that now tend to generate ill will between nations. An international crisis can emanate from a clash of consciences as much as one of national interests.

Western-style democracies wishing to exert positive influences on recalcitrant regional neighbours whose standards of behaviour are regarded as less than acceptable, have various options to exercise. Naturally diplomacy is the first choice. If diplomatic overtures prove ineffective, then consideration is often given to methods which employ higher profile forms of persuasion or coercion. Trade sanctions are a popular, albeit blunt strategy used by the global community to achieve this objective. The punitive extension of trade sanctions by military means – the economic blockade – is an expensive, labour intensive operation, and as a long term commitment, rarely totally effective. After two years of such treatment, Iraq is clear evidence of this. Other avenues of resolution no doubt need to be explored to manage a crisis before considering the option of active military involvement. However, what is not generally realised is that much can be accomplished with defence assets, short of naked aggression, to contain and control a crisis. The possession of military power will always remain of major importance in international affairs.<sup>2</sup>

When a nation operates unilaterally in support of its own political objectives to exert pressure on another country, as India did with Sri Lanka in the late 1980s, it runs the risk of close international scrutiny. Alternatively, when a group of nations acts collectively to counter belligerent behaviour by a neighbour, that approach can be impeded by cumulative caution and compromise. Present day Cambodia bears witness to that. Regardless of whether the approach is unilateral or collective, pressure applied in a blunt or insensitive manner with military force tends to attract widespread condemnation. However, the technology now available in a modern defence force and the finesse with which it can be applied, allow a merger of diplomacy and military capability to resolve a crisis.

## THE UTILITY OF AIR POWER

Australia's defence forces are structured to defend the country against external threat in the levels of conflict considered more likely. However, what is not seriously

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<sup>1</sup> The Economist, 5 Sep 1992, *Defence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p 3.

<sup>2</sup> Evans, Senator the Hon. Gareth, *Australia's Regional Security*, Ministerial Statement, December 1989, p 12.

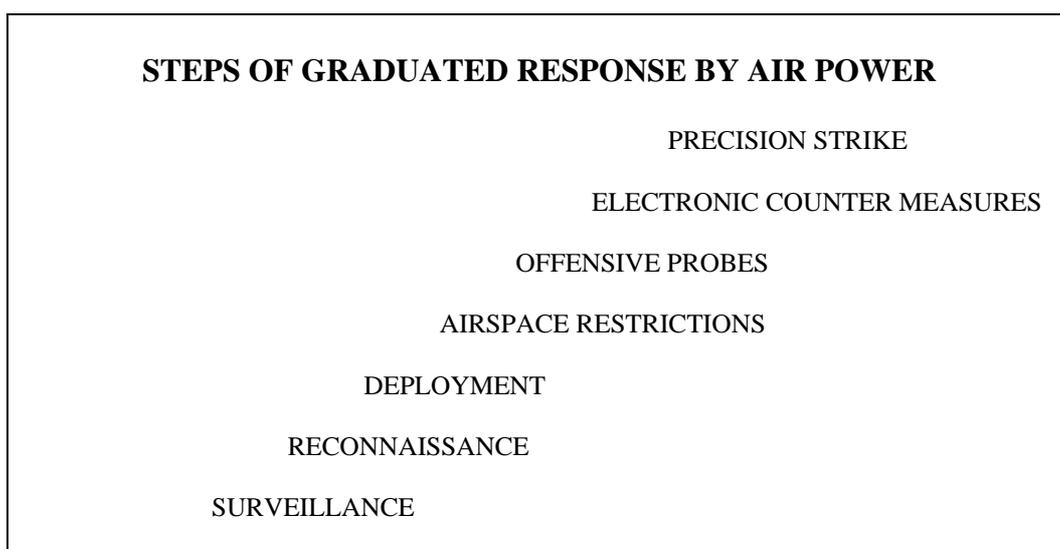
considered at policy level is the utility of these forces in circumstances short of such conflict. The best option may be to contain a developing crisis with all means available, including those assets acquired for use in conflict, so that the conflict does not eventuate.

A situation may call for a range of options that, used sequentially, gradually increase leverage yet allow for an agreement to be reached without a 'showdown' or 'loss of face'. The characteristics of air power make it very responsive to, and capable of, demonstrating a nation's political intent.<sup>3</sup> In a 'war of words', it also provides several choices for averting conflict by the gentle art of dissuasion.

Above all other military means, air power offers government a wide range of options with which to react in graduated form to manage a crisis. The unique characteristics of responsiveness, flexibility, mobility and range inherent in air power, unimpeded by geographical features, lend great attraction to its selection as an instrument of choice.

At the hostile extreme of the spectrum of responses is the pre-emptive strike – an action which sends an undeniable message but from which there is no retreat. A bold measure for use in dire circumstances only. Whilst broad support for such a controversial choice is unlikely without previously exhausting all other avenues, a range of options at the opposite end of the spectrum is also presently available to Australia.

Modern air power allows government to respond rapidly with considerable finesse, yet reflect the degree of gravity required in any given situation. These options extend from normal peacetime military operations and graduate systematically through a spectrum of elevating seriousness to the point of minor engagement with an adversary short of sustained conflict. Each operation in this form of psychological warfare would use proportionate force designed to prevent an overreaction, and is addressed in the following steps that reflect an ascending order of authority.



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<sup>3</sup> RAAF, *The Air Power Manual*, AAP 1000, Air Power Studies Centre, 1990, p 29.

## Surveillance

Broad area surveillance in Australia's maritime area of interest is a high priority at all times, and is conducted in much the same manner in peacetime as it would be in a period of increased tension. As a form of systematic and repetitive observation of expansive areas, it is designed to establish a pattern of normal activity so that any departure from this may provide an early indication of a change in regional circumstances. Knowledge of who and what is actively using the zone of prime importance to Australia is a fundamental tenet on which Australia's security is based.

A variety of agencies, platforms and sensors are employed to fulfil this role, with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) having the major element of responsibility. The task is immense, and in concert with naval assets and ground-based radars, air power provides the most effective and reliable means with which to cover the vast area involved. The use of RAAF aircraft in the surveillance role is also extended beyond national air and sea space to assist regional neighbours in protecting their interests.

In general, surveillance coverage in international waters and airspace is legally permissible to within 12 nautical miles of any coastline or established coastline baseline. The mere presence of aircraft in a limited capacity such as regular surveillance may be sufficient to convey a political message.<sup>4</sup> Such overt activity is conducted regularly by RAAF aircraft throughout the region and demonstrates a particular capability to observe at great distance from our own shore. By conducting this role regularly when tension is low or non-existent, it attracts little attention other than awareness and acceptance of its occurrence. Yet, it implies a determination to monitor constantly operations our region regardless of the degree of tension.

If a potential aggressor needed reminding of our commitment in this regard, regular overt surveillance by military aircraft to within 12 nautical miles of his territory is an appropriate first step to providing non-lethal deterrence. To gauge the likely impact on him, consider the roles reversed and the effect of another nation regularly surveilling to within 12 nautical miles of Australia's coastline. Surveillance is an internationally accepted practice that sends a clear signal without necessarily increasing tension.

Whereas the objective of surveillance is the collection of intelligence within a defined area or period of time, reconnaissance is concerned with specific targets.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, focusing attention on specific targets may provide a heightened degree of discouragement if surveillance alone does not have the desired effect.

## Reconnaissance

Depending on the source of disagreement between the parties, irrefutable evidence of transgressions committed by an antagonist may need to be gathered to bring it to account for its misdeeds. The deployment of reconnaissance or surveillance aircraft can have a salutary deterrent effect on potential aggressors by warning them that their actions are being watched and could provoke a response.<sup>6</sup> If successful in obtaining

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<sup>4</sup> RAAF, *The Air Power Manual* (AAP 1000), Air Power Studies Centre, 1990, p 29.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p 42.

<sup>6</sup> Vallance, Group Captain Andrew, RAF, as quoted in *Smaller But Larger: Conventional Air Power into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Alan Stephens (ed.), Canberra, AGPS, 1992.

such evidence, this alone may be sufficient to deter further disagreement and reduce tension. However, the evidence would need to be suitably compelling and credible to withstand international scrutiny from independent observers.

Whilst this evidence may be obtainable through a number of different sources and platforms, for purposes of expediency and cost effectiveness it must be a current capability that can react in a timely fashion. Use of satellites, human resources and electronic eavesdropping may not meet those criteria. On the other hand, aerial reconnaissance, which involves the airborne recording of information through use of photography, radar, infra-red, electronic, acoustic and visual means, is available now through elements of the RAAF.

Such are the modern reconnaissance sensors currently employed in Australia's combat triad of the F-111, F/A-18 and P-3C, that they allow coverage of land or maritime targets either covertly or overtly, 24 hours per day. For example, using the attributes of the F-111C, the RAAF can employ Pave Tack<sup>7</sup> reconnaissance in all potential operations, from the night time identification of enemy aircraft on defensive counter air missions, through all areas of the air/sea gap surrounding Australia, and finally on friendly territory to observe, report and accurately record a wide variety of potential enemy activities.<sup>8</sup> By virtue of the range and endurance of such aircraft, continuous coverage of targets is possible although this can be a particularly resource-intensive mode of operation. By remaining outside of the detection range of opposing ground-based radars, these aircraft can covertly observe and accurately record an opponent's activities. The information gleaned can be transmitted directly to the controlling authority on secure communications links, or alternatively the operation can be conducted completely passively and the results produced on return to base.

Regardless of whether the potential adversary is aware of the reconnaissance taking place, proof of sovereign airspace being infringed may be difficult to substantiate. If the reconnaissance were detected, reaction in the form of military aggression would be unlikely, especially if the target of interest related to the original point of disagreement. Not only could overt reconnaissance create the desired additional pressure in response to a crisis, but it could also generate a valuable source of intelligence for use in future operations.

At this stage in the sequence of options, air power activities have been restricted almost to individual sorties which form part of an overall strategy of gradually increasing pressure on a potential adversary. From this point onwards the scale of involvement of air power resources becomes greater, yet remains below the threshold of explicit intimidation.

## **Deployment**

The next level in the sequence of graduated response is the deployment of military aircraft and their associated support. Such action denotes an ability to project military

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<sup>7</sup> Pave Tack is a weapons system that detects targets by sensing emitted infra-red energy, and uses laser ranging to measure the aircraft's distance from a target as well as designating the target (with laser energy) to provide terminal homing of laser guided weapons.

<sup>8</sup> Criss, Group Captain P.J., *Employing Smart Technology in Low Intensity Conflict*, Canberra, Air Power Studies Centre, 1992, p 18.

power over vast distances to a forward base and exert influence through mere presence. Air power is sufficiently flexible to respond rapidly to short-notice deployment over the long distances Australia has to contend with. The first combat squadron of the USAF to arrive in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield launched only 19 hours after receiving orders to deploy.<sup>9</sup> Although the stakes in the Gulf region were a lot higher than could be envisaged in Australia's circumstances, the principle of displaying resolve in the face of an adverse situation is the same.

Air-to-air refuelling (AAR) is an integral component of the deployment of Australia's fighter aircraft, and although the RAAF possesses only a training rather than an operational AAR capability, it provides an invaluable enhancement to the fighter force. Logistic support for deployed RAAF combat aircraft via airlift allows a matched response to sustain the initial phase of an operation, although this would need to be supplemented by surface lift of bulky and heavy supplies such as fuel and weapons.

Depending on the prevailing state of relations between the countries in question, deployment could be staged either to attract publicity or minimise it. Regardless of the nature of the deployment, its occurrence will eventually become common knowledge. Whilst the chain of northern air bases within Australia offers several options, possibilities could exist for deployment to offshore sovereign territories or possibly a third country. The deployment of air power as a form of 'gunboat diplomacy' is an ideal medium to signify national will, and the sudden appearance of combat aircraft unexpectedly in an area can create a powerful impression. The appearance of a flight of USAF F-4 Phantoms over Manila in response to internal unrest during the Aquino regime had a restraining effect on coup plotters.

The ability to traverse any point on the earth's surface makes air power uniquely capable of exerting a potent presence. Even within the legal bounds of international overflight, government possesses the means to manifest its influence in a more emphatic form than surveillance through the deployment of air power. Equally, should tension evaporate, withdrawal could be completed in short order, thus sending another clear signal. Flexibility and responsiveness remain the key words in using air power to convey calculated messages in a delicate situation.

### **Airspace Restrictions**

Foremost amongst air assets deployed would be aircraft whose capabilities allow the next level of response – the imposition of restrictions on airspace. Such restrictions are common in various areas throughout the world as a result of the interaction between military and civil aviation. The basis for the regulation of airspace is normally safety and the separation of aircraft to allow positive control. Because of the unorthodox nature of military flying in comparison to civil aircraft, temporary restrictions are frequently imposed to allow exercises to be conducted without endangering other traffic.

The first step towards imposing tighter control over a segment of airspace is the transfer of responsibility from the civilian authority to the military for oversight of

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<sup>9</sup> Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: An Interim Report to Congress, Washington, 1991, p 1-7.

aviation within a particular area. This is achieved by declaring an Air Defence Operations Area (ADOA). However, for the declaration to have an impact throughout the region, it would need to be accompanied by a deployment of aircraft that operate in the counter air roles. The modern multi-role fighter such as the F/A-18 Hornet is ideal for this purpose as it can operate ostensibly in a defensive mode while possessing considerable offensive potential.

The 'tightening of the screw' by declaring an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) would signal an additional expression of national conviction. Proclaiming an ADIZ is an internationally accepted air control measure and places a responsibility on an aircraft approaching that airspace to identify itself and advise the military authority of its intentions. Failure to do so makes it liable to interception by fighter aircraft, and although access to international airspace cannot be denied on this basis, the ADIZ becomes a powerful expression of resolve, albeit in defensive form. The permanent ADIZ established around Hawaii is an example of an operative peacetime restriction on airspace. However, the opportunity formally to declare the activation of an ADIZ provides government with a valuable diplomatic mechanism which would not be available if a permanent ADIZ were maintained over Australia's air/sea gap.<sup>10</sup>

The declaration of an Exclusion Zone is the ultimate step in the process of imposing airspace restrictions. By its nature it is unambiguous and escalatory, and requires an enforcement capability to the extent that air superiority is almost obligatory to achieve the desired effect. It pays little heed to the conventions of sovereign or international airspace and includes both civil and military traffic. The intention is not just to establish an airspace blockade, but to deny totally the use of that airspace to an opponent. The Exclusion Zone imposed by the US and its allies over southern Iraq is testament to the utility of such action.

Clear definition of an exclusion zone boundaries and the rules of engagement that apply therein are imperative, in combination with an announcement of intention to police the zone and the consequences of refusal to comply. Continuous employment of airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft is the most practical and productive method of detecting non-compliance, although interceptor aircraft need to be available at short notice if not already airborne. The cost of imposing such rigid airspace restrictions continuously for extended periods is high and is best achieved through a coalition of air forces from friendly nations. However, the possibility exists of wavering commitment from coalition member nations in the face of extended operations without evidence of results. Consequently, airspace restrictions may be more appropriately imposed for a set period of time to allow a belligerent nation to absorb the seriousness of the situation and comply with pre-determined conditions.

### **Offensive Probes**

If the threat posed by airspace restrictions escalates the situation, additional measures can be carried out by the aircraft used in imposing those restrictions to increase the level of dissuasion. As tension heightens short of conflict, fighter aircraft used in the

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<sup>10</sup> Group Captain R.B. Treloar as quoted in Stephens, Alan (ed.), *Defending the Air/Sea Gap*, Canberra, Australian Defence Studies Centre, forthcoming.

defensive counter air role would need to be brought to a higher state of readiness and geared to adopt a more aggressive posture.

Combat air patrols in a declared ADIZ may be taken one step further by becoming offensive probes in international airspace. They would be aimed towards the opponent's territory in order to provoke a reaction. Known as offensive fighter sweep, the object of this activity in its most benign form is to engender concern in an opponent and cause him to react to the implied threat by increasing the alert status of his air defence system at times of our choosing. By retaining the initiative, the situation can be controlled and the opponent's reactive capabilities may decline over time. However, the political will to mount such a campaign must be demonstrated early if the initiative is to be taken and retained.<sup>11</sup>

Not only would a potential aggressor's ability to respond be tested, but his ability to sustain the required level of readiness for extended periods would also be assessed. His reaction would reflect the degree of commitment he has to the particular cause which originally created the tension. In this manner, a potent military influence can be exerted on a nation beyond the glare of the news media and without casualties – yet with an unmistakable message.

### **Electronic Counter Measures**

In concert with the offensive measures that can be employed through probes by fighter aircraft are techniques to disrupt and suppress an opponent's capabilities electronically. Whilst various methods of passive electronic intelligence gathering would have been undertaken during surveillance and reconnaissance missions, the situation now calls for active engagement to suppress an adversary's electronic transmissions. Without firing a weapon, an opponent's sensors can be blinded and his communications silenced through electronic counter measures (ECM). Targets for this type of interference are early warning, surveillance and acquisition radars, radio communications, especially for command and control of air assets and ground defence, and navigation aids.

Australia possesses only limited ECM capabilities and could not achieve anywhere near the degree of electronic superiority attained by coalition forces in the Gulf War. However, limited jamming of communications is achievable as well as various forms of deception jamming. To have a serious impact on an adversary's electronic capabilities, ECM pods would need to be acquired for fitment to RAAF aircraft. Caution would also need to be taken to avoid displaying the full potential of an electronic capability so that counter measures were not developed prior to a possible escalation.

### **Precision Strike**

The ultimate display of national resolve short of sustained and open conflict is precision strike – an option which enables a display of controlled force to inflict limited, but specific damage without attracting an escalatory response. An example is

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<sup>11</sup> Group Captain A.W. Titheridge as quoted in Stephens, Alan, (ed.), *Defending the Air/Sea Gap*, Canberra, Australian Defence Studies Centre, forthcoming.

the Israeli strike on the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak just south of Baghdad in June 1981. Described at the time by Prime Minister Begin as a 'morally supreme act of national defence', the raid struck a telling blow to a potential adversary without provoking a military reaction.<sup>12</sup> Whilst Australia's strategic circumstances are well removed from those that exist in the Middle East, the precedent is relevant and the principle remains valid.

The value of precision guided munitions (PGMs) was demonstrated in the recent Gulf War, where, in combination with laser guidance systems, they achieved remarkable accuracy. The attraction of an accurate weapons delivery system is that it neutralises a target with minimal force and collateral damage – hence the risks to life on both sides are minimised. Infra-red sensors on board aircraft allow the targets to be clearly identified in daylight or darkness to the extent that an aim point such as a ventilation duct on a building can be selected with confidence.

The RAAF possesses just such a capability. It can strike a target on foreign territory, day or night with precision through its Pave Tack equipped F-111C aircraft. The target could be civilian or military, on land or at sea, in hilly country or in the central business district. So accurate is this system that an attacked building may appear structurally sound from the outside but in fact be demolished internally. Regardless of the target's location, weapons ranging from an inert solid casing to a 2000lb bomb can be placed exactly where they have the most effect. This capability can demonstrate graphically to an adversary the resolve to oppose his present course of action and remind him of the weight of force that could be brought to bear if he persists. Yet, this powerful signal transmitted by an isolated precision strike can be so surgical as to minimise loss of life and avoid the risk of escalation.

## CONCLUSION

The turbulent world in which we presently live is likely to continue stumbling from one crisis to another, and Australia's region is not immune. Whilst diplomacy and the application of military force are implements which have utility in a crisis, they are regarded as at opposite ends of the nation's spectrum of responses. Avoidance of conflict may be desirable, but Australia's expectations of being able to exert influence and display national resolve in the face of another country's unacceptable behaviour need not be diminished.

Air power, with its vast destructive capacity, has often been regarded as a blunt instrument rather than a discriminating tool. Such an outlook is wrong. Through the utility of modern multi-role air power platforms, Australia possesses the ability to dissuade or deter without resorting to disproportionate means. By applying air power in graduated steps from surveillance through to precision strike, leverage can be exercised with the required degree of finesse to demonstrate displeasure reinforced by conviction. A thorough understanding of these roles and their application could prove to be a valuable weapon in a statesman's arsenal when confronted by an international crisis.

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<sup>12</sup> Russell, George, 'Attack – and Fallout', *Time* magazine, 22 June 1981, p 14.