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AIR FORCE FELLOWS

AIR UNIVERSITY

DESERT TALONS:

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS OF AIR POLICING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

by

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As US and coalition ground forces seek to transfer security authority to Iraqi battalions, airpower is uniquely endowed with capabilities that will allow it to act as a force multiplier and ensure hard-fought gains are not lost. The concept of airpower playing a predominant role in support of a smaller ground force has historical precedent. During the 1920s, the Royal Air Forces (RAF) air control method adhered to the concepts of the inverted blockade, minimum force, precision targeting, and force protection. The RAFs ground support and accompanying independent air operations sought to enhance the legitimacy of Iraqs nascent government and secure the countrys interior. RAF air control proved to be an extremely cost-effective option for Great Britain amid the global economic crisis. During the 1990s, the US followed a similar air policing concept as a means of containing Saddam Hussein and maintain external security for most of Iraqs neighbors. Humanitarian support operations in northern Iraq carried out by US and allied air forces, plus the air blockade enforced through the northern and southern no-fly zones, like their interwar British predecessors proved to be cost effective in limiting Saddam Husseins regional influence. Airpower is uniquely situated to provide air control services once again over the skies of Iraq to bolster the fledgling Iraqi Army in its counterinsurgency operations. Airpower is the most politically viable option for US policymakers, a superb choice to legitimize the Iraq government, and offers commanders a highly flexible option.

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Preface

During my tenure as a National Defense Fellow at Boston University's Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology, and Policy (ISCIP), I have had the opportunity to work with so many awe-inspiring leaders in academia. I appreciate the support of the Director of ISCIP, Professor Uri Ra'anan and Assistant Director of ISCIP, Ms. Susan Cavan who both played an important part in reviewing my arguments and helping organize my thoughts on this project. I am grateful to Boston University's Professor Joachim Maitre for his thoughts on guerrilla warfare, which proved essential to my examination of airpower employment to counterinsurgency operations. In addition, Boston University's Professor Cathal Nolan's expertise in military history provided me with a wealth of knowledge to craft my argument. Most importantly, Air University's Dr. Mark Conversino proved to be a tremendous supporter and enthusiastic advisor for this paper. I would not have succeeded without his guidance.

As an Air Force Security Forces officer I have had the honor of deploying and training with members of the Royal Air Force Regiment, whose heritage is directly linked to the armored car companies that provided the ground "punch" for air control in Iraq during the 1920s. The organization, its officers, NCOs, and gunners have always inspired me. One of my former officers, Capt Chris Hagemeyer, is currently on exchange with the regiment and I am appreciative for the historical insight and tactical information he provided to me for this paper.

To my lovely wife Heidi and wonderful children Andrew and Aubrey: thanks for holding down the fort while I was in Boston. You have all given me so much, and asked for nothing.

Abstract

As US and coalition ground forces seek to transfer security authority to Iraqi battalions, airpower is uniquely endowed with capabilities that will allow it to act as a “force multiplier” and ensure hard-fought gains are not lost. The concept of airpower playing a predominant role in support of a smaller ground force has historical precedent. During the 1920s, the Royal Air Force’s (RAF) air control method adhered to the concepts of the *inverted blockade*, *minimum force*, *precision targeting*, and *force protection*. The RAF’s ground support and accompanying independent air operations sought to enhance the legitimacy of Iraq’s nascent government and secure the country’s *interior*. RAF air control proved to be an extremely cost-effective option for Great Britain amid the global economic crisis.

During the 1990s, the US followed a similar air policing concept as a means of containing Saddam Hussein and maintain *external* security for most of Iraq’s neighbors. Humanitarian support operations in northern Iraq carried out by US and allied air forces, plus the air blockade enforced through the northern and southern no-fly zones, like their interwar British predecessors proved to be cost effective in limiting Saddam Hussein’s regional influence. Airpower is uniquely situated to provide air control services once again over the skies of Iraq to bolster the fledgling Iraqi Army in its counterinsurgency operations. Airpower is the most politically viable option for US policymakers, a superb choice to legitimize the Iraq government, and offers commanders a highly flexible option.

Chapter 1

Introduction

> *The aim of war should be what its very concept implies – to defeat the enemy . . . what exactly does defeat mean? The conquest of the whole of the enemy's territory is not always necessary.*
>
> —Carl von Clausewitz
> *On War*

Current Situation

On Saturday, January 31, 2009, voting polls throughout Iraq closed after a lengthy election process. Local leaders and international observers were pleased with the overall peaceful and successful provincial elections that took place throughout the war-torn country. Iraq Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh exclaimed, "Politics has broken out in Iraq … it's truly a proud moment."[1] During the previous week, over 6,000 miles away in Washington, D.C., President Barack Obama held his first meeting with senior military advisors. The meeting focused on the recently-signed status of forces agreement and various security issues between Iraq and the United States. The President, remaining focused on a key campaign pledge, asked the military leadership to ". . . engage in additional planning necessary to execute a responsible military drawdown from Iraq."[2] In particular, Obama's goal, with input from his field commanders, is to redeploy ground forces at a rate of up to two brigades per month, with the summer of 2010 being the target date for the complete withdrawal of American combat brigades in Iraq. Even if this drawdown timeline is realized, President Obama's plan states, "A residual force will remain in

Iraq and in the region to conduct targeted counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda in Iraq and to protect American diplomatic and civilian personnel."[3]

The notion of maintaining a "residual" force acknowledges that some military presence is likely needed to assist Iraq's fledgling democracy defeat al Qaeda's remaining insurgents in the country. A few days after President Obama's meeting, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that, "President Obama has made it clear that the Afghanistan theater should be our top overseas military priority."[4] Gates added that if current security trends continue, US ground combat troops would be out of Iraqi cities by summer 2009 and all remaining forces redeployed from Iraq by the end of 2011.[5] This plan appears feasible since thirteen of eighteen provinces within Iraq have completed the transition to Iraqi control, with the remaining provinces scheduled to transfer within the next six months. This represents the fruits of labor of a successful 2007 combat surge in American ground forces, the "awakening" of indigenous support to the coalition, and the successful training and reorganizing of Iraq's ground combat forces. In fact, Iraqi ground forces trained include nearly 298,000 Ministry of Interior forces (police and border enforcement) and over 235,000 Ministry of Defense Army troops. Unfortunately, the manpower, equipment, infrastructure, combat support and tactical capabilities of the Iraqi Air Force are not as mature as their ground combat counterparts.[6]

With the political pressures to reduce American "boots on the ground" in Iraq, the United States also finds itself in the midst of a global economic crisis and has incurred trillions of dollars of additional debt. The price of fighting the global war on terrorism and combat operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq have cost US taxpayers over 864 billion dollars through Fiscal Year 2009, with nearly 76 percent of the total going towards combat operations and reconstruction in Iraq.[7] All services of the US military, in particular ground combat forces and special operations forces, have been stretched during a seven-year period of continuous combat on multiple fronts. This has clear implications for sustaining force readiness, equipment lifespan, training, morale, retention, and recruitment for active duty and reserve component forces.

An Airpower Proposal

Assuming that a "responsible military drawdown" of the American footprint implies not ceding gains in Iraq while concurrently operating in a fiscally constrained environment, airpower is uniquely situated to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in order to preserve the enormously expensive yet tenuous security situation in Iraq. There is a historical precedent for airpower serving as the "main effort" to secure terrain and control ground. The lessons learned for previous uses of airpower in an air control fashion can be applied for not only Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, but future conflicts throughout the world.

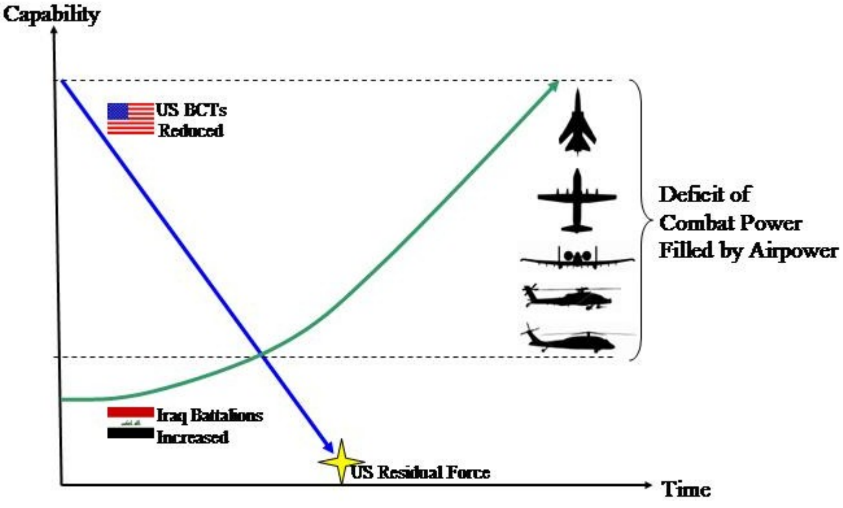
Capability
US BCTs Reduced
Deficit of Combat Power Filled by Airpower
Iraq Battalions Increased
US Residual Force
Time

Figure 1 An Airpower Proposal

Figure 1 depicts the situation as the number of US brigade combat teams (BCT) decreases; there is a corresponding decrease in ground combat capability. As the number of Iraqi battalions (as well as their capability) increases, the line is sloped upward. However, there is not a "one-for-one" replacement in capability between US and Iraqi units. Despite the fact that the Iraqi military has made significant progress in increasing the number of infantry battalions and headquarters that have been trained to conduct counterinsurgency operations, the networked command and control, sophisticated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, and combat support such as logistics, engineering and medical services necessary for Iraqi forces still "require growth."[8] In addition, American BCTs provide other capabilities beyond infantry such as armored vehicles, battlefield mobility (in the air and on the ground), on-call indirect fire support, and close air support.

On the other hand, Figure 1 also takes into consideration intangibles such as superior local knowledge of the ground, enhanced understanding of the "human terrain" in gathering intelligence, and the likelihood of increased support from the local populace that the Iraqi battalions will perhaps enjoy. These assumptions are reflected in "exponential" curve as the Iraqis continue to conduct and lead counterinsurgency operations.

Airpower is in a unique position to cover the capabilities of the departing US BCTs, bolster the Iraqi military and residual US forces, and lead a concerted COIN campaign in the region. First, airpower represents the most *politically viable* option for US and Iraqi lawmakers as it allows for a large reduction of American military presence in the country. Second, airpower *strengthens legitimacy* for the Iraqi ground forces, as many COIN tasks are often behind the scenes, or are in direct support of Iraqi ground forces. Third, airpower represents the most *flexible* option in the region where aircraft can rapidly transition between kinetic and non-kinetic operations.

Echoes from the Past

The situation facing military planners today parallels the situation that confounded administrators in Great Britain 90 years ago after their hard-fought victory in World War I. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire added to Britain's protectorates and territories. While on the surface, this would seem to be a positive event, it also created a strategic dilemma where the British army totaling over 1,084,000 soldiers was garrisoned throughout the Middle East. Great Britain was under tremendous political pressure, facing shrinking financial coffers and a brewing global economic crisis. All of these issues demanded of Parliament to "bring the boys home." The nation could not afford the costs of the spoils of victory and by the summer of 1919, the occupation force in the Middle East had fallen by more than two-thirds to 320,000 men deployed in the region.[9]

As the British occupation force rapidly dwindled, political turmoil and terrorism filled the vacuum left by the departing British forces. In the summer of 1919, three British officers were murdered in Kurdistan, followed by the killing of more government officials in November of that same year. In spring of 1920, six additional British officers were assassinated and by June 1920, the British faced a full-scale revolt in middle Euphrates region of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and the northwest corner of Iraq. Small outposts were overrun and communication lines were severed. The opening stages of the revolt resulted in nearly 2,000 British casualties, including 450 dead soldiers.[10]

As both the War Minister and Air Minister, Winston S. Churchill was cognizant of the fiscal and manpower constraints for the region and understood something had to be done. On March 2, 1920 Churchill outlined his security concept for Mesopotamia. He wrote to the Chief of Air Staff, Sir Hugh Trenchard, “It is not intended that the force holding Mesopotamia should be sufficient to guard it against external invasion. It would be proportioned solely to the duty of maintaining internal security.”[11] This force was to be led primarily by the fledgling Royal Air Force. Churchill’s concept of “aerial control” centered on a series of protected airfields and forward landing strips throughout the region. The RAF would uphold peace and maintain order through independent action or by providing close support, air transportation, and aerial re-supply to small, highly mobile British armored car companies and Iraqi levies. Aerial control, Churchill theorized, would, “… operate in every part of the protectorate and to enforce control, now here, now there, without the need of maintaining long lines of communications eating up troops and money.”[12] Having received Churchill’s intent, Trenchard’s Air Staff developed the theory and drafted the doctrine for air control that would be employed throughout Mesopotamia and other corners of the British Empire between the wars.

Thesis Organization

The author acknowledges history is replete with examples of airpower being applied as the “main effort” or involved in air policing roles to affect and control the ground. The United States Air Force’s bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in order to control wide swaths of territory and counter the infiltration of troops and supplies through Laos, or the independent air campaigns Operations COMMANDO FLASH and BULLET SHOT 1 conducted with minimal US ground troops to defend South Vietnam during the final stages of the Vietnam War in 1972 are examples of aerial control actions. In addition, the “no-fly” zone over Bosnia during the 1990s and Operation NOBLE EAGLE combat air patrols over the United States after the 9/11 attacks come to mind.

The experience of Iraq is unique in that the same region has been the subject of over two decades of air policing (1921-1932 and 1991-2003) and with the departure of the bulk US ground forces after Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, the region is likely to be policed and supported from the air again for the foreseeable future.

This thesis is organized around and focused on the past air policing experiences over the skies of Iraq. Chapter Two will examine the Royal Air Force's experience in the region during the 1920s. In particular it will cover air control doctrine developed by the RAF to meet Churchill's concept of operations, the RAF tactical task development, ground interface, and successes and failures in maintaining peace in the region. Chapter Three will observe the situation immediately following the 1991 Gulf War and will briefly examine tasks and ground control efforts applied by coalition air forces to enforce sanctions against Iraq through air policing. Unlike the situation during the 1920s, coalition aircraft were primarily focused on Saddam Hussein's military activities to ensure the safety of Iraq's neighbors. Chapter Four will consolidate the lessons learned from the previous air policing campaigns and recommend likely tasks airpower will play in Iraq in the near future with an eye towards the "combat power deficit" that airpower will cover. This chapter will demonstrate that airpower represents a politically viable, legitimizing, and flexible option for both the United States and Iraq.

Notes

[1] Arwa Damon and Ingrid Formanek, “Peace rules as polls close in Iraq,” *CNN International*, January 31, 2009, http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/01/31/iraq.elections

[2] Peter Baker and Thom Shanker, “Obama Meets With Officials on Iraq, Signaling His Commitment to Ending War,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/22/us/politics/22prexy.html.

[3] Barack H. Obama, *Blueprint for Change: Obama and Biden’s Plan for America*, 2008, http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/ObamaBlueprintForChange.pdf., p.69.

[4] Senate Armed Services Committee, *Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates Submitted Statement*, 111th Cong., January 27, 2009, p. 1.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 2.

[6] U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), pp. 29-31.

[7] U.S. Congress, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*, by Amy Belasco (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 15, 2008), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf, p. CRS-2.

[8] U.S. Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, p. 31.

[9] David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Owl Books, 1989), p. 404.

[10] *Ibid*., pp. 452-453.

[11] Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill Volume IV, Companion Part 2: Documents July 1919-March 1921* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1977), p. 1045.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 1045.

Chapter 2

RAF Air Policing Operations in Mesopotamia – 1921

> *Air is the greatest civilizing influence these countries have ever known, owing to its process of rapid communications, Air Methods are, in short, the reverse of the old punitive column. Our policy is one of prevention.*
>
> —Sir Hugh Trenchard
> *London Times*, April 1925

The Cairo Conference

In March 1921, Winston Churchill convened the Cairo Conference where he planned to discuss military options with his senior commanders throughout the Middle East. Churchill set out to investigate the costs, force requirements, and materiel needed to maintain security in Iraq. More importantly, he sought to determine the savings in both troops and money that might be realized with air control's implementation.[1]

The Cairo Conference took place in the immediate aftermath of the 1920 Iraq rebellion. This revolt, the most recent of several that broke out in the country, had required nineteen battalions (nearly 29,000 British and Indian troops) to squelch and it was not until August 1920 before the British could even mount an effective counteroffensive against the insurgents. To illustrate the enormity of fighting, on October 13, 1920 a rebel force of 3,000 men entrenched themselves around the city of Rumaitha and withstood British brigade-sized assaults, sustained artillery fire, and concerted air attacks before its leaders decided to withdraw after the day-long battle.[2] It was in this light that a different approach would be attempted; namely Churchill planned for the RAF to take responsibility for maintaining law and order with eight squadrons of aircraft, supported by a small ground force. However, even recent converts to and advocates of airpower, such as Army Lieutenant General James Aylmer Haldane, had their doubts as to whether or not airpower could succeed as the main imperial force in Iraq.[3] In fact, the British Army was not interested in providing the smaller mechanized force to support the RAF in the region. Air Marshal John Slessor (then an air staff planning officer) reported on the aerial control plan, "This decision met with violent opposition in Whitehall … it only meant that the Air Ministry had no alternative but to raise their own levies and armored-car units to do what the Army should have done."[4] It is somewhat ironic that in the heat of combat during the 1920 revolt, relatively unplanned and highly dangerous joint force operations were common; however once deliberate planning for administering Iraq was set in motion, inter-service squabbling was the order of the day.

Another factor in Churchill's notion of air control for Iraq may have been influenced by the recently-concluded campaign against the "Mad Mullah" in Somaliland. Undersecretary of State Leopold Amery recalled "Millions had been spent in inconclusive and, more than once, disastrous fighting … I was convinced that in open country with no cover even a few aeroplanes would be enough to dispose of an enemy who had no anti-aircraft artillery."[5] In January 1921, 500 troops of the Camel Corps, an Indian battalion, tribal levies, a few companies from the Kings African Rifles, along with a dozen RAF aircraft launched attacks against the Mullah's main encampment, supply lines, and fortress at Tale, Somaliland. By February 9, the Mullah was in full retreat with approximately 700 riflemen and left his homeland for Abyssinia where he was later killed.[6] While many claim the expulsion of the "Mad Mullah" was an example of air operations accomplishing something that the army found itself ill-suited to do, some British Army officers such as General Hastings Ismay noted that supporters of the Royal Air Force's "Z-Unit" in Somaliland neglected to note that the RAF required up-to-date ground information and intelligence concerning the locations of the Mullah's top officers and fortresses. More importantly, according to Ismay, a credible ground force caused the Mullah to flee Somaliland.[7] In all cases, this required an active ground force to conduct the overall campaign.

An additional factor of Churchill's scheme in Iraq was the cost. Amery recounts that the price tag of the Somaliland campaign was roughly £77,000 where he exclaimed the Mullah's ousting being, "… the cheapest war in history."[8] It is perhaps the financial bottom line that intrigued Churchill the most, although the air control experiment in Iraq could also provide a useful training ground for the fledgling RAF. Iraq represented the first opportunity for the RAF to be given overall command of a joint service operation.[9] With Churchill giving the go-ahead for the RAF to take the lead in Iraq, the promise of additional squadrons (from five to eight) to fully establish its presence in the region, and an Air Staff eager to prove the RAF's worth, what exactly would the Royal Air Force accomplish? On October 1, 1922, Air Vice Marshal John Salmond, armed with Trenchard's doctrine of air control, assumed command of all British forces in Iraq.[10]

Air Control Doctrine

Sir Hugh Trenchard examined the complexities of controlling an entire country without a large occupying force. His theory of air control centered on comparing air operations to the traditional ground-based punitive expeditions. Both air and ground forces sought the same objective: to force the enemy, its people, and its leaders into submission. Air control meant substituting ground troops for air operations where the RAF could quickly respond to crises, inflict serious harm on a specific target and force the enemy to come to terms. On the other hand, ground expeditions were cumbersome, subject to enemy ambushes and raids, difficult to resupply, slow to react to contingencies, more difficult to evacuate wounded, and ultimately more injurious to the native population.[11] In fact, Slessor maintained air control was more humane since the local civilian population, along with their lands and property, were not nearly as devastated as compared to a ground expedition. He argued RAF interruptions to the native daily routines would be, ". . . such a nuisance to him [the enemy] that he cannot stick it any longer and submits to orders of the Government rather than continue to put up with it."[12] The RAF weaved the ideas of the inverted blockade, application of minimum force, precision targeting, and force protection to fabricate an air control theory that was employed in the Iraq Mandate.

First, the *inverted blockade* sought to separate the enemy from the lands where RAF planners theorized hostile raiding parties conducted attacks against the native population in order to gain food and other sustainment. In particular, access to grazing lands, flocks, water wells, built-up villages, crops, or granaries were the usual objective of raiders.[13] RAF aerial harassment denied the enemy access to these and kept them separated from the sources of the basic necessities of life. The blockade, Trenchard theorized, would cause frustration and hardship where large sections of the enemy population found themselves in caves or neighboring villages, cut off from basic needs.

RAF aircraft provided the government with a rapid and unpredictable attacking force, which was essential to air control doctrine.[14] The RAF would fly at low altitudes to disperse flocks and scatter delayed action bombs to impede farmers from entering their croplands.[15] Pressure developed against offending tribes that had burdened law-abiding tribes as the farmer's extended presence created economic and political hardships. In essence, the RAF planners felt the offending tribesmen looked at the government conditions as the "lesser evil" of inconvenience caused by the inverted blockade and isolated the rebellious tribes among the broader population.[16]

Second, air control doctrine sought to use *minimum force* in order to compel the enemy to submission. Rebellious villages were warned (usually by leaflet) that they would be bombed if they did not submit to a particular government demand such as paying taxes or halting raids. The government demands were to be met at a specific time. If these demands were not fulfilled, then the RAF would issue a warning to evacuate the target area. Once an appropriate time had passed, aircraft would attack the outskirts of the village using small bombs, then finally use larger bombs close to houses or other important property if the required demands were still not met.[17] Slessor adds that RAF leaflets dropped by aircraft warned villagers to remove women and children from the target area. Redundant communication with the target area's inhabitants was provided via aircraft loudspeakers and third party letter couriers. In sum, Slessor felt, "I think the restraint was carried to ridiculous extremes."[18]

The Royal Air Force used aerial demonstrations as a show of force to compel the enemy to act without dropping any bombs. Large bomber formations would fly deliberately slow and at low altitudes over the target sites. In some cases, aircraft dropped flares, smoke bombs, and propaganda leaflets in order to maximize the psychological effect.[19]

The psychology of bombing and the use of minimum force was examined by RAF theorists. Air Vice Marshal John Salmond suggested that victims of bombing would undergo a three-phase psychological process. Initially, bombing attacks caused a sudden panic within the tribe. Once the tribal population realized the effects of aerial bombing did not produce the level of death and destruction as initially feared, the feelings of panic would give way to indifference or contempt for the bombers. However, as the bombing offensive was sustained, Salmond surmised the disruption to daily life would create a weariness among the population who in turn would long for peace and a return to normal activity.[20]

Third, the concept of *precision targeting* was related to both non-kinetic as well as kinetic air control operations. Slessor recognized that governance in Iraq was not just a military affair. He noted, "It is the civil administrator, the District Commissioner or Political Officer, and the policeman who *control* the country. The Services, whether Air or Army, have an important influence by providing the necessary visible backing of force behind the civil administration."[21] Within the purview of air control, the RAF directly supported the political situation by rapidly delivering political officers and civil administrators at the onset of a crisis. In this case, civil leaders could answer complaints and immediately address the population's concerns. Aircraft quickly and accurately delivered humanitarian aid, transported doctors and medical supplies, carried mail, and even facilitated economic trade. Conversely, ground forces could not operate in Iraq's arduous environment with the same degree of speed and flexibility as their RAF counterparts. Iraq's mountains, desert region, and marshlands coupled with poor road and communication infrastructures presented tough obstacles for ground forces.

Precision targeting clearly had a kinetic component and implied attacking and strafing enemy formations or specific sites. Opponents of air control criticized the RAF for being indiscriminate with its use of bombers. Slessor and air control theorists dismissed this criticism. These airmen argued that the ground force's artillery shelling villages was often more indiscriminate and inaccurate than aircraft bombing.[22]

Another criticism of the air control method regarding precision targeting was that its attacks were transitory in nature. Again, the Air Staff dismissed these criticisms and researched military history where ground forces in India's Northwest Frontier region had launched no less than fifty punitive expeditions in a 30-year time span. These punitive ground expeditions entered into a remote region, encamped for a short period, and slowly marched back to the garrisoned cites. Once the rebels had observed the British army's departure, the insurgents returned to influence the region. Essentially the British did not have enough forces to permanently occupy the remote regions. The air control enthusiasts concluded airpower could be applied "as often and as long as may be necessary."[23]

Ground columns often attacked a village and once the expeditionary force had departed, there was generally a lengthy respite for the insurgents to refit and rearm their forces. This was not the case regarding airpower. Bombing attacks, in theory, could be launched at random intervals for an indefinite time period.[24] The bomber provided greater reach than ground forces and proper sortie planning enabled an air force to maintain pressure on the enemy.

The final criticism for precision bombing was the contention that the primitive populace did not possess centers of gravity in which the RAF bomber could attack. Slessor disagreed and noted, ". . . there are almost always some essentials without which he [the enemy] cannot maintain his livelihood."[25] In fact, the basic principle of the inverted blockade pitted airpower against an enemy's economic or social centers of gravity.

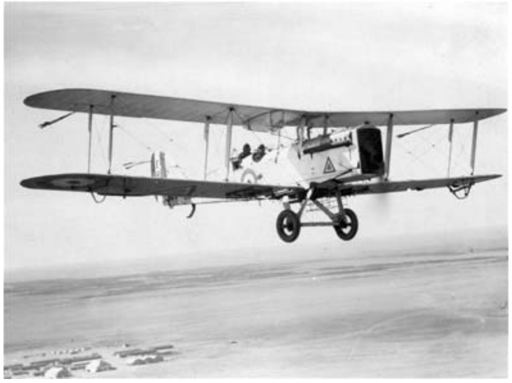

Figure 2 Airco (de Havilland) DH-9A on Patrol[26]

The fourth major component of air control doctrine is the concept of *force protection*. Ground columns moving throughout the country's western deserts, southern marshes, or the northern mountainous region were subject to a variety of man-made or natural dangers. To the RAF planner, airpower provided an option that conquered the deserts, swamplands, and mountains. These remote areas offered sanctuary against British ground columns, but not necessarily against RAF airpower. Paradoxically, the obstacles posed by the same terrain would have to be surmounted by the insurgents in order to attack the bases where the aircraft were safely parked. In addition, one can argue that the desert environment actually favored the aircraft and severely hampered the insurgent's movement as they were deprived of cover. Unlike the British ground columns, the insurgents' ability to resist aircraft was minimal, as primitive rifle fire generally proved innocuous to RAF bombers.[27]

From the perspective of force protection, airpower also removed the necessity for large defensive picket lines and small outposts that were manned by the British infantry. Slessor noted weak detachments of unsupported troops in hostile territory often resulted in these combat outposts, like Rumaitha in 1919, being completely overrun and destroyed. The devastation of these frontier outposts enhanced insurgent morale, strengthened the rebellion's cause, and drastically increased enemy recruiting.[28] The combat outposts and ground columns tempted insurgent activity with the promise of weapons, ammunition, food, water, medical supplies and hostages. This was in direct contrast, according to airpower enthusiasts, to the relative "invulnerability" of aircraft engaged in air control operations.[29] The four pillars of air control theory, namely the inverted blockade, the application of minimum force, precision targeting, and force protection, bolstered the overarching principle for air policing: *control without occupation*. While on paper, air control doctrine was potentially decades ahead of what a 1920 de Havilland DH-9 bomber could deliver and the notion of disrupting tribal daily life may have easily dismissed insurgent resilience, a critical component of turning this concept into reality rested with a small mobile force to effectively link air and ground operations.

Ground Interface

Concerning air control in Iraq, the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, stated in an October 1922 telegram, "I am perfectly certain that the air force alone, unsupported by bayonets, is quite incapable of defence [*sic*] of this vast area."[30] Lord Derby's comment highlighted a common misconception that air control meant air forces conducting missions alone. On the contrary, even RAF planners understood that while air forces would be the main effort, small mobile ground units would play a critical role.

There were several options for the forces for ground operations. The first option focused on the indigenous population. Churchill had envisioned raising tribal levies who understood the local customs, traditions, language, and terrain.[31] The local Iraqi Levies would ultimately be a cheaper solution than British infantry regiments, were often more mobile (i.e. more lightly equipped than their British counterparts), and some believed the formation of local Iraqi Levies would actually give paid employment to would-be insurgents. The merits of gainfully employing young men of fighting age is obvious. These levies were both the first and the largest ground combat element created to support the Royal Air Force in Iraq. However, the use of this large force of Iraqis was a continuous political balancing act as there was significant infighting and friction between Arab soldiers from the marshes of southern Iraq, Kurdish soldiers from the mountainous north, and Christian Assyrians from the west.[32]

A second option, closely related to the first, was the idea of using forces belonging to other nations within the British Empire. For Iraq, the majority of these "proxy" troops deployed from India. The training costs of an Indian soldier was less than his British counterpart, plus the Indian troops relieved some of the political pressures to redeploy British troops to their homes. Both the levies and Indian forces had British Army or RAF officers in charge of their formations to enhance liaison efforts between air and ground forces.

A third option for the RAF was to use British ground forces. With the British Army rapidly drawing down its presence in the region, the RAF raised their own air force infantry element that would specialize and focus on the requirements of airpower. In particular, ground elements were needed to rapidly deploy and secure forward landing strips and provide point defense of vulnerable parked aircraft. The RAF created the Armored Car Companies (ACC) for this purpose. These "fighting airmen" conducted mapping operations across the desert, surveyed landing fields, secured convoys of aircraft maintenance teams, engaged in peacekeeping operations between tribes, and provided real-time ground intelligence to aircrews.[33] Unlike their army counterparts, these ACC were highly mobile and generally did not remain at fixed sites or positions.

The ACC complemented the capabilities of the aircraft with patrols in urban areas (an acknowledged weak spot of air control) gathering local intelligence and providing accurate bomb damage assessment. In addition, the ACCs performed independent combat operations or went on stand-to alert when the light or weather did not favor aircraft missions. Owing to close cooperation with aircraft, these Rolls Royce armored cars not only carried machine guns and infantry to engage enemy ground forces, they provided a "mobile maintenance support" capability for aircraft. The ACC crews were trained in propeller swinging, aircraft handling, aircraft refueling operations, airfield operations (site selection and surface analysis), and minor aircraft maintenance. These teams also carried specialized ground-to-air signal flares, message bags, heliographs, ground signal strips, and smoke devices.[34]

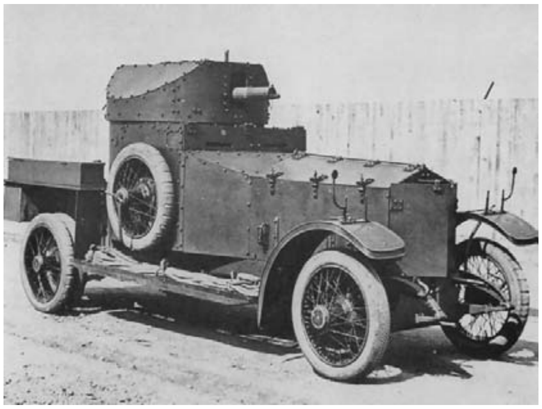

Figure 3 Pattern-1914 RAF Rolls-Royce Armored Car[35]

The symbiotic relationship between RAF air and ground crews was also manifested by aircraft executing aerial scout missions for ACC convoys. In this case, aircraft identified obstacles, led ground teams to targets, and warned of ambushes. Communication between pilots and ground gunners came in the forms of dropped weighted message bags, colored streamers, prearranged coded ground signals, a system of arresting hooks for aircraft to pick up messages from ground troops, and, by the early 1930s, short-wave wireless radios.[36] These ground forces provided a necessary component to the Royal Air Force's plan for Iraq. Slessor summarized, "I do not mean to imply that the RAF can control these wild countries without any troops on the ground . . . the land forces were an essential complement to the RAF in air control."[37] With the theory and its air and ground elements in place, what specific missions were conducted to support the internal security of Mesopotamia?

From Theory to Action – the Air Tasks

A review of the RAF air policing tasks reveals missions can be grouped into three major areas: *support to ground forces*, *independent air operations*, and *enhance government legitimacy*. In all categories, both direct combat (kinetic) and indirect support (non-kinetic) operations were conducted by the RAF.

The RAF's support to ground forces was essential in that its aircraft, through firepower, speed, and mobility, acted as a "force multiplier" to make up for the lack of dedicated infantry and artillery regiments. In a ground combat role, historians note that airborne artillery (close air support) and reconnaissance were the most important air policing roles for the RAF.[38] Aircraft bombing and strafing attacks against large enemy troop formations slowed the pace of hostile attacks against smaller British ground forces. Air attacks were often focused against enemy materiel (artillery, supply lines, transport) in order to even the odds for the British infantry or Iraqi Levies. These attacks also had a great moral and psychological impact on both the British and insurgents. More often than not, the RAF attacks gave the British ground forces freedom of action by forcing the enemy to take cover while the smaller friendly levies maneuvered into more advantageous positions. An operation of this type was successfully conducted by the RAF in April 1923 against conventional Turkish and insurgent tribal forces to great effect.[39]

The RAF's ability to conduct aerial reconnaissance directly supported army and police COIN efforts. Maintaining "eyes on" the enemy allowed British formations to move efficiently towards their targets and ultimately reduced the amount of equipment they had to carry. An example of this force-multiplying effect was seen in counterinsurgency patrolling and pursuit missions in the northern Iraq mountains against the Kurdish rebel, Sheikh Mahmud.[40]

Along the same lines of extending the ground force's vision, another RAF mission was troop transport. At the onset of hostilities, aircraft quickly delivered ground forces in order to precisely mass troops at the problem location such as quelling a riot. In addition, RAF transports brought reinforcements to British ground units already engaged in combat in order to help turn the tide of battle against insurgents.[41] Similar to troop transport, aerial resupply operations provided additional critical support to ground forces. Lieutenant General John Glubb, then a junior officer in the Arab Legion supporting the RAF, recalled aircraft extended his ground reconnaissance convoys by supplying fuel at prearranged locations.[42] In an emergency air resupply role, the RAF provided relief to besieged garrisons by supplying items such as water, food, weapons, weapon parts, ammunition, and medical supplies. The more routine air transport missions involved delivering mail, fresh clothing, soap, and saddler's equipment. The RAF also experimented with casualty evacuation by outfitting some of their transports and bombers to take on the role of "flying ambulances" for troops that were wounded in combat or injured while maneuvering in the rugged terrain of Iraq.[43]

The second major category of air control efforts centered on independent air missions with an objective of influencing behavior on the ground. In many cases the RAF conducted bombing operations to force the population into submission without the presence of native levies, and did so. For instance, when tribes raided encampments, villages, or trade caravans, this often prompted the RAF to act. On one occasion over one hundred Mashud raiders had stolen fifty camels and had later attacked an Indian army detachment, inflicting 36 casualties. The Royal Air Force launched a series of raids, dropping over 150 bombs on the tribal capital, resulting in the area's pacification.[44]

Beyond the independent bombing attacks carried out to enhance Iraq's internal security, the British Air Staff also focused on numerous other air missions. These missions included patrolling Iraq's borders with what Slessor called "watch and ward" missions. In this task, the RAF analyzed tribal movement patterns, identified and neutralized "cross-border" raiding parties, and flew specialized sorties focused on countering the slave trade. Border control missions were important in stopping insurgents from entering the country and conducting raids. Other air-centric tasks included the development of imperial air routes, photographic surveys, and mapping of the country.[45] A final independent air policing duty involved a form of "point defense" where aircraft would maintain security through observation and firepower to secure key Iraqi infrastructure. For instance, the RAF launched air patrols based on intelligence reports in order to secure the Abadan oil refinery, Iraqi oilfields, and key communications nodes.[46] Without specific intelligence reports to pinpoint times or locations of enemy intentions, the RAF could randomly include key infrastructure checks as part of their aerial "police beat" while they conducted flights in the region.

The final category of RAF air policing tasks centered on enhancing the legitimacy of the Iraq Mandate and later, that of the British-installed Iraqi King Faisal. This category of air support was no less important than the more traditional roles of airpower. In this case, air actions directly supported the Iraq economy, preserved life, or placed the central government in a positive light with the disparate tribes who already did not hold the Iraq Mandate in high regard.

The RAF flew civil administrators throughout the country in order to better understand local issues. However, this was a two-way street since airpower was also used to transport and provide the "big stick" for government officials to carry out tax collection activities.[47] Aircraft were used also to deliver mail and enhance communications for Iraq's citizens, to fly supplies during famine and to conduct humanitarian relief operations, and to protect local Iraqi fisheries in the south. Additionally, Slessor reported that the RAF used transport aircraft to evacuate civilians during disasters and also operated over villages to provide audible alarms during approaching wildfires and, on one occasion, of an impending flood due to a burst dam.[48]

Show of force sorties enhanced the legitimacy and bolstered the power of the government without having to drop bombs and cause unnecessary damage, as these flights reminded the populace of power of the Iraq Mandate government. RAF planners were known to have received reports of tribal feuds and dispatch a few aircraft to fly over the area in a show of force mission, often resulting in a cessation of violence. These psychological operations played a part in both peacekeeping and law enforcement operations throughout the country, and were effective in dispersing rioting crowds and demonstrators.[49] Aircraft formed part of a well-armed and highly visible police force that the populace respected (or feared). Did the Royal Air Force's effort at air control and air policing achieve the desired effects?

Battlefield Results

The RAF's ultimate objective was to provide a cheap alternative in both manpower and finances to sustain the Iraq Mandate. Many politicians, military leaders, and historians have documented the successes and shortcomings of the RAF's effort. The RAF demonstrated a flexible use of airpower that went beyond mere bombing in order to affect ground operations and control the populace. The ideas of aero-medical evacuation, aerial re-supply, ground-to-air interface, and civil support (disaster relief, political transport, etc.) were tested in the region and at times proved highly successful. However, the technical capabilities of the aircraft many times fell short of the enthusiastic promises made by airpower advocates. Bombers and fighters had problems flying at the higher altitudes over mountainous terrain and mist/fog drastically hampered air operations. Sand destroyed engines, high winds grounded aircraft, and the intense summer heat in southern Iraq caused rapid deterioration of the fabric and wood components of the aircraft.[50] In fact, Glubb recalls that during the 120-degree summers, his Camel Corps was the only mobile and effective combat force as the Iraq Levies, troops of the Indian Army, ACC, and RAF aircraft were all essentially out of action.[51]

Some analysts point out that air control and policing efforts were completely unsuccessful in urban settings where target acquisition and bombing accuracy were severely degraded. Cities also afforded concealed and protected firing locations from which insurgents could attack low-flying aircraft. To handle urban challenges, larger ground forces were called in to quell disturbances. In fact, thousands of soldiers were quickly deployed into neighboring Palestine in 1929 when the RAF found itself unable to deal with Arab disorders in the cities.[52] Even the open desert environment sometimes proved difficult for the RAF to detect insurgents pouring into southern Iraq. While fighting Ikhwan raiding parties, Glubb recollects RAF air patrols attempted to comb over 30,000 square miles without any plan on how the terrain would be effectively patrolled, let alone determining which tribal settlement was hostile to the Iraq Mandate and which one was not.[53] This highlighted one of the most crucial elements that the RAF required in its quest for air policing; actionable ground intelligence.

From Glubb's perspective (as an intelligence provider to the RAF) data was needed not only to track enemy raiders and the indigenous Iraqi population, but also required a firm grip and understanding of the highly mobile Bedouin tribes.[54] In the absence of accurate intelligence to aid in target acquisition, the RAF resorted to an attempt to forcibly displace thousands of Nejed tribesman, of whom only a small portion conducted illegal forays. Aircraft dropped leaflets ordering these tribes to march a distance of four days. The intent was to create a 70-mile wide clear zone in the south in order to detect insurgent movements through these areas. After the Nejed tribe refused to march south into the Arabian peninsula, the RAF dropped warning bombs, only to have the bulk of these tribesmen move the opposite direction north into Iraq to seek asylum![55] As time went by, the RAF leadership better understood "ground truth" as being crucial to counterinsurgency, psychological operations, and targeting.

From a strategic perspective, the RAF's control of the Iraq Mandate could be considered a success. Sir Arnold Wilson noted, "It is undeniable that the decision to control Iraq by means of the Royal Air Force made it possible to retain the Mandate."[56] In fact, the RAF was later granted air control status over the skies of Aden, Transjordan, and Palestine, based on the relative success of air control operations over the Iraq Mandate. If the aim was to *influence* the region at a reduced cost, then most would agree that at a minimum, the Royal Air Force proved to be a force multiplier. Its success partially proved the RAF's worth and air control likely persuaded the Salisbury Committee not only of the efficacy of airpower, but also that the newly formed air arm should remain an independent service.[57]

From a fiscal perspective, the RAF's air control experiment was highly successful, both in money and manpower. The last year of the British Army's occupation of Iraq cost London approximately £23 million in 1921. The following year, the RAF's first year of air control, the cost fell to £5.7 million, and by 1929, as the last British infantry battalion departed, the annual cost for military operations in the Iraq Mandate was only £620,000. Manpower savings followed a similar track. In 1921, there were 33 infantry battalions, 16 artillery batteries, 6 car regiments (transport), and 4 RAF squadrons. By 1929, the force footprint was reduced to a total of 4 RAF squadrons, 1 ½ armored car companies, and two battalions of Iraqi Levies.[58] Even more amazingly, the Royal Air Force lost only 14 pilots killed and 84 wounded during the initial decade of air control operations in Iraq.[59] Clearly the RAF had succeeded with regards to the financial "bottom line" and the service's ability to survive in a time of global economic crisis and a massive force drawdown cannot be overstated.

The air control mission enabled the RAF to execute new types of missions and develop a new doctrine for its combat and combat support aircraft. To illustrate, one of the first instances of Imperial troops being airlifted into combat occurred in 1923 when two companies of Sikh infantry and their tactical equipment were flown by Vernon transport aircraft to Kirkuk.[60] Counterinsurgency tactics such as nighttime idle-engine "silent" gliding attacks, non-lethal shows of force, and rear gun suppressive firing played a part in defeating an adaptive enemy.

Despite these tactical successes, some opponents of air control have argued that the RAF potentially learned the wrong lessons via air policing for the approaching war against Nazi Germany. This is potentially true with regards to research of bomb site technology and armor, both important for penetrating the skies of industrialized Europe. Aircraft conducting counterinsurgency operations in the desert had obvious different technological requirements as compared to high altitude bombers or fast single-engine fighters to combat the Luftwaffe.[61] In a period of a global economic depression, the RAF spent significant resources on a style of fighting that would prove irrelevant in World War II. Instead of using the experience of the Iraq Mandate as a proving ground to coordinate RAF and British Army air-to-ground cooperation, administrative walls and mistrust were raised. Slessor even acknowledged that air control efforts "... undeniably marred to some extent inter-Service relations in the years between the wars."[62]

Large numbers of RAF officers, including many future senior leaders, deployed in support of the Iraq Mandate with an eye towards desert air policing operations. Did the RAF's focus on counterinsurgency come at the expense of dog-fighting, strategic bombing, or even close air support (bearing in mind the Iraqi Levies and ACC were gaining this experience in Iraq, not the British Army)? Similar questions would be asked nearly 60 years later as the first Gulf War ended and the United States Air Force embarked on a different form of air policing to once again control the skies over portions of Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

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Chapter 3

USAF Air Policing Operations in Iraq – 1991

> *We continue to look forward to working with a new leadership in Baghdad, one that does not brutally suppress its own people and violate the most basic norms of humanity. Until that day, no one should doubt our readiness to respond decisively to Iraq's failure to respect the 'No-Fly Zone.'*
>
> — President George H.W. Bush

Aftermath of the Gulf War and Coalition Air Control

After the successful ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait during Operation DESERT STORM, the United Nations Security Council, on March 2, 1991, passed resolutions that focused on establishing peace in the region. United Nations (UN) Resolution 686 mandated that the government of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein return all prisoners of war and assist in identifying and clearing mines, booby traps, and chemical/biological weapons that were strewn throughout Kuwait. In addition, this resolution demanded that the Iraqi military, "Cease hostile or provocative actions by its forces against all Member States including missile actions and flights of combat aircraft."[1] The following day, the Safwan Accords instituted the official ceasefire agreement between Iraq and the US-led coalition. It also created a temporary ceasefire line between the belligerents. These accords banned the Iraqi Air Force from flying fixed-wing aircraft; however, this ban did not apply for most Iraqi helicopters.[2]

This distinction between aircraft type was important to Saddam Hussein as he used this "loophole" to his advantage. Literally at the southern end of the country, senior Iraqi officers were at the negotiating table brokering peace with coalition commanders, while simultaneously the Iraq armed forces were engaged in full-scale combat operations against the Kurds in the north. On April 1, 1991 eyewitnesses reported Kurdish refugees fleeing into snow-covered mountains as Iraqi ground troops, tanks, artillery, and assault helicopters launched raids and reasserted Baghdad's control in Erbil, Dohuk, the strategic oil city of Kirkuk, and the border town of Habur. A rebel spokesman reported that the Iraqi military was "killing every Kurd they see."[3] Clearly something had to be done.

On the heels of the Safwan Accords, the UN passed Resolution 687 on April 3, 1991. This diplomatic effort formalized the ceasefire and established long-term requirements for Iraq. In particular, it called upon Iraq to return all Kuwait property and citizens, dismantle the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction program (chemical, biological, and radiological weapons), be subjected to UN weapons inspections, maintained an embargo on Iraqi exports, and restricted imports to Iraq to medicine and food. This resolution also called for the creation and deployment of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), which was tasked to monitor the ceasefire agreement. Most importantly for air planners, military force was authorized to enforce this resolution.[4]

The next day, UNSCR 688 passed, with the primary focus of condemning Iraq's repression against its indigenous Kurdish population in the north and the Shiite population in the south. The resolution called on Iraq to permit humanitarian relief organizations to support these internally displaced people.[5] The coalition's air concept during the 1990s had some similarities to the RAF's air control experience during the 1920s. The coalition established an air blockade (much like the inverted blockade) that adhered to the use of minimum force, employed precision targeting concepts, and broadly linked force protection in order to contain Saddam Hussein. With the Gulf War winding down and coalition ground forces extricating themselves from Iraq, what did US and coalition leaders expect airpower to accomplish?

Coalition forces established an *air blockade* in order to deny Iraqi fixed wing or rotary wing operations north of the 36th parallel and south of the 32nd parallel (amended to be the 33rd parallel in 1996). These "no-fly zones" are depicted in Figure 4. The blockade applied to both military and civilian aircraft.

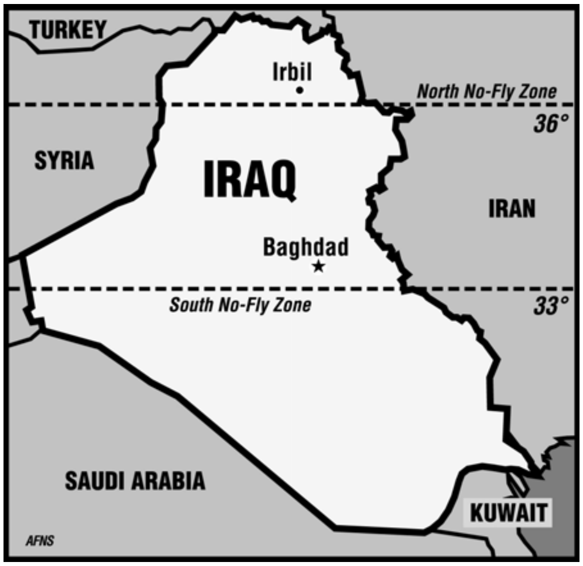

Figure 4 Iraq No-fly Zones[6]

France, the United Kingdom, and the United States used UN Resolution 688 as the pretext to immediately establish a "no-fly zone" (NFZ) in northern Iraq on April 5, 1991 under the codename Operation PROVIDE COMFORT (OPC). The operation's first phase was centered on the immediate humanitarian relief effort to hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled to the harsh northern mountainous regions. In fact, aerial re-supply by rotary and fixed-wing aircraft was the primary means of supporting the small groups of coalition forces who were establishing refugee camps. The second phase called upon airpower to not only deliver food and supplies to the refugees, but support the establishment of smaller refugee camps and way-stations. These smaller stations helped facilitate the southward flow of refugees returning to their homes in northern Iraq, primarily the Dahuk region. During this phase, the UN took control of the main refugee camps. In OPC's third phase, the mountain camps were closed down in order to further encourage the flow of refugees back to their homes. During the final phase, the UN took responsibility for the region with an eye towards reestablishing agriculture and facilitating the return of government services.[7]

During all phases of OPC, the coalition enforced the air blockade. The primary mission was to deny Iraqi aircraft flights above the 36th parallel and to maintain the integrity of a security zone where no Iraqi ground forces (army, border guards, and special police) were allowed to enter or operate.[8] As the small contingent of coalition ground forces conducting humanitarian operations left northern Iraq, the evolving relationship between air and ground forces was clearly seen in a Pentagon news briefing where a spokesman noted, "We're going to have some more airplanes for a while, as we adjust the force … the ground forces leave and the number of airplanes will go up."[9]

The coalition aircraft numbers increased and operated out of Turkey, namely Incirlik, Silopi, and Batman airfields. Over 120 aircraft were involved in the air control effort for OPC. These aircraft included F-16 and A-10 fighters, tankers, attack helicopters, transport aircraft, transport helicopters, and special operations helicopters. During the ground phase of OPC, Hussein's army never engaged the relatively small humanitarian ground force, although occasional border clashes with Turkish forces did occur.[10]

Operation PROVIDE COMFORT existed in various forms for the next five years; however, the focus shifted from humanitarian support to area security, with the new mission being dubbed Operation NORTHERN WATCH (ONW). This mission change occurred after the Iraqi Army's aggressive intervention in Kurdish factional in-fighting in the north. As Hussein's forces moved into the region (particularly Erbil), Western aid workers fled. With the departure of these aid workers, the French Air Force pulled its fighter aircraft from the northern air control mission, stating that its raison d'être (humanitarian support) was now gone.[11] British and American fighter aircraft picked up the slack and supported the new mission. ONW sought to limit Saddam Hussein's military options in Iraq, monitor all activities (ground and air) north of the 36th parallel, and maintain a presence, albeit mostly air, to assist any remaining humanitarian organizations.[12] Despite the mission's name change, the air blockade remained in effect.

In the south, a similar air control effort was established in the aftermath of the Gulf War. On August 27, 1992 Operation SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW) was officially activated with President Geroge H.W. Bush's primary objective to ". . . enhance our ability to monitor developments in southern Iraq."[13] In particular, OSW sought to prevent the Iraqi Air Force from tracking, targeting, and bombing Shiite rebels taking refuge in the marshlands in southeastern Iraq. These same rebels had been brutally repressed after a failed uprising against Saddam Hussein immediately following the Gulf War. By denying Hussein's aerial reconnaissance capability, OSW sought to degrade the Iraqi army's ability to effectively concentrate their artillery. The OSW zone expanded to the 33rd parallel in 1996, due to Iraqi ground force reprisals against the Kurds in the north. The expansion denied the Iraqi Air Force the use of an additional two air bases and a major combat training facility.[14]

In both the northern and southern NFZs, the concept of *minimum force* was strictly adhered to by the air coalition, even more so than their RAF predecessors in the 1920s. From a tactical perspective, pilots operating over the skies of Iraq were reminded of strike rules of engagement. Even Iraqi surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems were permitted to stay within the no fly zones. As OSW was established, a US F/A-18 squadron commander reminded his pilots, “We’re not at war with Iraq. We don’t want to be loose cannons . . . they [US aircrews] need to be disciplined. And they will be.”[15] From a political perspective, both Presidents Bush and Bill Clinton wanted to maintain pressure on Hussein, but not at the cost of fragmenting the territorial integrity of Iraq. Thus, coalition air units did little to stop Iraqi ground activity. Much to the chagrin of the London-based Free Iraqi Council, reports surfaced that nearly 60,000 Republican Guard troops and police units supported by Iraqi armor and artillery was shelling the city of Basra and artillery were besieging other cities within the southern NFZ. Shiite observers complained that coalition reconnaissance aircraft were operating too high to pinpoint the dispersed Iraqi soldiers who were slaughtering the population.[16] Coalition aircrews were able to observe road construction projects as Iraqi counterinsurgency forces edged closer to the Shiite’s marshland sanctuaries.[17] Essentially with regards to ground combat operations, the coalition was in a pure “watch and report” mode. From the Shiite and Kurdish rebel perspective, one can argue that *no force*, let alone minimum force, was used.

The exception to using lethal force occurred against SAM sites, air defense command and control sites, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) positions, and the occasional Iraqi aircraft. However, even in these cases the coalition took great care to demonstrate patience and moderation in force. During the early days of OSW in 1992, Iraqi SAM system radars would often “track” aircraft, setting off alarms inside the cockpit. However, the coalition would not attack these missile sites unless they “locked on” to the fighters.[18] Even Iraqi aircraft incursions into the NFZs often resulted in only warnings and/or a “chase” out of the NFZ. Saddam Hussein often used these incursions to test US resolve in the region. In several cases, both Iraqi and Iranian fighter aircraft were shepherded out of the NFZs without being attacked by coalition fighters.[19]

In addition, coalition aircraft dropped warning leaflets and targeted various military populations. In 1992, the USAF dropped thousands of leaflets on areas in order to influence ground gunners and pilots. Air Force Lieutenant General Michael Nelson noted these leaflet drops were, “… done primarily to warn people who either fly airplanes or control radars that they shouldn’t use them.”[20] Even a decade later in 2002, coalition planners expanded their target audience for leaflet drops, namely communications and fiber optics technicians who were upgrading the Iraqi integrated air defense network. These leaflets stated, “For your safety: Stop repairing military fiber optic cable. You are risking your life.”[21]

Another demonstration of minimum force application was the use of “less lethal” bombs. In this case, bombs were filled with concrete instead of explosives. These laser-guided bombs (up to 3,000 pounds) gave air planners more flexibility in smashing particular sites when concern of collateral damage was high. For instance, an AAA site or a command center nestled in an urban environment could be engaged while reducing the possibility of collateral damage to nearby civilians. Another benefit was cost, as these concrete bombs were far cheaper than the more lethal conventional munitions.[22]

The concept of *precision targeting* was also a mainstay of coalition air operations during their decade of air control over Iraq. As discussed earlier, enemy ground force interaction was mostly reduced to reconnaissance and observation. Advanced weapon systems such as laser-guided and global position system-directed munitions were used. Fielded forces, particularly the

SAM batteries and AAA sites, were often the targets of air attack. In September 1996, President Bill Clinton launched a campaign dubbed Operation DESERT STRIKE in order to apply pressure against Iraqi radar sites, SAM batteries, and command and control centers throughout Iraq. The pretext for this particular campaign was to ensure Saddam Hussein's ground attacks against the Kurds in the north did not go unanswered with aircraft tasked to target and neutralize Iraq's air defenses and expanded the southern NFZ.[23]

After the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) weapons inspectors had been blocked by Saddam Hussein, President Clinton noted, "The international community gave Saddam one last chance to resume cooperation with the weapons inspectors … Saddam has failed to seize the chance. So we had to act and act now."[24] The United States launched Operation DESERT FOX in December 1998 with the political objective of supporting and maintaining the UN weapons inspection process. The missions involved striking military and security targets that contribute to "Iraq's ability to produce, store, maintain and deliver weapons of mass destruction."[25] In this case over fifty targets were struck, including military intelligence centers, Republican guard headquarters, troop barracks, and enemy air defenses.

The decade-long air control mission involved having to monitor, report, and adapt to Iraqi ground force tactics. For instance, Iraqi SAM sites became highly mobile where systems could be quickly disassembled and moved. These systems were also concealed from view and could be fired without the "tell-tale" radar signature that would alert aircraft to hostile intentions. To counter these threats, air planners built target sets that included communication centers and not necessarily the AAA or SAM launch sites themselves. By attacking these communication nodes, coalition planners felt it would hinder the dispersed weapon sites.[26]

The remaining concept applied by coalition planners that paralleled the RAF air control method was that of *force protection.* As opposed to the RAF, the coalition air forces regularly employed stand-off munitions such as Tomahawk missiles. These sea-launched weapons, as well as cruise missiles fired from B-52 bombers, were able to strike AAA sites and command centers without having to operate in the skies over Iraq. An example of this control exerted from outside of the NFZ can be seen on September 4, 1996 when naval ships operating in the Persian Gulf launched 17 Tomahawk missiles and B-52 bombers operating over the Indian Ocean fired an additional 27 cruise missiles. The missiles hit targets were hit in the southern NFZ and included SAM batteries and command centers in the heavily populated cities of Al Kut, Al Iskandariyah, An Nasiriyah, and at Tallil air base.[27] This force protection measure enabled the coalition air forces to influence operations on the ground without having to penetrate Iraqi airspace.

The idea of force protection for conducting reconnaissance could also be seen in the use of unmanned aerial vehicles flying over Iraq. To highlight the threat, a USAF RQ-1B Predator flying in support of OSW was shot down and lost in the vicinity of Basra, the southernmost city in Iraq.[28] Clearly the use of satellites presented another safe option to protect aircrews, although these systems are expensive and at times “inflexible” because of their particular orbital positions or other higher mission priorities. Other reconnaissance alternatives that could help protect aircrews included the use of high-flying U-2 aircraft operating at over 70,000 or US Navy E-2C surveillance aircraft operating outside of Iraqi airspace altogether. However, with regards to both of these types of aircraft, the Iraqis modified weapon fuel systems to extend the range of their SAMs in order to close the “force protection gap” afforded to manned reconnaissance flights. Neither U-2 or E-2C aircraft were ever damaged by the modified Iraqi missiles.[29]

Political options existed that would aid in the force protection afforded aircrews. One was to further shrink the airspace permitted to Iraqi air operations and extend the no-fly zone coverage. The southern NFZ was pushed northward to the 33rd parallel in September 1996, reaching almost to the southern suburbs of Baghdad.[30] This extra distance gave coalition aircrews (and ostensibly Shiite rebels in the south) an additional 69 miles of warning for Iraqi helicopters and aircraft flying in their direction.

A paradox within to the concept of minimum force revolves around loosening rules of engagement for aircrew to more aggressively neutralize AAA and SAMs. Essentially, at times coalition pilots would not wait for enemy radars to acquire them and "lock-on" before attacking these batteries. Moreover, coalition aircraft conducted offensive operations to suppress enemy air defenses, regardless if their radars were turned on. These types of operations, often called "self-defense measures" were executed at least 11 times between August and September, 2001.[31] These missions were also important to weaken Iraqi air defenses as OSW and ONW ushered in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003.

Just as the RAF used the desert terrain to their advantage to protect airfields, the coalition air forces attempted to do the same. Recent operations out of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean have already been discussed, however, expeditionary bases were scattered throughout the region, including Kuwait, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman. In most cases, the terrain was favorable for the conduct of security operations by large USAF Security Force squadrons and RAF Regiment field squadrons.[32] However, as the proverbial "gloves came off" with aggressive air operations in Iraq in 1996, three major issues arose. First, the French government pulled its air support (arguably symbolic) from ONW. Second, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was placed in a difficult political situation and restricted coalition air combat operations in a face-saving gesture to their more fundamentalist population. A Saudi security official commented on coalition air forces, “We have adopted the principle that our bases will not be used as a means of punitive operations that go beyond the purpose of the no-flight zones.”[33] This, of course, placed a greater burden on naval and USAF forces operating outside of Saudi Arabia. The third area of concern created by a more aggressive air campaign was the increase in asymmetric threats to counter US operations in the region. Here, force protection “fault lines” were exploited with terrorist attacks against a military facility in Riyadh on November 13, 1995 killing five Americans and the June 25, 1996 truck bomb attack on the USAF Khobar Towers facility in Dhahran killing 19 Airmen and wounding over 350. In the latter case, the basic tactical concept of maintaining an adequate perimeter standoff was ignored.[34] Even the apparent “safe haven” of naval operations proved to be illusory when the USS *Cole* was attacked by a two-man team piloting a bomb-laden boat into the side of the destroyer. This attack in Yemen killed 17 sailors, wounded 39, and ripped a 40-foot gash in the hull of the ship.[35] While basing aircraft and ships outside of the air control zones of Iraq was a relatively safe option, it was not foolproof. These terrorist attacks highlighted the importance of force protection as an integral part of air control.

Air Tasks

Much like the RAF in Iraq during the 1920s, the bulk of air policing tasks in both northern and southern Iraq can be categorized into three major areas: *support to ground forces*, *independent air operations,* and *degrade government legitimacy* (as opposed to enhancing the legitimacy of British-installed King Feisal during the 1920s). The coalition’s air control methods did not maintain a dedicated ground maneuver element as the RAF did in Mesopotamia. Despite this, there were still important missions being accomplished within the ground support category.

During OPC, coalition air forces regularly provided site protection missions for camps holding more than 400,000 Kurdish refugees and humanitarian workers in the north. Likewise, coalition air operations ensured security not just for specific sites, but larger zones, enabling refugee transit. A general officer hoped that Saddam Hussein ". . . understands that we're deadly serious about protecting the Kurds."[36] As the ground forces pulled out of northern Iraq for OPC, air mobility assets provided a flexible option for commanders by keeping a credible infantry force operating out of Silopi, Turkey on full alert. Colonel E.E. "Butch" Whitehead, the infantry force commander, commented, "We have the aircraft and means, if necessary, to move forces into Iraq."[37] Air mobility was not only used to get forces rapidly into Iraq, but also supported the quick departure of support forces once Operation PROVIDE COMFORT was terminated, or when dangers to ground forces and humanitarian aid workers were present. The Central Intelligence Agency played a key role in the northern NFZ and was moved into position and supported via coalition air support system. In addition, as OPC gave way to the security-focused Operation NORTHERN WATCH, air forces rapidly evacuated nearly 6,000 Kurds who were working directly for the US government or western non-governmental humanitarian organizations.[38]

Aerial re-supply operations were probably the most critical air task supporting ground forces during Operation PROVIDE COMFORT. During the first few months of the mission, rotary and fixed wing aircraft air-landed or airdropped over 12,000 tons of food, water, medical supplies, blankets, and shelter kits in the mountainous regions of northern Iraq.[39] During the winter months, airlift support was even more crucial as the already primitive road systems were impassable with snow drifts. Helicopter transport was the literal lifeline for the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees and delivered tons of flour, rice, and cooking oil to UN distribution points dispersed throughout northern Iraq.[40]

Aerial reconnaissance was another important mission for the coalition air policing effort in Iraq. This task supported various ground organizations such as UNSCOM, which was charged with looking for and reporting undeclared arms production and weapons stockpiles throughout Iraq. Even when the French departed from air operations in northern Iraq, a French embassy spokesman acknowledged "We are still supporting UNSCOM, which is monitoring Iraq's military resources, arms control, chemical weapons and missiles."[41] In this case, airpower was a force multiplier served as the eyes for the small weapons inspection teams working throughout the entire country.

Another air policing task included enforcement of sea lanes and thwarting oil smuggling attempts out of southern Iraq. In addition, the idea of aerial shows of force as a "peace enforcer" played a part in dissuading Turkish attacks on Kurds and forays of Iranian aircraft attacking dissident groups inside of southern Iraq.[42]

The overwhelming majority of coalition missions were independent air tasks that directly enabled or strengthened the position of the aerial blockade. The first and foremost lethal mission was to deny Iraqi flights within the respective NFZs. For example, in January 1999 four coalition fighters (two F-15s and two F-14s) fired half a dozen missiles in a large aerial engagement against Iraqi Air Force MiG-23, MiG-25, and F-1 Mirage fighters that penetrated the southern NFZ.[43] Coalition fighters also led combat air patrols and in particular air escort missions for reconnaissance, tanker, and command/control aircraft. These types of missions were also flown in direct support of UN transport aircraft operating throughout Iraq.[44] The other main combat air task was the massive effort to suppress enemy air defenses. Attacks against

Iraqi AAA batteries, SAM sites, and integrated command centers was an independent air task that focused on maintaining coalition air superiority over the southern and northern NFZs.

Finally, some air tasks were directed at wearing down Hussein's regime by degrading the Iraqi government's legitimacy. As stated earlier, the political position of United States was to maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq and prevent the nation from crumbling into Shiite, Kurdish, and Sunni enclaves. At the same time, few members of the international community wanted to see Saddam Hussein remain in power. Even Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz interpreted coalition air strikes as attempts to ". . . lead to Mr. Saddam's overthrow."[45] The coalition partners hoped the NFZs would apply economic hardships and foment dissension inside Iraq's borders. The fact that no Iraqi civilian or military aircraft were able to fly between the capital in Baghdad, the critical southern city of Basra, or the oil-producing region of Mosul in the northern NFZ must have added some sort of economic stress on the people of Iraq. Coalition leaders hoped air operations would wear down Hussein's power, with US Admiral Mike Kramer noting that, "Saddam's grip on sovereignty is being chiseled away . . . he no longer controls important areas of Iraqi territory."[46] At the same time, reconnaissance aircraft were able to continue producing evidence of atrocities and enabling the US and its allies to politically isolate Iraq from the rest of the world. Tactically, the leaflet drops and information operations campaign were designed to demoralize and discourage Iraqi pilots and ground gunners, despite Saddam Hussein's orders to disregard the NFZs and make every attempt to shoot down coalition aircraft.[47]

Battlefield Results

Were coalition air operations conducted over Iraq during the 1990s a success? From a geopolitical perspective, Saddam Hussein did not repeat an invasion of Kuwait or launch massive ground attacks into neighboring Turkey, Syria, Iran, or Saudi Arabia. However, Iraq did launch a small incursion across the demilitarized zone between Iraq and Kuwait, despite warnings from the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM). On November 2, 1992 UNIKOM reported at least 500 Iraqi soldiers crossed into the demilitarized zone in order to dismantle and recover abandoned weapons. In addition, Iraq engaged in provocative internal troop deployments within 12 miles of the Kuwaiti border. This prompted a rapid deployment of nearly 13,000 US troops and nearly 350 additional aircraft to bolster the US and allied position in the region in October 1994.[48] President Bill Clinton remarked that the air control effort against Saddam Hussein was designed to increase the strategic position of the United States. In particular he noted that, "… the box you [Saddam Hussein] are in is now a tighter box."[49] One of the objectives from 1992 onwards was the *hope* that regime change would occur in Iraq. If the air coalition was to force this regime change, it needed to either operate throughout the entire country of Iraq, or would need better synchronization with some sort of ground force.

From the Kurdish or Shiite ground force perspective, the success of the air campaign may be viewed similarly. Coalition combat activities were primarily focused on sustaining unhindered air operations and this did not prevent large-scale Iraqi ground attacks and atrocities against these populations. Recall that during the opening phases of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, a highly mobile US infantry force was positioned in Silopi, southern Turkey. In 1992, as Iraq pushed its infantry and police forces into Erbil, this US ground combat force did not assist the rebels. The resultant clashes with Kurds in the cities of Erbil and Sulaimaniya resulted in over 500 casualties. Despite this, President George H.W. Bush commented that he did not expect the US ground force to be used for this direct intervention.[50] The same can be said of coalition air forces. The air coalition hampered the Iraqi Air Force from operating against insurgents;

however, the Iraqi ground forces operated without impunity. Slaughter took place under the noses of coalition aircraft in the NFZs.

From a tactical perspective, the decade of air control may have been helpful for an entire generation of fighter pilots to learn to operate in a tough ground-to-air threat environment. Colonel John Burgess, one-time head of air operations for the northern NFZ, commented in 2002, “Knowing the terrain and knowing your enemy is definitely an advantage. I think it would be hard to find a U.S. tactical pilot who has not rotated through Northern or Southern Watch.”[51] Through years of flying, pilots were better able to understand the tactics of Iraqi gunners, concealed firing position techniques, and be alerted to new capabilities within the Iraqi integrated air defense scheme. This would prove vital in the lead-up to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

Was it worth the cost? When looking at the total cost for air control and an annual US Army training exercise in Kuwait called Operation DESERT SPRING, the cost of keeping Saddam Hussein “boxed in” averaged $1.4 billion a year. With this average, the roughly twelve years of air control from 1991 to 2003 cost the US taxpayers approximately $16.8 billion. The cost of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM for the first year in 2003 to oust Saddam Hussein was $53.3 billion, not to mention the loss of hundreds of US and thousands Iraqi lives.[52] From this point of view, air control under the guise of “containing” Saddam Hussein appeared to be an attractive alternative to the outright occupation of Iraq. Are there lessons to be applied from the decades of RAF and USAF air policing in Iraq with an eye towards counterinsurgency operations in that country for the future?

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Chapter 4

Air Policing and Counterinsurgency in Iraq – the future

> *People often want to focus on, "Are you killing somebody? Are you shooting from the air?" But, frankly, from my perspective, that's a very, very small – important, but very small contribution of airpower in a counterinsurgency.*
>
> —Major General Robert Allardice
> Commander, Coalition Air Force Transition Team[1]

Air Control Lessons for Modern Counterinsurgency

There are several historical lessons to be gleaned from the previous decades of air control that apply to airpower's conduct of modern COIN operations in Iraq. The first lesson for air control and air policing is that despite the illusory rhetoric that "airpower can do it alone," these ventures were inherently *joint operations*. Recall that Sir John Slessor recognized RAF air control operations needed a ground component in order to affect surface operations. In particular these forces gathered human intelligence, engaged the local populace, supported aircraft logistics and maintenance, and conducted tasks where airpower was ill-suited, such as patrolling cities or densely populated tribal regions. The RAF hoped that the British Army would provide a small mechanized force for this purpose; however, their refusal forced the RAF to standup armored car companies and the Iraqi Levies to take on this important complementary role. Understanding this vital relationship is seen today in the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNFI) Commander's counterinsurgency guidance, in which General Raymond Odierno notes the Iraqi people themselves represent the "decisive terrain" for coalition forces to secure and defend.[2]

Similarly, the 1990s air policing of the NFZs was a joint force effort between USAF, US Navy, and US Marine Corps aviation forces (not to mention the combined force of French, Australian, and RAF squadrons). Moreover, during Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, the US Army's alert ground force supported by Army and special operations helicopters in Silopi, Turkey provided a credible combat element that ensured the security of humanitarian aid distribution sites and refugee camps, although that ground force could not prevent the Iraqi Army attacking the Kurds in Erbil. These army helicopters provided battlefield mobility, evacuation, and aerial re-supply where fixed-wing assets could not reach. Joint operations supporting air control were also seen executed with Tomahawk missiles launched from surface ships and submarines. These seaborne forces proved to be crucial, especially when the Saudi government blocked USAF land-based fighters from striking targets in Iraq. In both decades of air control, joint operations were essential to the overall campaign.

The second major historical theme from air policing campaigns is *interagency cooperation*. In other words, despite the military component conducting combat and support missions, there was always a non-military dimension integral to air control. During the 1920s, the RAF used its airpower with a particular emphasis on aiding civil administrators to travel throughout the Iraq Mandate. Aircraft enabled these political officers to rapidly assess crises, collect information (to include complaints as well as taxes), deliver humanitarian relief supplies, and disseminate information from the central government. RAF airpower was linked directly to both hard power (military) and soft power (diplomatic, informational, and economic) within the country. Likewise, the air control efforts during the 1990s mirrored their RAF predecessors. During OPC, airpower was not only the main, but at times the *only* delivery option of humanitarian workers and relief supplies into the mountainous regions of northern Iraq. These deliveries were timely and supported hundreds of thousands of refugees and thousands of UN and nongovernmental relief workers. During the enforcement of northern and southern NFZs over Iraq, the interagency role was limited, but important nonetheless. Air escort missions supported UNSCOM weapon inspections throughout Iraq. Reconnaissance aircraft provided real-time intelligence to US and world leaders on Saddam Hussein's atrocities. In addition, these missions provided indications of the effectiveness of UN sanctions against Iraq. In both decades of air control, RAF and coalition air operations were clearly tied to non-military roles. While military historian James Corum argues airpower and technology cannot replace the "ground-centric" nature of counterinsurgencies, he acknowledges the critical nature of airpower supporting actions focused on addressing economic, social, or political issues.[3] Airpower is uniquely situated to support interagency operations.

Finally, like almost all counterinsurgencies, a historical look at air control in Iraq reveals the *time intensive* nature of this type of operation. Both the RAF experience and coalition operations against Saddam Hussein each lasted over a decade. The RAF's air policing of the Iraq Mandate was a COIN mission in the truest sense, with Kurdish and Shiite forces operating inside the territorial borders and continuous Arab and Ikhwan raiding parties from the desert regions in the south and west. In addition, the RAF also fought against massed conventional forces attacking from Turkey and against Kurdish insurgents simultaneously. Turkish forces provided an easily identifiable target for the RAF; however, the same was not true of the unconventional Kurdish rebels. Despite this, the Royal Air Force was able to attack, degrade, and demoralize its enemy. After years of fighting, Sheikh Mahmud accepted ceasefire terms and halted his insurgency in southern Iraq. During the ceasefire negotiations in May 1931, Mahmud is purported to have walked up to an RAF pilot and, while pointing to the wings on the officer's tunic, exclaimed

"You are the people who have broken my spirit."[4] The years of fighting this particular insurgency ended when all its leaders were captured in a final battle near present-day Kuwait. In a final joint operation, RAF aircraft, "Blue Jackets" (operating as naval infantry), Royal Marines, and forty-eight RAF armored cars fighting in a wing-sized formation concentrated and defeated the Ikhwan insurgency.[5]

Although not a counterinsurgency, the air control effort to contain Saddam Hussein was just as long in duration for coalition forces as that conducted by their RAF forerunners. The enforcement mission of the NFZs was concluded only by the initiation of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) in March 2003. Air control during the 1990s was not only time intensive, but labor intensive. In fact, coalition air forces flew over 200,000 aircraft sorties in the first eight years of OSW, with another 16,000 sorties flown for ONW during its first three years.[6] While there is not much evidence to conclude that air control operations loosened Saddam Hussein's political grip on power, some strategists argue the northern and southern NFZs weakened Iraq militarily and presented the option for regime change and kept him "contained" in the interim.[7] Based on this, coalition air control may have "set the conditions" for a successful ground invasion.

To highlight the frustration of time intensive air control methods, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld thought economic sanctions and the air blockade of Iraq were a failure. He noted that Saddam Hussein's barring UNSCOM weapons inspectors proved the ineffectiveness of air control and its enforcement of the NFZs. Rumsfeld commented, "There is no way any reasonable person could look at that record and say that it's worked. It hasn't worked. And it's not working."[8] Ironically, after the invasion, the inability of coalition ground forces to locate any Iraqi weapons of mass destruction seems to contradict Rumsfeld's assertion.

Was coalition air policing of the no-fly zones perhaps more effective than previously thought? While there is no evidence to support this claim, the comments made by Secretary Rumsfeld emphasizes patience is required in conducting modern air control operations. Since airpower's support to COIN operations requires a joint and interagency approach, what advantages does airpower present to US and coalition commanders as US Army brigade combat teams (BCT) begin to depart Iraq?

Airpower Advantages

Current military doctrine highlights the importance of ground forces (i.e. soldiers and Marines) in leading and conducting counterinsurgency operations. In particular, the idea of "troop density" in support of inhabitants (the number and ratio of COIN forces to the populace is situation-dependent) is key to creating and maintaining public order. Counterinsurgency is a manpower-intensive endeavor as security operations will likely cover widespread areas.[9] While airpower is unable to conduct counterinsurgency without a ground element (as seen with the RAF's experience), the converse is also true: ground power cannot effectively conduct COIN operations without an air element. This fact will be magnified as the number of Army BCTs is reduced. Airpower is uniquely suited to maintain combat capabilities in the region. The USAF provides a *politically viable* alternative for US lawmakers, *strengthens legitimacy* of the Iraqi government, and is a highly *flexible* option for ensuring security gains are not lost in the region.

Airpower is a politically viable option for both US and Iraqi politicians, especially as Iraq forces take the lead in COIN operations. During an April 2009 visit to Iraq, President Obama proclaimed to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki "We have committed ourselves to a strategy that ensures an orderly responsible transition from US coalition security forces to Iraqi security forces . . . the drawdown that will take place will ultimately result in the removal of all US troops."[10] The drawdown of forces directly plays into airpower's doctrinal strength as a force multiplier. In this case, aircraft can present a smaller military footprint than land-based COIN forces. Rapid battlefield mobility afforded by tactical airlift enables smaller numbers of ground forces to quickly shift positions throughout the area of operation.[11] For instance, aircraft can be based in neighboring countries such as Kuwait or Turkey, fly to support Iraqi and remaining US ground forces stationed in Iraq for a particular mission, and then return to their host expeditionary airfields upon completion. Similarly, as US ground forces continue to reduce (and eventually eliminate) their footprint inside of Iraq, they can be collocated with aircraft outside of Iraq. In this case, US air and ground forces can be arrayed in an "operational overwatch" position and serve as a quick reaction force (like in Silopi, Turkey during OPC). This option, enabled by airpower, may prove to be critical for US policymakers as the role of the US "residual force" supporting the Iraqi Army is more clearly defined.

Airpower is also politically viable with regards to reducing and mitigating risks. Currently, there are nearly 140,000 US troops spread throughout Iraq.[12] These troops require a substantial network of main and alternate convoy supply routes in order to sustain and equip fielded forces. As the US presence in Iraq shrinks, airpower can assume a greater portion of the supply lifeline and reduce the number of highly vulnerable ground convoys. This will also have the effect of eliminating some logistical troops and actually increase the percentage of combat force.

From a close air support perspective, on-call aircraft can orbit and effectively support US and Iraqi counterinsurgency operations. Coordinating these air operations are Battlefield Airmen who are embedded with ground COIN forces. The close air support aircraft can inherit many (admittedly not all) of the functions of heavy armor and artillery batteries, allowing COIN forces to increase battlefield agility without decreasing firepower. In essence, airpower can support, supply, and deploy forces while at the same time reduce the number of the proverbial "boots on the ground."

As with both the RAF air control of the Iraq Mandate in the 1920s and the USAF air policing of the NFZs during the 1990s, airpower is an enticing option since it has proven more cost effective than maintaining a large ground presence. An increased scope of air operations may directly lead to a lower casualty rate as the ground contingent is smaller and shuttled through the air. In a protracted campaign, a large ground-based COIN force may be looked upon as occupiers and inflame the local populace as time goes on. Airpower, if applied properly, can provide an "economy of force," enabling a smaller ground US footprint, while not reducing capability.[13] Clearly if airpower is misapplied (especially through errant munitions, collateral damage, or civilian casualties) then this can quickly unravel tough gains made by ground-based COIN forces who have positively engaged with the local populace.

Another politically attractive option for increasing airpower support to COIN is that the reduction in ground forces provides policymakers with strategic options. The ground forces can return to their home bases to refit, reorganize, and recuperate. The US BCTs can also be redeployed to other contingencies around the world. During the 1920s, the RAF's coverage of the Iraq Mandate freed British ground forces to conduct operations in Egypt and the heavily populated regions of Palestine. In present-day Iraq, USAF and US Navy airpower may free up coalition ground forces to focus on Afghanistan until competent and confident indigenous ground COIN forces have been established in that region.

Airpower can also enhance the legitimacy of the Iraqi government. General Odierno's counterinsurgency guidance directs coalition forces to "Conduct operations by, with, or through our Iraqi partners . . . with the Iraqis more and more in the lead."[14] Airpower is perfectly suited for these types of operations. For instance, many COIN missions such as border enforcement in remote regions, signals intelligence platforms or reconnaissance satellites often operate unseen and at high altitudes. These assets gather critical and timely information and relay it to Iraqi ground forces where host-nation units take the lead and conduct visible ground combat operations. Resupply missions and battlefield mobility can operate with a similar degree of discretion. For example, a flight of CV-22 Ospreys may deliver Iraqi ground forces to a landing zone that is purposely offset several kilometers from a village. Once inserted, the Iraqi troops move by foot to their objective, conduct their mission, depart from the objective site, and are picked up by US air assets. In this illustration, aircraft play a critical, but relatively low-visibility part of the mission in the eyes of the Iraqi populace.

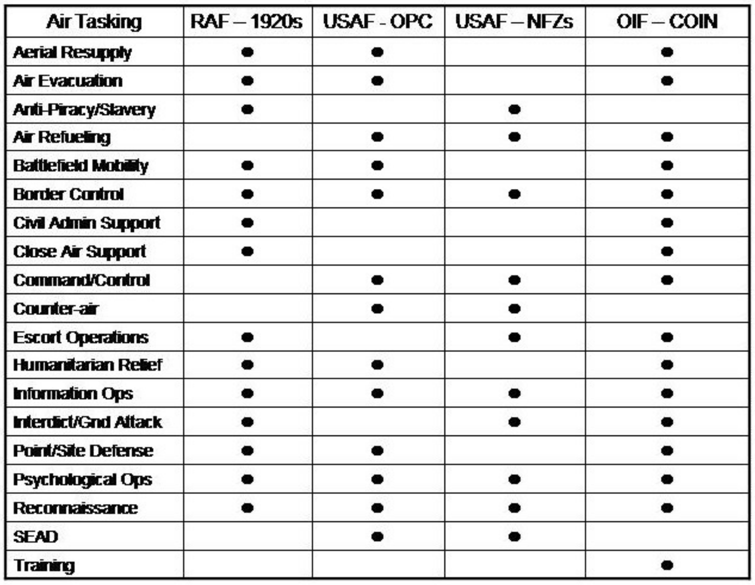
Aircraft can also bolster government legitimacy by broadcasting messages on behalf of regional governments. Leaflet drops, military deception, and counterpropaganda campaigns can all be discretely conducted by airpower while directly aiding the national government's strategic communication efforts to the Iraqi people.[15] Like the RAF during the 1920s, aircraft can rapidly deliver Iraqi emergency response and humanitarian relief workers at the onset of a crisis in order to demonstrate the national government's immediate control of a manmade or natural disaster.

Finally, airpower provides a flexible option in the region for US policymakers as aircraft offer COIN forces an asymmetric advantage over ground-based insurgents. Airpower's flexibility can be seen through aircraft delivering precision-guided munitions, moving supplies and humanitarian aid, or shifting troop positions on the battlefield. As was the case with the RAF, modern irregular warfare doctrine calls for airpower to conduct COIN operations and conventional warfare simultaneously.[16] History has demonstrated that manned and unmanned aircraft are able to strike insurgent targets as well as patrol borders, conduct convoy route reconnaissance, and play a significant role in extending communications capabilities for COIN forces by relaying and coordinating tactical information. Moreover, intelligence-gathering platforms complement human intelligence gathered on the ground in order to obtain full spectrum awareness of insurgent activities.[17] Increased loiter times and air refueling have enabled multi-role fighter aircraft to provide point defense security over key infrastructure such as power generation stations, oil pipelines, and key government buildings. Air and space platforms can monitor, deny, disrupt, degrade, and destroy an insurgent's ability to communicate. These platforms, supporting ground COIN forces, are crucial in gathering intelligence and in influencing the local population.[18] In all cases, aircraft provide commanders with a highly flexible option for supporting a smaller ground force.

Filling the Deficit – the Air Tasks

As has been discussed, the RAF's primary combat and air support roles were to maintain *internal* security for the Iraq Mandate. On the other hand, the policing effort during the 1990s was almost exclusively air-centric in nature. The coalition almost exclusively used airpower to contain Iraqi forays into neighboring countries, thus guaranteeing *external* regional security. As coalition ground forces for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) begin their exodus and complete the transfer of authority to Iraqi battalions, historical analysis can predict the "deficit" that airpower will be expected to fill.

In Table 1 below, the air tasks for three major air control efforts (the RAF in the 1920s, Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, and the NFZ enforcement) have been listed, with a fourth column dedicated to presumptive tasks that airpower can accomplish in order to cover the capability deficit of departing Army BCTs. Based on historical analysis, the likely OIF-COIN tasks appear to take on many attributes of the RAF's air control during the 1920s. Modern air tasks such as air refueling and airborne command and control have been added. Suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) and counter-air missions are unlikely tasks for airpower, as the COIN effort is ground-focused. If for some reason the Iranian or Syrian air forces turned aggressive towards Iraq, then the USAF could shift roles and combat these emerging threats.



Air Tasking	RAF – 1920s	USAF - OPC	USAF – NFZs	OIF – COIN
Aerial Resupply	●	●		●
Air Evacuation	●	●		●
Anti-Piracy/Slavery	●		●	
Air Refueling		●	●	●
Battlefield Mobility	●	●		●
Border Control	●	●	●	●
Civil Admin Support	●			●
Close Air Support	●			●
Command/Control		●	●	●
Counter-air		●	●	
Escort Operations	●		●	●
Humanitarian Relief	●	●		●
Information Ops	●	●	●	●
Interdict/Gnd Attack	●		●	●
Point/Site Defense	●	●		●
Psychological Ops	●	●	●	●
Reconnaissance	●	●	●	●
SEAD		●	●	
Training				●

Table 1 Air Policing Task Matrix

One mission listed in Table 1 that was not seen during the 1920s air control or 1990s air policing is the idea of training the indigenous military air force. Just as ground forces are heavily involved with “putting an Iraqi face” on COIN, the same will ultimately hold true for the training of the Iraqi Air Force. Iraqi Air Force COIN missions, like those of the USAF, will focus on reconnaissance, mobility, close air support, medical evacuation, counter-air, and interdiction. The issue for USAF trainers is that it takes a significantly longer period of time to build an air force than it does a ground-based COIN or police force. Training pilots and aircraft maintainers, procuring equipment, and rebuilding airbase infrastructure implies that the USAF Airmen advising and assisting the Iraqis in this task will likely remain in Iraq long after their ground trainer counterparts have completed their mission.[19]

Notes

[1] "Major General Robert Allardice (USAF) Holds a Defense Department News Briefing via Teleconference from Iraq," *Congressional Quarterly*, March 17, 2008 via Lexis-Nexis.

[2] General Raymond Odierno, "Multi-National Force-Iraq Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance," (Baghdad, Iraq: Headquarters, MNFI, September 16, 2008), p. 1.

[3] James Corum, "On Airpower, Land Power, and Counterinsurgency: Getting Doctrine Right," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 49, 2nd Quarter 2008, p. 94.

[4] "Report on Air Operations, May 1931, Air 5/1292"; quoted in Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: 1914-1932* (London, UK: Ithaca Press, 1976), p. 202.

[5] Kingsley Oliver, *Through Adversity*, p. 9.

[6] U.S. Congress, *CRS Report on Iraq-U.S. Confrontation* by Alfred B. Prados and Kenneth Katzman (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 27, 2001), via Iraq Watch, http://www.iraqwatch.org/government/US/CRS%20Docs/confront.htm.

[7] U.S. Congress, *Iraq: Former and Recent Military Confrontations With the United States*, by Alfred B. Prados (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 6, 2002), p. CRS 13.

[8] Ben Barber, "U.S. pledges protection for Kurds in Iraq; Meets with dissidents at State," *The Washington Times*, August 10, 2002 via Lexis-Nexis.

[9] U.S. Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, December 15, 2006), p. 1-13.

[10] "US president, Iraqi prime minister hold news conference in Baghdad," *Al-Iraqiyah TV*, April 7, 2009; BBC Monitoring Middle East – Political, April 8, 2009 via Lexis-Nexis.

[11] U.S. Air Force, Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3, *Irregular Warfare* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Doctrine Center, August 1, 2007), p. 15.

[12] Greg Miller and Usama Redha, "12,000 troops soon to exit Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 2009 via Lexis-Nexis.

[13] U.S. Air Force, AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, p. 20.

[14] General Raymond Odierno, "Multi-National Force-Iraq Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance," (Baghdad, Iraq: Headquarters, MNFI, September 16, 2008), p. 1.

[15] U.S. Air Force, AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, pp. 37-39.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 8.

[17] U.S. Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, December 15, 2006), pp. E-1-4.

[18] U.S. Air Force, AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, p. 37.

[19] U.S. Army, FM 3-23, *Counterinsurgency*, p. E-5.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

> *I think the method of air control, as devised and practiced by the RAF in many wild parts of the world during the first decade after the First World War, may be susceptible of adaptation and application in very different conditions to preserve the peace of the world.*
>
> —Sir John Slessor
> *The Central Blue*

History has provided over two decades worth of lessons where airpower was called upon to control Iraq. During the 1920s, the Royal Air Force offered Great Britain a cheap alternative to influencing the region. The RAF's air control operation focused on the principles of the inverted blockade, the use of minimum force, precision targeting by its bombers, and the concepts of force protection to ensure the security of its small regional element. The cost in lives, equipment, and money was significantly smaller than large ground-based punitive expeditions or by maintaining large geographically scattered garrisons to exert control. The RAF tasks supported small highly mobile ground forces, enhanced the legitimacy of the Iraqi government, or were part of an overall independent air campaign. Air control drastically cut the annual cost of operations for keeping the Iraq Mandate from £23 million to £620,000, or a reduction of 97 percent! This is exactly what Winston Churchill had proposed and on the surface, it suited the British Empire well. Moreover, the fledgling Royal Air Force was eager to ensure its own survival in the midst of military down-sizing.

Much as a ground occupation force in Iraq was not *financially* viable for Great Britain after the Great War, an occupation of Iraq was not *politically* viable for US policymakers after the Gulf War. The 1991 Gulf War resulted in the successful ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The United Nations Security Council's UN Resolution 660 called for the Iraq military to, "… withdraw immediately and unconditionally all its forces."[1] As Kuwait was liberated, there were only limited calls for a permanent ground occupation of Iraq. Occupying Iraqi soil would not have proven popular with the coalition as the political objectives for securing Kuwait had been met. While the ouster of Saddam Hussein might have been a desired goal, it would have to be settled through political or economic means.

The air policing effort during the 1990s afforded the US its *only* option to maintain pressure on Saddam Hussein's regime. Coalition air forces were engaged in an air blockade that denied Saddam Hussein's military and civil administration freedom of air action covering large swaths of Iraqi territory. Much like the RAF experience, the coalition adhered to the concepts of minimum force, precision targeting, and force protection for their deployed air assets operating in theater. While there was air support to ground forces during the first few years of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in the Kurdish region, the main combat actions involved an air-centric approach to denying Iraqi Air Force flights and degrading Saddam Hussein's integrated air defense systems. Undeniably, the concept of minimum force provided Saddam Hussein with a loophole as the NFZs did not stop Iraqi ground operations against Shiite and Kurdish populations. However, airpower was never given the opportunity to directly engage the Iraqi counterinsurgency forces as they launched their campaigns in the north and south.

Like their RAF predecessors, the northern and southern NFZ enforcement missions proved to be relatively cheap as compared to a large-scale ground occupation in Iraq. After six years of combat, the average cost of occupation is roughly $12 billion per month for a projected total cost of nearly $3 trillion.[2] The efficacy of air control is clearly visible where the decade-long containment of Saddam Hussein cost roughly the same as *one month* of ground occupation during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

History reveals that air control still requires significant joint service support in order to execute. Additionally, airpower support to interagency operations to enable diplomatic, economic, and informational elements of power are often more important than the military solutions, especially in a counterinsurgency. As the Army BCTs depart the region and the Iraqi battalions and national police lead the fight against insurgents, airpower presents a politically viable option and aptly fills the "combat deficit" that will remain. Airpower provides an asymmetric advantage to the Iraqi battalions and smaller US "residual force." Aircraft will act as a force multiplier and facilitate battlefield mobility, reduce the footprint of support forces, and provide accurate and lethal fire support where needed. The air policing force will strengthen the legitimacy of the Iraqi government by enabling the Iraqi ground forces to be the publicly visible force conducting COIN operations. Airpower will provide crucial, behind the scenes support to the ground forces. Missions such as border control, information operations, strategic communications, humanitarian and civil administration all play to airpower's strengths and directly assist in bolstering the Iraqi government. Modern air and space assets are flexible and offer local commanders and policymakers a wide array of support (mobility, reconnaissance, command/control) and combat (both lethal and non-lethal) capabilities to the small force.

Notes

[1] United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 660*, S/RES/0660 (1990).

[2] Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz, “The Iraq War Will Cost Us $3 Trillion, and Much More,” *The Washington Post*, march 9, 2008 via Lexis-Nexis.

Glossary

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery
ACC	Armored Car Company
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
COIN	Counterinsurgency
MNFI	Multi-National Force-Iraq
NFZ	No-fly Zone
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
ONW	Operation Northern Watch
OPC	Operation Provide Comfort
OSW	Operation Southern Watch
RAF	Royal Air Force
SAM	Surface to Air Missile
UNIKOM	United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission
UNSCOM	United Nations Special Commission
USAF	United States Air Force

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