



NEWPORT PAPERS

A Series of Point Papers
from the Naval War College and the
Navy Warfare Development Command
For Senior Leadership
In Response to Critical Issues

Strategy / CONOPS / Doctrine / Decision

United States Naval War College
Navy Warfare Development Command
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Newport Paper: 24**EMPLOYING AERIAL COERCION TO COMBAT TERRORISM:
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE THEATER CINC**

Purpose: This paper examines aerial coercion, its applicability to, and effectiveness against, state-sponsored and non-state terrorism.¹ While air power can be a powerful weapon for the Theater Commander-in-Chief (CINC) to employ in combating terrorism, it is not decisive in and of itself. In order to be successful, the Theater CINC must be able to determine when aerial coercion is applicable and under what conditions it will be effective. The selective application of air power, specifically the employment of high technology weapons against select targets that directly affect a terrorist's will to continue his course of action, can overcome both self-imposed operational constraints and enemy anti-coercion strategies. When employed in conjunction with other measures, to include the use (threatened or actual) of ground troops and diplomatic, economic, or information initiatives, aerial coercion can successfully change a terrorist's course of action and influence his behavior.

Discussion: War fighting at all levels (strategic, operational and tactical) is guided by 'principles of war' described as the bedrock of U.S. military doctrine.² This set of principles, however, primarily applies to conventional conflicts. Planning and operations for military operations other than war are guided by a separate set of principles. Contained in this distinct set are the principles of objective, unity of effort, and security that are derived from the former list, and the principles of restraint, legitimacy, and perseverance that are MOOTW unique.³ Restraint is the need to apply appropriate military capability prudently. Key to this principle is the concept of proportionality, which notes that force expended must be proportional to the objective sought. Both restraint and proportionality are crucial in the fight against terrorism. If force is not used judiciously, it will damage the user's legitimacy while enhancing the opponent's legitimacy.⁴

As the United States increasingly operates with multi-national forces, the legitimacy of an operation, based upon a specific audience's perception of the legality, morality, or rightness of a set of actions, will be paramount to sustaining the effort.⁵ Terrorism is a contentious issue within the international community, and is made even more so because it is ill defined under the United Nations Charter. Article 2, Paragraph 4, of the Charter states, "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."⁶ The exception to that rule, other than when authorized by the Security Council, is self-defense. Article 51 states that nothing "...shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs."⁷ The phrase 'if an armed attack occurs' puts the commander in a legal gray area when contemplating anticipatory self-defense versus self-

defense after the fact. Harold Robertson in a recent Naval War College Review points out the “unreality” of forcing one side to “absorb the first blow,” “...especially in this age of missiles and weapons of mass destruction [and precision guided weapons], where the first strike may be fatal.”⁸ If military action in the fight against terrorism is conducted under the auspices of anticipatory or pre-emptive self-defense, the legitimacy of the operation may be challenged by coalition partners and the international community.

The final MOOTW unique principle, perseverance, underscores the importance of preparing for the measured and protracted application of military capability in support of strategic aims.⁹ Perseverance, when applied to coercive efforts, is absolutely paramount to credibility. Coercion, as Robert Pape suggests, is intended to force an opponent to “...choose between making concessions or suffering the consequences of continuing its present course of action.”¹⁰ If a lack of protracted action (either stated or implied) causes a terrorist to perceive there to be no credible threat, then there is no incentive for him to make any concession. Nowhere is this entire concept more important than in the fight against terrorism - especially involving non-state actors - where the causes are difficult to discern, the perpetrators are hard to target, and the outcomes are rarely decisive.

The objective of the fight against terrorism is to force the terrorists, either those committing or sponsoring the acts, to alter their behavior. This is accomplished when force, or its threat, is used to influence a deteriorating or potentially hostile situation, deter an adversary's action, or compel compliance. If air power delivers the ‘force,’ then it becomes aerial coercion. The degree to which a coercive effort is successful can be evaluated, in part, by examining the extent to which the principles of restraint, legitimacy, and perseverance were leveraged as means to reach the desired objective.

Aerial Coercion and State-Sponsored Terrorism

State-sponsored terrorism is an operational dichotomy. On one hand, the potential damage a terrorist group can inflict against a state is increased by the support, active or passive, given to such a group by other states.¹¹ On the other, it also increases the options available to those against which the terrorism was targeted. Under the 1949 Geneva Convention on the Law of Armed Conflict, state-sponsored terrorists are considered illegal combatants. As such, less stringent restrictions and legal obligations are placed on the

Theater CINC that, in turn, results in increased response options. Above all else, it provides the operational commander with a tangible target - a state - toward which a response can be directed. Studies have shown, however, that while often dependent on the type of government in power, states have difficulty accepting coerced change to actions they have put in motion.¹² Despite this reality, aerial coercion has been employed against state-sponsored terrorists on numerous occasions to deter further attacks and to compel them to act within international norms.

The 1983 air strikes by the United States against terrorist targets in the Bekaa Valley (see Appendix A) and the 1986 strikes by the United States against Libya (see Appendix B)

are two examples wherein aerial coercion was employed against state-sponsored terrorists. In both cases the United States demonstrated a great deal of restraint, some intentional and some unintentional. In the case of the Bekaa Valley strike, inadequate planning was largely responsible for the inconsequential nature of the targets selected. Insufficient training and poor execution were responsible for the limited number of targets hit. Operational failures aside, restraint in this case was not compatible with the overall strategic goal of the coercive effort. The results of the strike were not proportional to the damage caused by the terrorist attacks, nor did the targets hit have any meaningful effect on the terrorists. In the raid against Libya, although few targets were struck, their destruction had a profound effect on the coercive effort. The vast majority of the targets hit in the attack were selected with the specific aim of reducing Libya's ability to support terrorist activities. The 'personalization' of one target, however, significantly affected Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi's will to continue the policy of supporting terrorism unabated.¹³

The effect the strike on Lebanon had on the legitimacy of the effort against terrorism was the exact opposite of that desired by the United States. The strike was viewed as an act of reprisal that, although technically a legal act in response to a prior illegal act, has a lower moral standing in the international community than self-defense.¹⁴ Rather than enhance the morality of the fight against terrorism, the strike on Lebanon elevated the status and legitimacy of the terrorists. The raid against Libya was also viewed by some in the international community as an act of reprisal, despite claims by the United States that it was an act of pre-emptive self-defense. As discussed, the concept of self-defense is universally accepted within the international community. The idea of *anticipatory* or *pre-emptive* self-defense is not universally accepted however, and the legitimacy of actions conducted under those auspices has been called into question. Nevertheless, the application of air power in an attempt to coerce Libya to end its support of terrorism was widely viewed as legitimate.

For a coercive effort to be successful it must be viewed as credible. The Theater CINC must, in both actuality and appearance, be prepared for the measured and protracted application of resources. Against Lebanon, there was no perseverance in the coercive effort against the terrorists. The United States withdrew militarily from Lebanon, there were no additional measures implemented against the terrorists or their sponsors, and the Lebanese sponsored terrorist group Hizballah remains one of the most active and dangerous in the world. Although direct military operations against Libya ceased after Operation El Dorado Canyon, other flexible deterrent operations continued. The international community joined the United States in applying long-term political and economic sanctions that, combined with the persistent threat of further military intervention, "succeeded in achieving the United States' political objectives."¹⁵ The credibility absent from the effort against Lebanon was evident in coercive effort against Libya. The measured and protracted initiatives implemented to deter Libya's continued support of terrorism ultimately compelled Libya to comply with international norms.

Aerial Coercion and Non-State Terrorism

Whereas state-sponsored terrorists provide the theater CINC a tangible foe, non-state terrorists are much more elusive. Because they operate across borders, with or without the acquiescence of the host country, non-state terrorists are difficult to target. While states are frequently difficult to coerce due to bureaucratic inertia and national pride, coercing individuals can be even more challenging because they are often committed to their current course of action no matter the cost. These two factors make the use of air power as the primary coercive agent against non-state actors extremely complicated. The United States has on occasion, however, turned to aerial coercion in an attempt to deter the actions of non-state terrorists.

In 1998 the United States launched cruise missile strikes against terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. Both the proportionality of the cruise missile strikes in relation to their targets and the overall application of military power were questioned. The goal of the strikes was to coerce Usama bin Laden to cease terrorist operations, but the targets selected did not achieve that aim. Evidence showed the targets were selected in large part due to political expediency. For example, the El Shifa chemical plant, explained a White House official, “could be struck with little risk of civilian casualties.”¹⁶ In 2001, the United States again employed air power against Usama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan. The United States, while employing significant air power against the Al Qaeda organization, has thus far limited its actions to purely military targets. The introduction of ground troops to find, fix, and identify targets has greatly increased the effectiveness of the air strikes and significantly minimized collateral damage. The low amount of collateral damage has consequently aided in sustaining the legitimacy of the operation.

The legitimacy of the 1998 cruise missile strikes was questioned both internationally and domestically. It also highlighted a problem that exists when attempting to confront non-state terrorists. Unilateral action may be required if terrorists are operating out of (but not necessarily sponsored by) countries that are not party to a coalition, or in situations where neither ‘friendly’ basing nor over-flight rights are available. The violation of another country’s sovereignty to achieve military and political objectives in the fight against non-state actors may be a necessity. The legitimacy of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan has been largely unquestioned thus far. The horrific nature of the terrorist attack that precipitated the response notwithstanding, almost universal international support has solidified the moral justification of the operation.

Similar to state-sponsored terrorism, if any attempt to coerce non-state terrorists is to be successful or even credible, it must be sustained. This sentiment was echoed in a 1998 article on the self-imposed limits of air power where Stephen Aubin stated, “...[e]ven in the case of the strikes against terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan, the success of the cruise missiles (and this form of air power) ultimately depends on whether the war against world terrorism will be sustained by the Clinton administration.”¹⁷ After the strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan, the United States made no further attempt (other than hollow rhetoric) to persevere in its coercive effort against Usama bin Laden who, undeterred, continued sponsoring terrorist attacks against the United States. Forced to confront to same terrorist problem, the current Bush administration and the Department

of Defense have repeatedly stated that Enduring Freedom operations in Afghanistan are only the beginning of a long international campaign to end world terrorism. To date, the United States has shown requisite perseverance in eradicating the terrorist threat operating from within Afghanistan. The question remains, however, as to whether this operation will be credible enough to convince the remainder of the Al Qaeda network operating in other parts world to end its campaign of terror. If not, the United States must have the political and military will to continue the effort and finish the mission.

Enemy Options to Defeat Coercion

Coercion is a dynamic process. As such, terrorists will attempt to counter each move made by the United States with strategies designed to take advantage of perceived weaknesses. Coalition fracturing is an obvious strategy. Although the United States reserves the right to act unilaterally when national interests are at stake, it prefers to strengthen the legitimacy of its actions by operating within a coalition. With few exceptions, all United States coercive military operations since the end of the Cold War have been prosecuted under the auspices of the United Nations or NATO, or of *ad hoc* collections of allies or partners.¹⁸ Each coalition member brings its own set of interests. Terrorist states and organizations will try to leverage those interests in an attempt to split the coalition. State-sponsored terrorists may attempt to target specific states within the coalition, while non-state sponsored groups, like Al Qaeda, have unabashedly attempted to link their operations to a larger ‘cause.’ In an attempt to maintain coalition unity, restrictions are placed on the type and amount of force employed, which ultimately reward the adversary’s coalition-splitting efforts and further encourage such ploys.¹⁹

Another method of countering coercion is a casualty generating strategy. A common perception within the international community is that the United States is not willing to engage in a situation that could result in a large number of military casualties. In confirmation of those perceptions, a RAND study concluded that, in limited war situations, “...the public tends to be unwilling to tolerate anything more than minimal costs.”²⁰ Democratic states seem especially sensitive to casualties, so much so that “even newly democratic Russia feared raising its (friendly) casualty count too high in its war in Chechnya.”²¹ Capitalizing on this apparent casualty aversion, terrorists, both state and non-state sponsored, have struck military assets of the United States in the past with relative impunity. The 1983 bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, which killed 241 and wounded 100, resulted in the ‘decision’ to move U.S. forces offshore.²² If terrorists can raise the level of ‘pain’ above what political and military leaders are willing to accept, especially in operations considered peripheral to national interests, then the terrorists have rendered coercion impotent.

The civilian suffering-based strategy is perhaps the most effective counter to coercive pressure from the United States. Once a coercive effort is undertaken, terrorists attempt to portray themselves as the victims. Those who cannot compete with the United States militarily highlight the loss of civilian life and collateral damage in hope of preventing further strikes and curtailing the coercive pressure completely. Sudan, a country virtually inaccessible to international media, invited television crews to view the damage to the

pharmaceutical facility in Khartoum in the wake of the 1998 cruise missile strikes.²³ The instant access of television, the so-called ‘Cable News Network (CNN) effect,’ has greatly aided efforts to sway international and domestic opinion towards those being ‘victimized.’ Due to an over-arching desire to uphold humanitarian norms, even when domestic and international support for further coercive strikes does not erode, the United States limits the coercive pressure it can bring to bear by imposing a range of restrictions on its activities.²⁴

Restraints

For aerial coercion to be an effective strategy in combating terrorism, the Theater CINC must have the will to overcome traditionally self-imposed restraints. Such restraints include a preference for coalition operations, intolerance for U.S. casualties, aversion to civilian suffering, sole reliance on high technology weapons, and an excessive commitment to international norms.²⁵ Of these, the first three are easily exploited by terrorist organizations and can lead directly to the counter-strategies previously discussed. The last two restraints arbitrarily limit the type and amount of military force the Theater CINC can employ.

The United States has the most advanced military and equipment in the world. Its reliance on high technology weapons has, paradoxically, rendered it at odds with the concept of perseverance. Colonel John A. Warden argues that “air power permits the *virtual* occupation of enemy territory by aircraft without requiring a potentially entangling and costly ground occupation.”²⁶ (emphasis added) This is not the same as an *actual* occupation. By removing the ground option, the United States has undermined its own credibility by declaring that it is not willing to assume the risks or incur the costs associated with that particular course of action. Operationally, the problem is similar. Aerial coercion employs precision weapons that “...by concentrating force to hit what they aim at (which may or may not be what they should aim at) achieve the desired effects with fewer engagements than non-precision weapons.”²⁷ While extremely effective, this is often construed as an attempt to ‘win wars on the cheap.’

Continued distortion by the United States of international norms also poses a problem for the operational commander attempting to coerce terrorists with the use of air power. In Afghanistan, the fear of criticism about civilian casualties not only influenced wartime decisions, but also increased the likelihood of Al Qaeda chieftains escaping because of its pervasive influence on U.S. strategy.²⁸ The United States continually imposes restraints on the type and amount of force that can be employed in military operations in an attempt to maintain legitimacy. While this loosely corresponds to the principle of restraint, which states military capabilities should be applied appropriately and prudently, it is not completely compatible with the concept of coercion. To be successful, aerial coercion, or any other form of coercion, must be credible. If the United States is not willing to increase the pressure it applies to an adversary, then any attempt at coercion will not be credible. At that point, terrorists can capitalize on such constraints and win a coercive contest despite being militarily, politically, and economically inferior.²⁹

Conclusions: Aerial coercion is extremely difficult to implement. Success can be attained only if the coercer is fully prepared to impose its demands by force and usually only after fighting a long way toward a military decision.³⁰ Properly applied, air power may not only negate enemy strategies to defeat coercion, but can overcome several self-imposed constraints as well. Because it has the most advanced military equipment in the world, the use of air power within a coalition often means the United States will provide the vast majority of the military forces. High technology weapons, in combination with its power projection capability, enable the United States - while *technically* a member of a coalition - to operate *effectively* but unilaterally.

Air power also makes it difficult to execute an effective casualty generating counter-strategy. Against low-technology adversaries, air power's inherent standoff range, especially when combined with precision-guided weapons, make it relatively invulnerable. The increased use of cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for reconnaissance and combat will make it exponentially difficult for adversaries to inflict casualties on U.S. military forces. Precision-guided weapons also negate civilian suffering-based counter-strategies. While not perfect, precision-guided weapons not only limit collateral damage, but bolster coercive strategies by enabling the coercer to turn punishment on and off at will, as well as modulate it into fine increments.³¹ Consequently, this also resolves the self-imposed constraint of conforming to international norms for, "in comparison with the devastating impact on civilians of coercive mechanisms such as sanctions, modern air warfare stands out as an increasingly efficient, effective, and humane tool of foreign policy."³²

Aerial coercion can be effective in combating both state-sponsored and non-state terrorism. For state-sponsored terrorism, the hostile act of another state provides the target state with a visible putative foe.³³ This not only increases the military and diplomatic options by which the Theater CINC can respond, but it increases the legitimacy of the operation. Legally, international norms concerning operations against hostile states are clearly defined. While restraint may become less of a concern against states that prove initially immune to coercion, perseverance is essential to success. The Theater CINC must be prepared politically and operationally for a sustained effort.

Despite increased difficulty, non-state actors can also be coerced through air power. The legal and political difficulties in dealing with non-state actors, however, will inevitably harm the legitimacy of any operation the Theater CINC implements. Because operations are likely to violate another country's sovereignty, restraint may also become a more significant issue. No attempt at coercion will be successful if the effort is not perceived as credible; thus, perseverance will again be of paramount importance - especially against individuals or groups who are committed to their cause no matter what the cost.

Recommendations: A relatively new entry to the lexicon of military jargon, aerial coercion has quickly become the military and diplomatic tool of choice for the United States. As such, the Theater CINC must be prepared to implement that option - even in conditions where the probability of success is less than favorable. In the fight against

state-sponsored and non-state terrorism, the Theater CINC can implement several measures to significantly enhance the coercive effects of air power:

1. Have the political and military will to finish mission. For coercion (of any type) to be successful, it must carry a credible threat of 'pain' beyond the benefits that an adversary may anticipate through resistance. Within parameters set by civilian superiors, this may involve ignoring international and domestic pressure, violating established 'norms,' and acting unilaterally to accomplish the mission.
2. Have a strategic plan. The most important aspect of the strategic plan is 'effective targeting.' Targets cannot be hit simply because they are targets. In a coercive effort, select targets will be struck in an attempt to change or deter an adversary's behavior. Consequently, each target chosen must have a direct effect on the terrorist's will to continue his course of action.
3. Implement in conjunction with diplomatic, economic and information initiatives. In certain situations, some flexible deterrent options may have limited applicability. However, coercive efforts against both state-sponsored and non-state terrorists must be a coordinated, protracted operation employing all means available. The Theater CINC should coordinate and integrate coercive efforts with initiatives from other national and international agencies.
4. Employ in conjunction with ground forces. Ground forces are required to accurately find, fix, and identify targets. Against state-sponsored terrorists they can be surrogate or multinational forces, while against non-state terrorists U.S. ground or Special Forces can be employed. Additionally, ground forces should be on stand-by for employment if aerial coercion is unsuccessful and, of equal importance, to signal further United States' resolve to finish the operation.

NOTES

¹ While there are instances where aerial coercion may also be applicable against domestic terrorism, they will not be addressed in this paper.

² U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations, Joint Pub 3-0 (Washington, DC: 10 Sep 2001), A-1. These principles include: objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity.

³ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, II-1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II-4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II-5.

⁶ United Nations. The Charter of the United Nations – 26 June 1945. (Reprint from AFP 110-20, 27 July 1981): 5-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

⁸ Horace B. Robertson, Jr. "Contemporary International Law: Relevant to Today's World?" Naval War College Review, Summer 1992: 101.

⁹ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, II-4.

¹⁰ Pape, 12.

¹¹ Henry W. Prunkin, Jr. and Philip B. Mohr, "Military Deterrence of International Terrorism: An Evaluation of Operation El Dorado Canyon," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 20, 1997: 268.

¹² Maj. Scott Walker, "A Unified Theory of Coercive Airpower," Airpower Journal (Summer 1997): 71.

¹³ David R Klubes, Conventional Strategic Bombing and Compellence, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1999), 313.

¹⁴ Richard B. Lillich, "Forcible Self-help Under International Law," Reprinted from U.S. Naval War College International Law Studies, Vol. 62, (Volume II of Readings) Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1980: 131.

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- ¹⁵ Klubes, 313 and Prunckun and Mohr, 277.
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- ¹⁸ Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "Defeating US Coercion," Survival, Vol. 41, no. 2, (Summer 1999): 108.
- ¹⁹ Byman and Waxman, 114.
- ²⁰ Maj. Charles K. Hyde, USAF, "Casualty Aversion Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers," Aerospace Power Journal (Summer 2000): 19.
- ²¹ Michael Horowitz and Dan Reiter, "When Does Aerial Bombing Work? Quantitative Empirical Tests, 1917-1999," Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 45, no. 2, (April 2001): 150.
- ²² Byman and Waxman, 115.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 112.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.
- ²⁶ Maj. Marc K. Dippold, USAF, "Air Occupation: Asking the Right Questions," Air Power Journal, Winter 1997: 69.
- ²⁷ Col. Richard Szafranski, USAF, "Twelve Principles Emerging From Ten Propositions," Air Power Journal, Spring 1996: 78.
- ²⁸ William M. Arkin, "Fear of Civilian Deaths May Have Undermined Effort," Los Angeles Times, 16 January 2002, sec. 1, p. 1.
- ²⁹ Byman and Waxman, 107.
- ³⁰ Pape, 316.
- ³¹ Pape, 320.
- ³² Phillip Meilinger, "A Matter of Precision," Foreign Policy, no. 123 (Mar/Apr 2001): 78. Meilinger cites a 1993 study by the Harvard Center for Population on the sanctions imposed by the Organization of American States (in 1991) and the United Nations (in 1993) that not only failed to persuade coup leaders to surrender power but also caused considerable civilian deaths. Upwards of 1,000 children a month were killed compared to a handful of deaths, civilian and military, resulting from the United States' armed intervention.
- ³³ Prunckun and Mohr, 268.