

# *The Role of Joint Air Power – JAPCC Conference 2007*

## *General Egon Ramms' Keynote Address*

### *"The Role of Air Power in Expeditionary Security and Stability Operations."*

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for allowing me to address you today. It is an honor to be the Keynote Speaker here at the JAPCC Conference on Allied Airpower Transformation. As the Commander of JFC Brunssum, I am the NATO Operational-level Commander for Allies' mission in Afghanistan. This places me between the in-theatre Commander of the International Security Assistance Force, General (US) Dan McNeill, in Kabul, and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General (US) John Craddock at SHAPE.

I am going to talk for about twenty-five minutes from my perspective on NATO operations in Afghanistan and on air operations. But I have three distinct disadvantages here that I ask you to excuse:

- One: I am a simple soldier for whom English is a second language, so I will be speaking from my prepared remarks.
- Two: I am blessed with a quite serious Teutonic persona in which humor rarely surfaces.
- Three: I am addressing an audience as a German. For me, the idea of German Air Superiority can be summed up in one word: Lufthansa!

You are all aware of the recent history of Afghanistan, on thirty years of instability and insurgency. The Soviet invasion in 1979 established a Communist regime and brought about the Mujhadin insurgency, and then when the Soviets left the warlords ruled and there was continued civil strife. The warlords were followed by the Taliban regime and its fundamentalist view of Islam and society. Since 2001, forces under command of OEF, and since 2002, the International Community through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have worked to establish safety, security, reconstruction and development and a new governmental framework for Afghanistan.

There is still much work to do, one of the main reasons being the security and safety situation in the country does not allow for the comprehensive reconstruction, development and establishment of governmental structures and institutions at a speed that we, and the people of Afghanistan, would like to see happen. Furthermore, the complexity of Afghanistan is best reflected in the continuous interplay of many factors: a weak central government disconnected from local, district and provincial developments, fragile institutions, illiteracy, narcotics, corruption, insurgents, bad infrastructure, tribalism, warlordism, criminality and the challenges that go with the geopolitical situation of Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

It is in this context that NATO debates a concept referred to as the "Comprehensive Approach." I know this is an air power conference. The often repeated refrain is that NATO is a military alliance lacking the expertise or the skills to address the shortcomings of governance and economic development. This is true. I

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have no economic planning staff in my headquarters, no one capable of training lawyers and judges, no banking experts, no agronomists, no urban planners. There is no way around these limitations. With proper support from the nations, the military can only provide the 20 or 30 percent of the solution to Afghanistan's problems that relate to security and military matters as a pre-requisite for the other 70 to 80 percent needed for a positive outcome in Afghanistan.

The 20 percent that the military can contribute to an ultimate victory in this counterinsurgency campaign, I would say that air power is about 40 percent of that, or about 8 to 10 percent of the total necessary effort or effects to achieve success.

This is not to minimize the importance of air power. No! Kinetic superiority - as made possible by air power in Afghanistan – is absolutely essential to our success. But I want to emphasize here that as you evaluate NATO Air Power transformation during this conference, try to avoid thinking that air power must be transformed into a complete solution for success in all dimensions.

I believe that air services are currently well trained and equipped to accomplish the traditional strategic and theatre air missions. Where transformation, and new doctrinal thought are necessary, I believe, is in improving the employment and effectiveness of air power in campaigns that are so dependant on non-kinetic effects, against an opposing force so well prepared to exploit every instance of collateral damage and civilian death. In my opinion, this is a difficult enough task.

The themes you will be discussing during this conference include Allied Air Power contributions to – and transformation for – command, control, and ISR, kinetic effects, non-kinetic effects, and reconstruction and development.

I will touch on all of these, but some will be emphasized more than others, naturally, because the related operational issues are of different emphasis for me.

Expeditionary security and stability operations – as characterized for NATO by operations in Afghanistan and by coalition operations in Iraq – are a challenging area for air power. Air power theory and doctrine – in the main – reflects that the history of air warfare is predominately one of high intensity, inter-state warfare. And we should not neglect that! The collective global community now finds itself in a Post-Cold war, Post-“Classical Attrition Warfare” period of history. But we must remain ready to operate in a traditional strategic manner.

We have already begun to pay the price for shutting down some of our ground-based early warning systems in this new era. We must now scramble airborne early warning aircraft to track the increasingly frequent Russian bomber sorties over the Omega line. The pendulum always seems to swing too far when money can be saved.

In military air theory however, despite some updates in the 1990s, doctrine has stayed focused on a major inter-state conflict. Conflicts with non-state actors, known variously as small wars, Military Operations Other Than War, Low Intensity Conflict, and including Counter-Insurgency Operations, are now the prevalent form of warfare, and could remain so for the foreseeable future given the long war on global terrorism.

Western armed forces, normally configured for conventional warfare, have often struggled to adapt to such unconventional operations. Hence the US Army and US Marine Corps have recently revised their counter-insurgency doctrine, and the US Air Force revised its “Air Force Doctrine for Irregular Warfare”. Such conflicts are often viewed as land-centric but increasingly airmen will need to consider how the air

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environment can be exploited to facilitate – if not deliver – non-kinetic, cognitive effects, as well as more traditional kinetic effects.

Hence I welcome the focus of this JAPCC conference on “The Role of Air Power in Expeditionary Security and Stability Operations”, not just in Afghanistan but elsewhere.

Let me get this conference going by talking about issues I am currently dealing with in Afghanistan, outlining the more general military contribution toward counter-insurgency operations and the effects we wish to achieve, and finish by posing some challenges for this conference to discuss.

So first, let me talk for a few minutes about Afghanistan specifically. The situation there can perhaps be a case study as you evaluate air power transformation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in Afghanistan the basic enemy tactic is to ambush, raid, and then flee if necessary to avoid being drawn into action to hold ground – in other words to engage in only tactical operations.

The insurgent depends upon the people for physical and moral support. Both sides – the Opposing Military Force (OMF) and ISAF – are competing for the will of the same people. And let us not forget that one of the reasons the adversary fights as he does as an insurgent or terrorist, is because Western military superiority forces him to. A critical element of this Western superiority is the control of the air. Air Power enables our kinetic superiority, and denies the adversary freedom of manoeuvre while maintaining freedom of action for our own forces. Control of the air discourages the adversary from concentrating, and forces him to fight as an irregular.

The enemy intimidates, terrorizes and hides among the local population and uses them as a platform from which to launch attacks on ISAF and Afghan forces with little or no regard for civilian casualties.

ISAF forces have to respond, but here we face a dilemma. Every time when force is employed, there is a risk of civilian casualties and collateral damage, which makes the task for ISAF of winning and maintaining the support of the local population more difficult. Deciding when and how to respond to these asymmetric attacks is one of the most challenging elements of this campaign and we are learning “on the job”.

The shortages of manoeuvre forces, helicopters, and other key enablers in ISAF are no secret. These and other shortfalls increase the risk to our soldiers and compromise the ISAF mission. It is vital that political decisions of member nations are supported with the means to carry out those decisions.

Perhaps national air force inventories are shaped for more strategic missions, hence a shortage among NATO troop-contributing nations of capable rotor-wing aircraft to contribute. That is a consideration. However, the political will of these member nations to provide forces and to continue supporting the mission is also under direct assault through the enemy’s exploitation of collateral damage and especially civilian casualties, effects generally perceived to be worsened by – if not actually intrinsic to – air operations in Afghanistan. The declining national will of the allies, and the sub-optimal force contributions, endanger the mission.

Sophisticated IEDs are now the biggest killer of ISAF troops, but only a handful of nations have any counter-IED expertise, training or equipment.

Suicide bombers are an increasing threat, but only a few nations can provide actionable intelligence to address that threat. We engage complex targets requiring precision and video surveillance, but again, only a few nations can deliver those capabilities. Providing solutions to these deficiencies will take time; however, they

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must be addressed. Many ISAF counter-IED requirements have remained unfilled for months, and most are not high technology requirements that exist only in a few nations.

Despite these problems, over the last year ISAF operations have placed the enemy under great pressure. In some regions, the Afghan citizens are increasingly willing to cooperate with ISAF.

As we, with our Afghan partners, demonstrate the ability to sustain a security presence in a given location, the people have begun to show their support for ISAF and the Afghan government, against the radical opposing elements amongst them. It is not true to say the Afghan universally welcome foreign troops with open arms. But, in many areas where an Afghan National Security Force presence cannot be provided, the local people have expressed their preference for an ISAF security guarantee rather than a harsher, more restrictive, alternative being offered by the Taliban and other opposing forces. This is a pleasing development that must be nurtured, since gaining and maintaining the support of the people is central to a successful ISAF campaign.

Militarily we are winning the tactical battle. We have eliminated many top opposition commanders and other leaders and continue to inflict significant losses on the enemy. We have made a great deal of progress in improving security in the most heavily contested areas of the south and east.

However, the ISAF campaign is entering a critical phase that requires a re-examination of the task and a renewed effort by the member nations. As everyone in this room understands, the stabilization of Afghanistan will not be achieved solely by military means. But I have made my point in that regard here, and I will continue to carry it forward to the diplomatic community and other national decision makers.

There is general agreement that the broad principles for countering irregular activity developed by the British, French and other in colonial and post-colonial counter-insurgency campaigns have stood the test of time. These are the recognition of the political nature and therefore civilian primacy of the issue, the need for long-term and integrated civil and military commitment, the importance of information operations, the need to separate the insurgent from the mass of the people, the need to neutralize the insurgent through appropriate and proportionate military response, and the need for political reform and long-term socio-economic development to remove the cause of the problem. In other words, a comprehensive approach.

NATO has since 1973 defined counter-insurgency as those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken to defeat insurgency. Though enduring, these principles must be tailored to the context and circumstance. Not only is the character of adversary activity evolving, for example Jihadi rather than communist threats, but contemporary operations are expeditionary and offensive, not imperial and defensive. Also the effects based approach to operations promotes the achievement of desired conditions and outcomes, better understanding of Influence or non-kinetic effects, and interagency ways of achieving effect. A key activity is, therefore, developing the authority of the state. Part of this is establishing the authority of the military lines of operation through the legitimacy and perception of the conduct of intervening military forces.

I say again: “The legitimacy, and perception of the conduct of intervening forces.” Here again in Afghanistan we have a problem. NATO has endorsed and undertaken a ground war, but its member nations have not provided enough ground forces, hence

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an increased need for Close Air Support. Unfortunately, this increased reliance on CAS increases the risk of collateral damage and civilian casualties, undermining the “*legitimacy and perception of the conduct of intervening military forces*” in a population that sees such remote engagements as disproportionate, or even unsporting.

Joint military activities create effects in both the cognitive and physical domains. In the physical domain, for example, kinetic superiority at the point of contact with opposing forces, and the assurance of that as provided by CAS, is imperative.

But we now ask ourselves: “Are information operations messages sufficient to counter negative perceptions of air power, the negative cognitive effects? Or – again – do doctrine or tactics or technology need to be reviewed to address this as intrinsic to Stability and Counter-Insurgency Operations?”

In terms of cognitive effects, it could be possible to mobilise support for the legitimate authority by delivering adequate levels of human security, and exposing the weakness of the adversary’s ideology and view of the future.

Unfortunately, in Afghanistan at the moment, airpower, as currently employed, is not necessarily facilitating these positive cognitive effects. While air power may be attractive to reduce risk to friendly forces, the images of the results of air attacks on the local population are emotive and will reduce public support.

The physical effects of military force may be used to deal with the capability and capacity of the insurgent adversary within the population. The military priority will be to achieve an acceptable level of security to allow political and military development by neutralising or destroying the opposing military force. In non-permissive environments, offensive action may be required to clear areas of significant adversary activity and to enable economic, social, and political lines of operation to work.

Classical counter-insurgency doctrine emphasises the need to separate the insurgent from his base in the population. In contemporary urban environments, this is a particular challenge, highlighting the need for persistent Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) and precise kinetic effects to avoid collateral damage and fratricide. Inappropriate use of force will drive the affected population into the arms of the adversary.

Having set out the context of expeditionary and security operations, and given you an overview of current operations and the value of air power, let me conclude by listing just some of the challenges I hope you will consider in this conference.

Let me try and list these using the themes of each panel, but as I am sure as you will discover in the discussion many of these issues are overlapping.

The first is the role of air power within a comprehensive approach. By a comprehensive approach what I mean is a natural extension to an effects based approach to operations, which I will summarise as the military activities to achieve effects, which establish decisive conditions in the pursuit of favourable long term outcomes. A comprehensive, multi-agency approach is required, because the effects required at the strategic and operational levels are not just military effects, but are also diplomatic, political and economic.

So we need to understand and identify these effects and then plan and conduct the military operations, including air activities to achieve them. How do we adopt such a strategy to task approach, how do you have airmen contributing to it and how do we measure air’s effectiveness within it?

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The second is command and control, and ISR. Of course it is through command and control the commander resolves how to exploit air power in order to achieve effects within a comprehensive approach and within military line of operation. Key to this in security and stability operations is the air-land integration from the strategic-operational planning level to the level of tactical execution and vice versa. But how is this best achieved?

We are all, I am sure, well aware of the importance and challenges of air-land integration at the tactical level, the importance of Close Air Support in many operations in Afghanistan, and the need for expert Air Liaison Officers, Tactical Air Control Parties and Forward Air Controllers. But how does the air commander influence and interface with the joint and land commanders?

It could be said that the integration of air (and land) power to a joint campaign produces full spectrum air (and land) effect. On the other hand however, the integration of air power to a land campaign produces the inefficient use of reactive air effects.

An important aspect is the synchronisation of activities – taking into account the fundamental differences in operational processes – whereby land activities, in order to overcome the friction of the battlefield, start from the notion of *decentralised planning and decentralised execution* where air activities, in order to have theatre-wide effect, use the paradigm of *centralised planning and decentralised execution*.

Of course in Afghanistan we have not started with a clean piece of paper, and have to marry up C2 for air operations throughout the USCENTCOM area of operations with ISAF operations. Add to this challenge of interoperability and compatibility of the many C2 systems in use in Afghanistan, and the ability to task and share ISR products.

The third challenge is how best to use air power in providing kinetic and non-kinetic effects in security and stability operations. What are the considerations in its use now, its limitations, and how could it be done better in the future? Most airmen understand about “dropping bombs and breaking stuff” but how do we employ air to influence the adversary?

And my final challenge for you is the detail of how air power can be used to direct support reconstruction. I would include in this the Security Sector Reform and the Host Nation Air Power Capabilities, and also direct support in reconstruction and development activities through civil-military co-operations.

NATO air power has proven its success in humanitarian operations in the Pakistan Earthquake Relief Mission, but what about the role of air power in assisting reconstruction and development against the backdrop of an ongoing insurgency.

So I leave you with those thoughts. NATO forces through ISAF are doing a vital job in Afghanistan and doing it well, and the role of air power is critical to this. But there are numerous challenges we must overcome, and this type of operation is likely to be with us for some time.

I could simply add some additional remarks or questions on this subject; for example:

- In which way will an integrated joint counter-insurgency plan begin? With the non-kinetics effects, or with kinetic possibilities?

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- How will we minimize civilian casualties in consideration of the popular will, both inside and outside the area of operations?
- What logistics support has to be provided, and how?
- What has to be done in regard to training and education for our airmen? And what especially needs to be done concerning specific training for our ground forces?

So I think it is timely that we consider the implications for air power, and for the JAPCC to host this conference. I wish you a productive and enjoyable conference, and I look forward to being briefed on your discussions, thoughts, and especially you conclusions.