

PATHFINDER

AIR POWER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE BULLETIN



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THE ART OF AIR POWER: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE 2010 RAAF AIR POWER CONFERENCE

The recently conducted 2010 RAAF Air Power Conference (2010APC) provided a valuable opportunity to consider key issues such as the role of air power in current and emerging national security concepts, Government requirements and intentions of the Air Force and the air power it generates, and what the Air Force can do in order to be prepared to meet emerging challenges as a first rate provider of air power. With the theme of *The Art of Air Power* (reflecting Sun Tzu's enduring treatise on war and strategy, *The Art of War*), the 2010APC analysed current perspectives of air power in terms of where it is now, what its future may be, and the implications of this for Australian air power. This *Pathfinder* summarises the key points that emerged from 2010APC. More importantly, it will be through the art of air power, enabled by professional mastery, that the Air Force can both transform to a future force and successfully deliver air power for Australian national security with that force.

The conference focused on four key areas of air power in Australian national security, namely, the role of air power in national security in terms of the 2009 Defence White Paper; the challenges to air power in meeting its full potential in difficult geopolitical and security environments; the role of air power in irregular warfare; and the key air power capability requirements such as space and ISR as identified in the 2009 Defence White Paper.

There were five key outcomes from the conference. First, there is a need to understand the way conflict, and the critical role of air power within it, has evolved. Second, the need to study current and emerging characteristics of

conflicts and the strategies required to prevail in them. Third, the need to have a strategic understanding of Government's requirements of the military for Australian national security; that is, having a military strategy that directly flows from a national security outlook. These three factors are critical for the Air Force to enable it

to plan, prepare and conduct the increasingly complex operations Government requires of it across a broad spectrum of conflict. The fourth factor is the need to further develop air power enabled ISR and space capabilities in an integrated manner to meet the Future Joint Operating Concept and Future Air and Space Operating Concept in accordance with the 2009 Defence White Paper. Lastly, Air Force needs to leverage the flexibility inherent in a balanced force to counter irregular and non-state adversaries operating in a complex battlespace, while at the same time, retaining capability to meet high-end conventional threats. Importantly, each of these factors is integral to the Air Force and its mission in providing air and space power for Australia's security.



Chief of Air Force, AM Mark Binskin, stressed the importance of professional mastery in his closing of the 2010 Air Power Conference.

Traditionally, the art of air power has been in applying the four key enduring air power roles: ensuring control of the air, affecting elements or events on the ground, observing things from the air and moving things through the air. Historically, control of the air has been viewed as the most important of these roles, however, there is a growing belief that information superiority is an equally important air power role. The Royal Air Force Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Sir Stephen Dalton reflected this emerging perspective in suggesting earlier this year 'it will be air power's ability to maximise its comparative

advantage in the third and fourth dimensions and to dominate the information space that will underwrite its future utility as a useful, credible, viable and essential tool in both the influence and hard elements of national power.' Such a statement challenges traditional air power mindsets and the notion that air power is primarily offensive in nature. ACM Dalton is not alone in suggesting such change. LTGEN David Deptula, a pilot like ACM Dalton, has led the USAF transformation of ISR stressing the operationalisation of intelligence. Both perspectives show the potential synergies in knowledge dominance that air power can provide to the joint commander. Knowledge dominance exploits the inherent strengths and characteristics of air power—theatre wide perspective, global reach, flexibility, penetration and responsiveness that can create strategic effects.

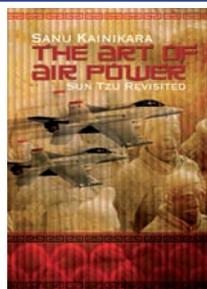
In his presentation to the conference, the Chief of the Defence Force, ACM Angus Houston, noted that the enhancement of the Air Force's ISR capability will be impressive. More important, he acknowledged that the Air Force will take a leading role in data sensor fusion. To do so, it must transform its ISR capabilities and take a leading role in developing and promoting the ISR concept across Air Force and within the wider joint community. Overall, there is much alignment in ACM Dalton's, LTGEN Deptula's and ACM Houston's understanding of the capacity of air power to be the primary provider of information superiority in the battlespace.

ISR is only part of the transformation that Australian air power will undergo in the coming decade. As the Minister and CDF outlined at the conference, the Air Force is transforming from a modern Air Force to a future force characterised by 5th generation air combat aircraft, uninhabited aerial systems, networked ISR, and global reach. This is a significant challenge that will require Air Force to not only apply the art of air power to operations but also to its transformation from a modern tactical Air Force to a future networked enabled and strategically influential force providing Government with effective air power in support of Australian national security.

However, the critical need for Air Force is not just the realisation of this future force through the application of the art of air power but effectively applying the future force's capabilities in support of Australian national security. This will require a clear understanding and knowledge of air power and strategy. The fundamental

building block to achieve this is professional mastery; a key priority highlighted by CAF in his Commander's Intent.

Having air power strategists who can articulate the integration of air power, and thus our future force, in national security—in essence, having air power statesmen—will represent the pinnacle of the art of air power. It is only then that Air Force will realise a future force capable of conducting integrated operations to address complex security challenges and providing Government with strategic response options in support of Australian national interests. More importantly, Australian air power will be effectively integrated into a national effects-based security strategy by statesmen of air power who can successfully articulate and integrate air power at the national level. This can only be achieved through mastering the art of air power.



The Art of Air Power, by Dr Sanu Kainikara from APDC, examines the relevance of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* in terms of air power theory and strategy, and was launched by Chief of Air Force at the Conference.

- *Conflict, and the role of air power within it, is evolving and there is a need to ensure we understand such change in developing the future force.*
- *The rise of ISR as a key air power role challenges traditional air power mindsets and the tenet that air power is primarily offensive in nature.*
- *Mastering the art of air power, through professional mastery, will enable Air Force to transform to the future force and apply it to Australian national security interests.*

'Leading an Air Force, directing an air campaign and controlling and conducting air operations is an art—the art of air power.'

Air Marshal M. Binskin,
Chief of Air Force



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

