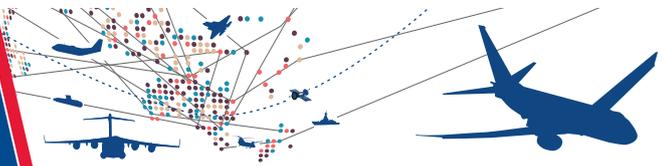




2020
AIR POWER
CONFERENCE

AIR POWER AND INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY



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Introduction to the 2020 Air Power Conference

Air Marshal Mel Hupfeld

Good morning and thank you all for taking the time to participate in the 2020 Air Power Symposium, and for joining us to consider Air Power and Indo-Pacific Security.

I'm sure we are all familiar with the oft-quoted curse, "May you live in interesting times." I don't think I know exactly who came up with it, but it's likely they had 2020 in mind when they did. Yes, this has been quite a year so far, but beneath the media attention that raging bushfires and international pandemics receive, something greater is at play. In the mind of any observer of our region's political climate - these are indeed interesting times.

While peace prevails in a traditional sense of warfare, changing great power and regional dynamics are driving accelerated uncertainty. There is increasing competition for regional political and military influence. With that, there are significant implications for both individual nations' and our region's sovereignty and security.

Within this climate, Australia's foremost foreign and security policy goal is fostering an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific. We seek a region that is characterised by stable, prosperous and sovereign states. Our partners must be individually and collectively resistant to coercion, while remaining open to engagement on the basis of shared interests. And as a nation, we are committed to a proactive agenda to shape such a region, and seek to work with all of our regional partners in this endeavour.

Over the course of this conference we will be exploring what all of this means for how air and space power can contribute to Indo-Pacific security.

It is a critically important topic to explore. The Indo-Pacific is our region; we are at its heart and it is where we live. It embraces our Pacific family, our close neighbours, our major trading partners, strategic partners and allies, and the world's fastest growing economies. It offers unparalleled opportunity and its dynamism can support ongoing economic growth, creating jobs and enhancing our standard of living.

But it is a region in flux. Australia cannot afford to be an indifferent bystander if we are to safeguard our sovereignty, our safety and our livelihoods. We must sharpen our influence and bring it to bear to protect and promote our interests.

Australian Air Power

As Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force I am responsible for providing an effective air and space power capability for Australia. That capability must support not only our national security but also maintain and advance our national interests.

I don't take this responsibility lightly. How we as a nation use air and space power has significant implications for the security, safety and prosperity for our nation, and our entire region.

Thanks to the brilliant stewardship of my predecessors, I have taken over in the midst of the most profound peacetime build-up of capabilities in our Air Force's history.

On the eve of its centenary, the Royal Australian Air Force is close to completing the most significant update to our platforms ever undertaken.

In doing so, we are transitioning out of our historical bespoke force of standalone capabilities. Our end state will be a networked force capable of delivering air and space power effects for the integrated force, and across the full spectrum of conflict.

Of course, I am proud to be leading what is arguably now the most modern air force in the world. But more importantly, it is now one of the world's most versatile air forces. It is this fundamental characteristic that is critical to delivering the very broad spectrum of utility that is increasingly required of it both at home and throughout our region.

To return to the new reality of our regional political environment, uncertainty is driving one key certainty – that we

will be called upon to do more, and to do it more often.

In short, interesting times demand an air force that is capable of operating across the entire spectrum of air and space power. From humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, to developing and bolstering regional capability, and – as always – high-end kinetic operations.

The Delivery of Air Power as a Component of National Power

While we've been focused on our own strategic transformation, our operating environment has also changed.

With ever-increasing competition and jockeying for influence across the Indo-Pacific, we are seeing some actors working below our previous thresholds for conflict or even for intervention.

No doubt you've heard the expression grey zone tactics. They are actions where national power outcomes are achieved below the threshold that would normally trigger any use of traditional military response.

Some regional powers call this winning without fighting, because they know the significant challenge and cost of competing with our technologies and capabilities.

And it is into this environment that we will need to deploy Australian air power for the foreseeable future. It is why we need to shift our thinking about air power as an element of national power.

We can no longer take a platform-centric point of view or place our confidence in traditional air superiority. Today's reality is that strategic goals are already being won and lost in ways that don't – and won't – involve force-on-force conflict.

This means that we can no longer afford to view the Royal Australian Air Force as being just about aircraft. We need to demonstrate national power across a broader spectrum - from influence and competition to counterinfluence and conflict. There has already been significant thought and energy devoted to considering the role of air power in these winning-without-fighting scenarios.

Of course, we must start from first principles. The Royal Australian Air Force remains Australia's primary provider of air power to meet our national defence requirements.

Our air combat excellence remains a bedrock requirement and we will continue to focus on building joint, integrated missions to generate combat superiority. This scenario, of course, extends to continued and enhanced cooperation with our partners and allies throughout the region.

But in the winning-without-fighting environment we are now facing, there are challenges that won't always suit the application of force. While we recognise that the provision of air combat power will always be required from us, Grey Zone tactics and other threats means there is a requirement for an improved value proposition to government.

That means that the Royal Australian Air Force, within the joint force, needs to broaden the options it provides as an instrument of national power. In addition to our traditional combat roles, we must also maximise our contribution to national-level influence and deterrence.

I want to ensure air power brings greater value to the joint force, and to whole-of-government efforts to enhance Australia's national security. So, we're adopting an effects-oriented strategy which focuses on three key areas: access and influence, exposure, and cost-imposition.

With access and influence we underpin deterrence and regional influence. We do this through cultivating military cooperation and alliances and maintaining persistent regional presence in support of national influence measures.

Exposure relates to our ability to contribute to joint force effects which lay-bare and discourage grey zone actions.

Finally – cost-imposition. Our air power effects must be able to impose an intolerable cost to rival states that persist in unacceptable behaviours against Australian interests.

This means we must rethink how we blend traditional and emerging air power roles and missions. This will be critical to unlocking the necessary asymmetry required of a medium size air force.

Constant Operations for Constant Influence

Grey zone tactics deliberately blur the distinction between war and peace. And since we are experiencing them right now, the Royal Australian Air Force needs to move to a mode where we are comfortable in an environment of constant competition.

The value of Australian air power within the joint force will be measured by its ability to deter, deny and discourage traditional military threats. Our contribution to the government's deterrence and influence options must be able to

prevent malign behaviours or policies that are counter to our interests. But most importantly, Australian air power will be assessed against its ability to positively influence regional outcomes that support our national security goals.

Therefore, we need to recalibrate our thinking so that air and space power, as part of the joint force, is a tool of national power that is constantly operating. Not simply at the ready in case of outright conflict, but deployed in some form, all the time.

Of course, we saw this recently with the commitment shown by the Australian Defence Force in responding to the bushfire crisis and the COVID-19 response. This is a great example of the Australian Defence Force's broader value to government beyond our traditional combat roles.

While these responses have rightly captured the nation's attention, this type of relief mission actually represents business as usual for much of our air force. Our people routinely answer the call in ways that largely go unnoticed. For much of the Royal Australian Air Force, such as our mobility, combat support and maritime communities, constantly operating has always been a way of life. The rest of the force must be open to learning from them, in order to build cultures that can withstand enduring operations.

Constant operations place significant pressure on any workforce, and we will need to build resilience if we are to sustain this constant operating model, and remain effective.

Broadening our Value-Proposition: Multi Domain Influence

To ensure air power's value and diversity contribute to the joint force's value proposition for government, we need to achieve synergies across domains to generate access, presence, influence, and deterrence in support of our national security goals.

And while our core air power roles, such as control of the air or mobility, all remain just as relevant today as in the past, we must also capitalise on the synergies available through Multi-domain Operations.

Multi-domain Operations and the associated Command and Control paradigm have become an important way of thinking about how we can fight and win in the event of conflict. We can capitalise on this model by broadening it to suit the winning-without-fighting environment we face.

But Multi-domain operations provide much broader potential to unlock the necessary asymmetry for us to prevail across the entire competition continuum. We need to explore how we can achieve synergy across domains to generate strategic effect for government. It is only through a multi-domain approach that we will achieve the access, presence, influence, denial and counter-coercion effects that best prepare us to win without fighting.

And we should be looking at how to achieve these effects through joint force integration. How might elements of the Royal Australian Air Force cooperate with Army and Navy elements to achieve synergies and force multiplication in the fight for influence? What are the specific capabilities each service brings, and how can they best cooperate?

This will demand significant coordination and integration across all domains including air, land, maritime, space and cyberspace. The requirement to link effects across these domains further underscores the importance of moving away from platform-centric thinking.

But equally, this multi-domain logic must be broadened to whole-of-government applications. By linking influence operations, the Australian Defence Force can achieve whole-of-government efforts to wield national influence. This will permit us to generate maximum impact in a high contest regional environment.

And, of course, it must be broadened to international partners. We must explore pathways for multi-domain influence operations with all of our regional partners.

We once viewed international engagement as a secondary activity to enhance our operations. But it should instead be foundational to everything the Royal Australian Air Force and the Australian Defence Force does to contribute to national security and national influence throughout the Indo-Pacific.

End transcript.