



PROFESSIONAL MASTERY IN THE APPLICATION OF AIR POWER

The most important factor in the generation and application of air power, and the one that will determine the success of all operations, is the professional mastery of the practitioners. The blurring of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants and the complexity of the battlespace—urban, built-up areas where the adversary is resident within or in close proximity to innocent civilians—makes air power a difficult force projection capability to employ well.

In recent times the application of air power as part of national power has come under intense scrutiny from different angles. There has been debate regarding its application and how air power can be used to best effect while still being applied within the confines of the three fundamental concepts of military power projection—necessity, humanity and proportionality. Under these circumstances it is of paramount importance for air power advisers to have a deep understanding of all aspects of air operations in war and operations other than war, and clear professional mastery across the entire spectrum.

Essentially, the effectiveness of air power is contextual. It has to be appreciated that air power alone is not capable of doing it all and other military capabilities are equally important in achieving the ends being sought. Therefore, when air power is applied, its use must be tempered by knowledge that it is capable of escalating a conflict very swiftly, that it has a poor track record when it comes to winning the hearts and minds of the adversary, that the primacy of strike as an air power capability tends to distort the other equally crucial roles that it plays, and that there are significant command elements that are unique to its application as compared to other military capabilities. Employing air power well requires profound wisdom that can only come with professional mastery.

The effective exercise of air power must be tailored to integrate with the national security strategy. This can only be achieved by an air force with the professionalism and skills to focus the application of air power to achieve national objectives. It requires an

independent organisation at par with other facets of national power that is capable of adapting dynamically to emergent situations. It is professional mastery that will make the difference between wise application of air power towards this end and the ineffective dissipation of resources. Contributing the necessary air power capabilities to create joint outcomes demands expert decision-making by air and space power professionals. Such professionalism is founded on air power mastery that is created by a holistic understanding of the prevalent doctrine, air strategy, air force capabilities and future demands.

The exercising of professional mastery within a force is a product of the skill of its leaders and the flexibility and robustness of the organisation. Leadership is critical in shaping the force to be effective in operations and the organisation provides the processes by which emerging opportunities can be best exploited. Professional mastery therefore has to exist across the organisational and operational dimensions of the force in order for it to achieve the outcomes valued by the nation.



Professional mastery, which is primarily personal, is necessary both individually and collectively to generate the right balance and combination of logistics, equipment, weapon systems and skilled people in designing an air force. This assumes greater importance in the case of small forces with finite resources but operating at a high tempo. Professional mastery enhances a person's capability to analyse and synthesise

available information within a complex strategic context and be able to make the crucial contributions necessary to provide the organisation with the required robustness to meet emerging challenges and prevail.



Timely and correct decision-making is a critical element in ensuring success of any operation and the skills required to achieve professional mastery are a vital part of the equation. This includes traditional military and air power education and also other skills that improve an individual's understanding of a whole range of disparate matters, such as cultural issues, religious sensitivities, adversary doctrine, etc.

The face of warfare has changed in the past few decades and military forces are now constrained to prosecute their operations within the public glare provided by the ever-present media. While this is a laudable development from a democratic viewpoint, wherein the citizenry is provided with an unbiased view of their armed forces in action, it also brings unwelcome interference in the actual conduct of an operation. For a number of reasons air power receives more than its fair share of the media highlights and therefore interference in its application from, at times, poorly informed political leadership. This could prove to be detrimental in the achievement of laid down strategic objectives. Air force personnel with adequate professional mastery could remedy the situation by being able to inform the higher level decision-makers of the reality and providing them with acceptable options. This is a relatively new phenomenon and greatly increases the breadth of skills necessary to be an effective air power decision-maker.

Professional mastery and the confidence in one's capabilities will provide the personnel involved with the moral courage required to provide honest advice, even if such advice is unwelcome and may even have the potential to become politicised. Moral courage underpins the fundamental professional responsibility of all leaders to make informed decisions regarding the application of air power in the pursuit of national security. Moral courage bolstered by professional mastery allows personnel to make decisions in circumstances where information is imperfect, the fog and friction of combat is tangibly evident and the emerging situation is incredibly complex. It is only professional mastery that assists in mitigating strategic surprise and helps to manage risks in an acceptable manner.

Professional mastery is the tenet that links organisational flexibility, proper application of air and space power and force projection capabilities within the ambit of a whole-of-government, National Effects-Based Approach to ensuring the nation's security.

- *Professional mastery is critical to effective application of air power*
- *Air power must be applied within the bounds of the fundamental concepts of military power projection—necessity, humanity and proportionality*
- *Professional mastery in combination with moral courage provides decision-makers with the capacity to mitigate strategic surprises*
- *The breadth of skills required to be an effective air power decision-maker has increased considerably in the recent past*

Having the second-best air force is like having the second best hand in poker—it gets you nothing yet costs you money.

– General George C. Kenney (Ret) USAAF



Air Power Development Centre
Level 3, 205 Anketell Street
TUGGERANONG ACT 2900

Ph: 02 6266 1355 Fax: 02 6266 1041
Email: airpower@defence.gov.au
Web: www.raaf.gov.au/airpower

