



### THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR AIR POWER

The end of the Cold War saw a period of time when military power was employed in half-hearted ways to achieve objectives that were not always clearly defined. Most of the developed world resorted to arbitrary military budget cuts that left the armed forces with strategies that the emerging force structures were unable to sustain. The imbalance between force structure and force requirements was the greatest at this time. Then came the events of September 11.

The military imperatives of the global war on terrorism are now being considered as the primary capability driver. This is an incorrect assessment. The capabilities required to combat terrorism have to be catered to in addition to, not as a substitute for, capabilities identified and embedded in the defence forces earlier. The first use of air power against terrorist threats, in Afghanistan, painted a wrong picture—it was presumed that all future military actions would be against technologically inferior adversaries with limited warfighting capabilities.



*B-52 on bombing run over Afghanistan*

In Afghanistan, circumstances permitted the unhindered and effective use of legacy fighters and Cold War era bombers. This situation will not repeat itself. Declining defence budgets and shrinking force structures have eroded the technological advantage that traditionally assured success in air power missions. The need to shore-up the technological advantage has never been greater.

Warfighting is in the process of being radically changed, brought about primarily by the explosion in information technology and the advent of long-range precision strike capabilities. The combination of these two capabilities is epitomised in the holistic application of air power to achieve national security goals. It also provides the decision-makers at the highest level with a viable alternative to the attrition model of war characterised by the clash of large scale conventional military forces and the resultant heavy loss of life on both sides.

Although the assured reduction in loss of life as a concept should receive whole-hearted support, incredibly there is more than token resistance to it. Concepts such as effects-based operations that underpin the new way of thinking are greatly resisted by those with vested interest in traditional forms of warfare. These groups accuse air power proponents of claiming that air power can win wars by itself. Nothing could be further from the truth. No claims are being made that air power can win wars all on its own! However, it has to be accepted that the relative burden in warfare has clearly shifted. Air power carries much more of the total load than it ever did before and it can no longer be automatically assumed that the land battle is, or will ultimately become, the focal point in winning the war.

When carefully optimised, close integration of air and space power with land and maritime forces provides the greatest combat capability to a nation. Strategies that rely on single dimensions are not only inflexible, but in a wider perspective too risky to be applied in support of national security imperatives. While accepting that it may not always be possible to achieve complete victory by the employment of air power alone, it is also necessary to emphasise that victory of any kind will prove to be elusive without adequate air assets. It is now a reality that time sensitive precision targeting and long range systems make it increasingly possible to achieve the effects of mass and concentration of force without the

actual massing of forces within the range of enemy firepower.



*AC-130 'Spectre' gunship over Kosovo*

In the past two decades space has emerged as yet another dimension to be considered in warfighting. There is now a clearer understanding and acceptance of space power than in the past. Clearly discernible trends strongly indicate the migration of more and more military missions to space. The functions of information, surveillance and reconnaissance are now increasingly conducted by space-based assets and space systems are already extensively used to support and accentuate military operations on earth. It is only a matter of time before other missions will also be routinely conducted from space.

Within the foreseeable future, command of space will become as critical as command of the air is today. It can also be safely assumed that when the security of the nation is threatened by actions originating from or using the medium of space, the defence forces will be expected to counter it. Command of space in the years ahead will have to stem from seminal work that should be done today. Although air and space are independent mediums, there is a sense on continuum between them. It is therefore imperative that air commanders and air power strategists look to addressing the pros and cons of the application of space power to military missions on a regular basis.

The war on terrorism is at the forefront of the current global strategic scenario. The *modus operandi* of the adversary does not permit foolproof defence of one's own assets, even within home territory. The

strategy that is thus being advocated is to fight on the adversary's turf in order to neutralise enemy assets. This is almost completely reliant on situational awareness, mobility and long-range precision strikes, capabilities that form core competencies of air power. It is apparent that air power would have to be the lead in all such endeavours.

The arena of national security is more complex than ever before and needs rapid response capabilities at times of crises. Such rapid and appropriate responses can only be effectively achieved by constantly striving to have total situational awareness, adequate resources to provide the necessary reach and well-trained and reactive force projection capabilities. Superiority in air and space becomes a prerequisite for the nurturing of these capabilities. It is therefore obvious that these are the forces that the nation will look to first when faced with a threat. Other forms of force projection will always be second level options when time critical action is of paramount importance.

There is no substitute for air and space power!

*The air ocean and its endless outer space extension are one and indivisible, and should be controlled by a single homogeneous force.*

- Alexander P. de Seversky, 1962

'Pathfinder' is a fortnightly bulletin from the Air Power Development Centre. Its title is a tribute to the Pathfinder Force which operated within RAF Bomber Command from August 1942. The original Pathfinders were an elite navigational group with the role of preceding each raid and accurately lighting up the target area with incendiary fires to permit visual bombing by the main force. The first commander was Group Captain (later Air Vice-Marshal) D.C.T. Bennett, a Queenslander who trained with the RAAF in 1930-31 before transferring to the RAF, and many other Australians also flew with the force.

The emblem we have adopted is 'Fiery Mo', the unofficial insignia carried on No. 6 Squadron's Hudson aircraft in New Guinea during 1943.



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