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Theme: "Air Power and Africa's Asymmetric threats in the 21 st Century"

AIR POWER IN POST 9/11 AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The letter of invitation from the South African Air Force to deliver this paper to the 2004 Sir Pierre van Ryneveld air power symposium states, "As was graphically demonstrated on the 11th of September 2001 in New York, threats to national security are not only the result of hostilities by opposing nations. Increasingly the trend is observed that considerable threats are posed by non-state actors, which, by their very nature, often defy the use of conventional military equipment to combat them. Applying air power assets in an African context to promote peace and security presents the situation where the adversaries do not possess equivalent levels of air power sophistication as the government or coalition forces; yet manage to create substantial threats to the conduct of operations. In the same way, the commercial aviation sector faces threats related to acts of terrorism where the adversaries are near impossible to identify and employ crude, unsophisticated tools and methods, yet represent a considerable threat to the employment of air power. The theme of the 2004 Sir Pierre van Ryneveld Air Power Symposium was chosen against the background of the asymmetric nature of these challenges, and the innovative responses required to counter them."

The generally accepted father of air power doctrine, General Giulio Douhet said in 1921 "Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur."¹ Clearly he, as the organisers of this symposium, acknowledged the importance of innovation and forward thinking. This is indeed a characteristic of air power proponents and of air power itself; adaptability and flexibility; the ability to adapt quickly to an ever changing world.

But what is air power? Power is a potential; an inherent strength; an ability to do something even in the face of opposition. Power normally serves to reach an objective, often even without the need to use it. By this logic, I would like to define national air power as *'the ability*

of a nation to exploit aerospace in the pursuit of its national objectives'. By the same logic air power can also be said to be the ability of any group of nations or states to exploit aerospace in the pursuit of their mutually agreed (regional) objectives. The concept of air power obviously transcends the sphere of the military application of air capabilities (air force) and includes civil aviation, aviation facilities and infrastructure, the aeronautical industry and, most importantly, the attitude of the people of the nation or region toward air power; the so called air-mindedness of the people.

The air power debate is not new and much has been written about air power as an instrument of national and international power. Since World War II, air power has played an important, if not dominant, role in both conflict and in peace. As military air power has become a precondition for effective and efficient military operations, so commercial aviation has become the centrepiece for long distance and international travel and an important element of the international economy.

So what has changed? Well 9/11 happened and the world changed. On 9/11 a form of air power was used in a most unconventional way to achieve a political objective. Since then the world has become aware of the threat of international terrorism and the use of asymmetric warfare as never before. Also since 9/11, air power has been used extensively against the threat of international terrorism in the so-called 'war on terror'. It is therefore timely to again look at the role of air power in the post 9/11 World in general and, in this instance, in Africa in particular.

This paper will not discuss air power in its totality, nor provide a total analysis of the post 9/11 strategic environment but rather focus on the role of military air power as an instrument in the hands of legitimate authority in the pursuit of security in Africa.

THE POST 9/11 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The post 9/11 strategic environment is mostly characterised the 'International War on Terror' led by an aggressive US foreign policy. It is too early to make any judgement on the success of this war at this stage but certainly the way in which the war is being conducted raises certain important issues. The first is the move towards unilateralism by the US and the so-called 'coalition of the willing' and the commensurate erosion of the role of the United Nations as the principle international guarantor of peace and security. This manifests itself in a doctrine of pre-emptive intervention anywhere in the world that the US deems necessary in its national interest. In his book *Global Disorder*, Robert Harvey, a former British MP and member of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, argues that the war on Iraq was unjustified and undertaken without the actual sanction of the United Nations. He says that, "the (US) administration has shifted its public justification of the war to the need to remove a monster regime" and asks "If Iraq, why not Zimbabwe, much of Africa, several of Russia's southern neighbours, most of the Middle East, Burma, or even China?"². He goes on to say, "Any neighbourhood has a few bad guys who need to be controlled; but a neighbourhood in which the policeman has no friends and is himself the chief object of hatred is a dangerous one indeed".³ This is not anti-American propaganda, but a warning of the dangers of unilateralism and a call for a return to the essential role of the UN as the guarantor of international peace and security. Only if the decisions relating to who the 'bad guys' are taken by the international community in concert, will the actions against them have credibility and force them to rethink their 'outcast' status.

Secondly the US-led War on Terror, has given rise to questions as to the nature of so-called 'humanitarian interventions', including the issue of when, if ever, it is appropriate for states to take coercive and in particular military action against another state for the purpose of protecting people there. This focus may have helped to raise a sense of urgency in tackling conflicts but, according to some development actors, it has also highlighted the complex relationship between development and security.⁴ Adam Smith argues, "Since 2001, [...]"

there has been a tug of war between the human security agenda, and the one emerging from US President George Bush's War on Terror. These two agendas are dichotomous, [...] 'the human security agenda doesn't ignore the short-term but puts a lot of emphasis on the long-term. The war of terrorism puts every emphasis on the short-term and forgets about the long-term entirely'.⁵.

Of particular concern to African states and to development agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is the extent to which the resurgence of a unilateralist, military approach to intervention and the war on terror, has led to a prioritisation of the security agenda, shifting the emphasis from "the fight against poverty to the fight against terrorism".⁶. As poverty is the major issue to be solved in Africa's developmental agendas, and as poverty and deprivation provide a breeding ground for discontent and, potentially, for the growth of terrorism, this shift seems to be counter-productive. The war on terror needs to be fought on all fronts, not only by force, but also by concerted efforts directed at development and social upliftment to eradicate the sources of insecurity and conflict.

Since 9/11 terrorist attacks have occurred throughout the world in places as divergent as Bali, Kenya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Israel, Russia and most recently in Jakarta, Indonesia. At the same time the frequency and intensity of attacks against the interim government and the allied forces in Iraq continues to increase. The Brookings Institute, an American think tank, estimates that the amount of Shia rebels (followers of Muktada al-Sadr) fighting against the new government and the Americans in Iraq quadrupled from some 5 000 in April 2004 to 20 000 in August 2004.⁷. This clearly demonstrates the imperative for a broader approach to the war on terror and the importance of addressing human security issues as a prerequisite for conflict prevention, management and resolution. A too militaristic approach could aggravate matters and drive the neutral parties into the camp of the terrorists.

But let us move our focus closer to home. What is happening in the African strategic environment within this context? Firstly, Africa is unfortunately still suffering from chronic underdevelopment, poverty, lack of human security and other social ills. This, together with poor governance and the competition for control and exploitation of resources, has led to the proliferation of intra-state conflicts on the Continent. Currently there are 11 UN and African peace missions in 12 African countries. These are Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Western Sahara. Most of these peace operations are directed at solving internal disputes fired on by warlords and rebel groups motivated by ethnic or religious disputes, the control and exploitation of resources and/or political adventurism. These conflict also lead to overflows into neighbouring states as is evidenced in West Africa, the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa. This high level of instability and conflict, coupled to the general state of underdevelopment on the Continent, creates a vast potential breeding ground for polarisation, the rise of warlords, rogue regimes, terrorism, and crime. It could also create conditions favourable for international terrorists to operate from against other parts of the world. If this is not contained, the potential for unilateral external interventions will become very real. This in turn, brings the possibility of polarisation between states due to the need to choose sides in the war on terror.

THREAT ANALYSIS

From the foregoing, the question that begs to be answered is the question of what this means for the future security of the peoples and nations of Africa. Are our security forces correctly structured to meet the potential threats? Are we developing the correct regional collaborative security architecture for this environment? What are the real threats and how could they manifest themselves? I will touch on all of these but will focus the paper on the threats of an asymmetric nature.

Firstly, the move to unilateralism and the doctrine of pre-emptive intervention in itself, poses a threat to African States. States that are weak or not aligned with the interests of the overseas powers could unilaterally be declared 'failed or rogue states' for the purpose of providing a reason for intervention. This would probably only occur in states in which there are major foreign interests such as oil or other natural resources. Ralph Wilde argues that so-called failed states, as glibly defined by western commentators, are not always the result of internal structural realities. Often the financial interests and actions of other states and the international financial institutions and multinational corporations contribute to this phenomenon. ⁸ Examples are the role that the US played in damaging the Chilean economy in the Allende era and the failure of the colonial powers to prepare their dependencies for independence as is classically demonstrated in the case of Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo). This phenomenon of unilateralism brings a special responsibility to the table of the AU and other African sub-regional organisations (the Regional Economic Communities or RECs). As these bodies are engaged in collaborative defence and security arrangements, especially mutual defence pacts in the case of some (and also being considered by the AU), they will have to provide for collective responses to such threats. Again this could best be done if the predominant role of the UN in conflict prevention, management and resolution is reassured. But, let us get to the asymmetric threats.

What is asymmetric warfare and what are asymmetric threats? Probably the earliest recorded example of asymmetric warfare is contained in the Biblical narrative of David and Goliath. David, a shepherd, killed the giant soldier dressed in battle dress and armed with a spear and shield, with a stone launched from a sling. As inspiration, the story is usually cited as a triumph of the weak over the strong, or the oppressed over the mighty, but in simple military terms, it was the triumph of planning and skill over brute force.⁹

In the context of this paper I present the definition of asymmetric threats to be; '*threats posed by small radical entities against legitimate authority using violent means to achieve their aims*'. It is the use of force by such radical entities that have little power to attack the powerful other than by indirect means such as attacks on innocent civilians. In a way asymmetry uses the power of innovation against conventional sources of power and authority. Within this definition the asymmetric threats facing African states and continental multinational organisations are:

- Terrorism in all its manifestations both national and international;
- Internal threats to legitimate authority in the form of 'warlordism' and rebel movements; and
- Criminality, both national and trans-national, involving violence of a military nature.

Terrorism

Terrorism is a form of asymmetric warfare. One definition of terrorism (and there are more than 300 floating around) holds it to be '*an unprovoked attack against civilian non-combatants away from any theatre of war by men and/or women not working for a power openly at war with the victims' country*'.¹⁰ This could obviously be argued, but I use it as it demonstrates the essential elements of unprovoked attacks against innocent people by non-state actors.

According to a statement by US Secretary of State Colin Powell there were 208 international terrorist attacks in 2003, up slightly from the 205 in 2002. The number of people killed in terrorist incidents in 2003 was 625, compared to 725 in 2002. In contrast the number of people injured in terrorist attacks rose to 3,646 in 2003, from 2,013 in 2002.¹¹

The terrorist threats to Africa are fourfold. Firstly international terror organisations could use African countries as a springboard to attack foreign countries through actions such as

sabotage of air and maritime trade, infiltrating those countries from Africa and launching terror attacks from aircraft and ships travelling from Africa. This brings with it the danger of retaliatory or punitive attacks from the country so attacked.

Secondly, international terrorists could attack the interests of foreign countries on African soil and in African air and maritime space. This could take the form of attacks on embassies, foreign business interests, tourists and other foreign assets such as aircraft and ships. Such attacks have already occurred in Saudi Arabia, Kenya and Tanzania. Again this could lead to retaliation and punitive action as well as to collateral damage to African infrastructure and people.

In the third place, international terrorists could use terror tactics to coerce African states to comply with their will or to punish them for not doing so. In this case the terror actions will be launched directly at the people, infrastructure and other targets of African countries themselves. Terrorists could also foster rebellions against African regimes in the different countries, which they regard as unsympathetic to their cause and illegally exploit resources to further their own aims to the detriment of the African economy and development.

In the last place, Africa itself is not immune to internal terrorist movements with their own selfish agendas. Post apartheid South Africa has experienced terrorist attacks or plots from religious fundamentalists and the reactionary far right. Uganda and Burundi are experiencing terrorism even as we speak.

Internal threats to legitimate authority

Africa is rife with internal conflicts and threats to state authority. This is clearly demonstrated by events in West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone), the Great Lakes Region (DRC and Burundi) and the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia/Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan). These conflicts are motivated by political ambitions, ethnicity, religious differences and greed for the control of resources amongst others. Most of these conflicts are conducted by a proliferation of warlords and rebel movements, some only consisting of a few thousand followers. In regions such as the eastern DRC it is nearly impossible to keep track of the mass of rebel groups. Every day seems to produce a new one. This demonstrates the path to political power in these regions. If one wants to be a player in the political process and transitional governments in these conflict areas, the best way is to get a few followers and a few guns and shoot your way in. Unfortunately you have to shoot some people along the way.

The role of these rebel movements in illegal resource exploitation contributes to the prolongation of these conflicts. It was recently reported by MONUC, the UN mission in the DRC that, " Violence and human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Ituri district will not end until the government takes control of the extraction of natural resources there. The competition for the control of natural resources by combatant forces, exacerbated by an almost constant political vacuum in the region, has been a major factor in prolonging the crisis in Ituri".¹²

This proliferation of warlords and rebel groups mostly use the techniques of asymmetric warfare as defined earlier in this paper. They are small radical entities using violent means against legitimate authority to achieve their aims. They avoid sustained contact with state military forces and rather use hit-and-run tactics as well as attacks on civilians as part of their psychological strategies.

Criminality

Crime is unfortunately a feature of society. This is nothing new and police forces and the criminal justice system will be engaged in combating crime until the end of time. However, what is new is the internationalisation and violent nature of crime. Crime has become big business run by large, mostly international, crime syndicates that operate on semi-military precepts. There is also a clear tie between terrorism, warlordism and organised crime as the perpetrators are all involved in the same dark world of resource exploitation, gun-running, drugs, arms proliferation, human trafficking and the like. Another common factor is often the employment of mercenaries in support of their mutual goals. The Equatorial Guinea saga is a case in point.

The reason why I include this dimension of criminality under asymmetric threats is the militaristic nature of the perpetrators of trans-national and highly organised crime syndicates. They cannot be combated by normal policing and criminal justice systems. They require a military response. An example is piracy around the horn of Africa and in the Gulf of Guinea of which more than 70 instances occurred during 2003. These modern day pirates operate fast patrol boats, armed with heavy machine guns and missiles and attack ships with military precision and force. They do not just steal for a living but to support political and power ambitions. They do not hesitate to kill and will sink a ship if this is required for their own safety. They do not just harm their victims but do great damage to the economies of Africa and the international maritime trading community. They cannot be combated by normal policing but require a forceful military response. Other examples of crime that I believe fall into the category of asymmetric threats as previously defined include the crime syndicates operating in Nigeria's oil fields and the Bight of Benin and the cash in transit syndicates operating in South Africa. These are ferocious criminals that use military weapons and will kill whosoever crosses their paths.

Coming back to the issue of mercenaries. This was mentioned here as an activity in support of warlords, rebel groups and crime syndicates. I will not go into further analysis of this issue in this paper other than to pose the question whether mercenary activities (i.e. soldiers of fortune) will not increasingly present a threat to African security on its very own in the future. Given the many conflicts in the region, the poor post conflict disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes, the general high levels of unemployment and poor economies, one cannot help but wonder whether ex-combatants will not increasingly find a new livelihood in mercenary activities. If left unchecked, this could become a cause onto itself.

Tools of the Asymmetric Threat

Having looked at the types and sources of asymmetric threats to Africa, let us have a brief look at the manifestation of these threats in relation to the types of weapon systems and delivery methods that would most likely be employed.

The majority of weapons used by the 'small radical entities against legitimate authority using violent means to achieve their aims' will be small arms and light weapons (SALW) and home made bombs, also referred to as "weapons of micro destruction" by Robert Harvey.¹³ On the other hand, terrorists and other asymmetric actors could increasingly gain access to weapons of mass destruction such as chemical weapons; biological weapons, dirty bombs and even nuclear weapons. This is due to the 'globalisation' of knowledge and the ease of access to technology. The current events in South Africa regarding the charges against two civilians for dealing in items banned by the Nuclear Energy Act and Weapons of Mass Destruction anti-proliferation legislation is a case in point. There can be little doubt about the existence of international underground collaboration in the field of weapons grade nuclear material and bombs as well as chemical and biological agents.

These weapons could be delivered in a great variety of ways; probably in more ways than one can imagine. These would include delivery by individuals, small combat groupings, letter

bombs, parcel bombs, human bombs, car bombs, container bombs, model aircraft, civilian aircraft and even cruise missiles. Phillip Meilinger writes, "In 2003 Iraqi forces launched nine ballistic missiles against coalition forces in Iraq. All were detected and intercepted by Patriot missiles. The Iraqis also launched five cruise missiles against the coalition force. None were detected and one hit a hotel in Kuwait City. Cruise missiles are difficult to detect due to small size and lack of extensive support equipment. Today there are more than 75 000 cruise missiles in 70 countries. (Some of these) could easily fall into hands of terrorists. [...] One enterprising New Zealander built a cruise missile, using components obtained commercially, that can deliver a 22 pound payload over 100 miles away – for only \$ 5 000."¹⁴ This demonstrates the 'power of innovation' and the ease with which non-state and asymmetric actors can obtain and deliver high levels of destructive power anywhere, fast, far and with surprise. This requires equally innovative and flexible responses.

These threats are difficult to predict and counter and are further complicated by the subterfuge inherent in asymmetric warfare. Discussing new challenges to the military Dr. Steven Metz, Chairman of the Regional Strategy and Planning Department, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College identifies the use of dispersion, intermingling, ambiguity and protraction by non-state actors that seek to counter advanced militaries.¹⁵ All of this demonstrates the complexity of identifying and reacting to asymmetric threats.

THE STRATEGIC RESPONSE

In determining the strategic response to the threats facing Africa, including of course the asymmetric threats, we cannot simply look for a military or air power response. In the modern world, we cannot separate the military dimension from the political dimension. As military power is a subset of political power, so air power is only one part of the overall military capability of a nation. Air and military power are therefore always subjugated to political authority and control.

The first line of defence against the threats as described in the previous section, must therefore always be the prevention, management and resolution of conflict by non-military means. This essentially entails the creation of the political, social and economic conditions that will remove the causes of the threats in the first place.

If we lived in a rational world, this would bring the matter (and this paper) to a close. Unfortunately this is not the case and states today still need instruments of force, or violence if you like, to support the non-violent elements of their powerbase. States require such an instrument of force to oppose others from imposing their will on the state by means of force. This instrument of force is ultimately the military and its components of terrestrial, maritime and air power. Despite the changes in the strategic environment, the enduring role of military forces remains to meet force with force or the threat of force with the threat of force.

Accepting the need for effective military forces they must obviously be appropriate and adequate to meet the challenges of the day. This brings with it the question of "what are defence forces for?" Dr. Rocky Williams argues, "The answer to this question is less complex than it seems and a suggestion is made in this regard. It would be more appropriate, it is argued here, to define Armed Forces as those policy instruments (be they landward, maritime or airborne) which are placed at the disposal of the state to manage those crises of sufficient magnitude which other state departments, either collectively or individually, are not equipped to manage. They do this because of their unique features—their ability to project force, their superior organizational abilities, and their ability, if required, to judiciously manage the instruments of state violence. The nature of those tasks which the state may expect the armed forces to execute will be determined by the short-to medium term environment within which a country is placed specific on the basis of continually changing political, developmental and budgetary realities".¹⁶

But what are the tasks of the military in modern times? Air Marshal Sir Timothy Garden argues that there are four such military tasks today. These are defence of citizens on home territory, war-fighting abroad, securing international (or regional) peace and providing a capability to deal with civil emergencies.¹⁷ He goes on to argue that whereas after the cold war the perception of external threats to Western security had all but disappeared “11 September and its aftershocks had changed the perception of threat. For the first time in a decade, we (the UK) had an external threat to our security”.¹⁸ To a large degree the same is true for most African countries and for the African continent as a whole.

Within the context of the asymmetric threats previously mentioned, I therefore submit that military forces have an important role to play in 1) the prevention of such threats through deterrence, 2) the combating of the threats when and where they occur and 3) the alleviation of the effects of such threats after the fact. Let us look at these one by one.

Deterring asymmetric threats

Deterrence is an essential part in conflict prevention in that it makes the chance of success of the intended military action too small and the potential cost too high. Asymmetric threats can best be prevented by collaborative regional and/or sub-regional action mandated by the African Union and the sub-regional RECs. This entails the establishment of collective defence and security management organisations and mechanisms to ensure the capacity (means) to act and the credibility (political will) to do so. Fighting the threats of terrorism, internal rebellions and cross-border crime, requires collective action, as these threats themselves acknowledge no borders or limits.

Currently the African Union has accepted the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP), which acknowledges that “each African country’s defence is inextricably linked to that of other African countries, as well as that of other regions and, by the same token, that of the African continent as a whole.”¹⁹ One of the building blocks of the CADSP is the African Standby Force (ASF), which is mandated by the Protocol of the Peace and Security Council of the AU. The concept of the African Standby Force is based on brigades to be provided by the five African sub-regions. These brigades will be established in two phases, to be completed by the year 2010 with the attendant strengthening of capabilities at both the AU and regional levels. The ASF will have military, police and civilian components and will operate on the basis of various scenarios under African Union mandates, ranging from observer missions to peacekeeping operations and intervention in conformity with the Constitutive Act of the AU. Operationalising and strengthening these mechanisms will undoubtedly contribute greatly towards providing the wherewithal to collectively combat the asymmetric threats to Africa.

All military actions against asymmetric threats will not always be of a collective nature. In the case of purely internal threats to a state, it should also be able to act against such threats unilaterally or if need be with the assistance of other states. In sub-regional context, the regional standby brigades should also be at the disposal of national states, within the context of the CADSP, to assist in conflict prevention and resolution when so required. This obviously entails that African countries must develop militaries that are aligned with their own needs as well as to contribute to the ASF.

In developing African militaries cognisance must be taken of the asymmetric threats facing the continent and the requirement that this places on the force design of such military forces. This could best be done in a highly collaborative manner. The major military contributions to dissuade and deter asymmetric threats will be in the provision of the capacity for early warning and intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and patrol capabilities and the ability to strike accurately, fast and hard against any threat either pre-emptively or in retaliation.

Combating asymmetric threats

Asymmetric threats are by their very nature difficult to combat as their perpetrators rely on surprise, subterfuge, dispersion and intermingling to launch their attacks against military and civilian targets alike. They also use a proliferation of all kinds of weapons from small arms to weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems of an unconventional nature.

Combating such threats requires great reliance on intelligence and early warning, rapid reaction, long reach, precision firepower, flexibility and networked capabilities. There is a need to be able to engage fleeting targets at short notice and to redirect missions during execution. Another important requirement for combating asymmetric threats is ensuring the protection of own offensive and defensive capabilities. This ensures the basis from which to react as well as a second strike capability. Asymmetric threats could be directed at sabotage of military installations and capabilities to inhibit offensive capability and gain psychological advantage.

In a study by John Reynolds he concludes with five principles for consideration when designing campaign plans against asymmetrical threats. "These five principles are 1) first strike capability, 2) force protection (second-strike capability), 3) the ability to threaten severe consequences on the belligerents interests, 4) sending a deterrence message, and 5) demonstrating the will and determination to conduct retaliatory strikes".²⁰ Additionally, the study concludes that neither active, passive, nor retributive actions by themselves are effective in deterring asymmetrically threats; it is only when these three actions are integrated together into a single campaign plan where one can hope to deter asymmetrical threats and regain the deterrence equilibrium.

Alleviation of the effects of asymmetric threats after the fact

One of the important roles of the military in the asymmetric threat environment is the ability to assist civil authorities in the alleviation of the effects of asymmetric attacks. This includes a vast array of activities from medical assistance on site, casualty evacuation, providing essential services, providing disaster relief (water, food, shelter etc) and assisting with reconstruction of essential infrastructure amongst others. With the growing threat of the proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, as well as dirty bombs, the possibility of assisting with decontamination also increases. Very few African countries have any form of defensive chemical, biological and nuclear capabilities and this is something that needs to be addressed in the new threat environment.

Characteristics of the military response to asymmetric threats

In summary of the above, African military forces that can be effectively used to deter and combat asymmetric threats and alleviate the effects of their actions need to have the following characteristics:

- An early warning and intelligence capability;
- A credible deterrent capacity capable of delivering precision firepower rapidly and effectively;
- High mobility, flexibility and reach;
- The ability to sustain operations; and
- The ability to provide disaster relief and essential services.

THE ROLE OF AIR POWER - USING THE WRIGHT STUFF

The argument between land power, maritime power and air power is as old as these forces themselves. Sir Halford Mackinder is generally accepted as the father of terrestrial power theories due to his expressed belief that "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island

commands the World."²¹ On the other hand Captain Alfred T. Mahan, founder of the United States Naval War College in 1873, argued that those nations, which had had a powerful maritime force had been the most enduring. He argued that the greatest historic requisite for national power was sea power, which had made a small nation like England so mighty. Last, but certainly not least, we find General Giulio Douhet, considered by many to be the father of air power doctrine, who argued that command of an enemy's air space and subsequent bombing of industrialized centres would be so disruptive and destructive that the pressure for peace would be overwhelming. He maintained that control of the air could win a war regardless of land or sea power.

Today, given the tremendous development of air power over the years and the demonstration of its effects in World War II and later military conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, the Falkland Islands or Malvinas (depending on your point of view), Kosovo, Iraq (Gulf war), Afghanistan and again during the "shock and awe" campaign in Iraq, many air power proponents again argue that air power is the key to military power. They argue that air power is only limited by political restrictions and that "the political goals of avoiding civilian casualties and protecting civilian infrastructure had diluted the effectiveness of the originally envisioned 'shock and awe' air campaign".²² This argument does, of course, not hold water. The fact is that usable air power will always be politically constrained in the same way as all military power and force will be so constrained. Owens argues that, "The problem with the argument that 'air power can do it all' is that it assumes that war is independent of politics. But, since war is not an end in itself but a means to achieve political goals, political considerations will always limit military courses of action. Accordingly, it is unlikely that air power can ever be used in such a way as to satisfy its most vociferous advocates"²³. To our credit, despite its many woes, the modern world is governed by such instruments as International Humanitarian Law, that constrain the uninhibited use of force even by legitimate authorities. In fact, the mark of legitimate authority is its judicial use of power. Today, the concept of 'human security' has become the overriding factor in the security debate. The ultimate aim of security is human security with national and regional security serving as instruments in ensuring human security. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty noted in a 2001 report titled 'The Responsibility to Protect' that, "The concept of human security, including concern for human rights, but broader than that in its scope, has become an increasingly important element in international law and international relations, increasingly providing a conceptual framework for international action".²⁴ We must therefore argue the role of air power in combating asymmetric threats within this political and legal framework.

Characteristics of military air power

Let us have a brief look at the characteristics of military air power. These are mobility, flexibility and firepower. Air power bestows upon a military force great mobility through air-landed and parachute operations; strategic, operational and tactical battlefield support; the ability to provide firepower in a variety of locations within a short time span; and the ability to execute surveillance, reconnaissance and patrol operations over a large area. It also provides great flexibility and adaptability in changing between missions rapidly; from offence, to defence, to support as the need requires. The same aircraft that drops paratroopers can be used to re-supply them, to extract them, to do casualty evacuation, or to transport a peace negotiator. Helicopters, in particular, have the ability to execute a great variety of missions from direct participation in the firefight to humanitarian relief and communications missions. Fighters also show flexibility in their employment from the offence to the defence and in the variety in types of weapons delivered and mode of delivery. In the last place, air power provides the capacity to direct a large amount of firepower quickly, at long range and accurately on any given target. In arguing the role of air power against asymmetric threats, it is these characteristics that must be optimised within the concept of joint, or today more popularly referred to as networked, operations. It is not my intention to go into operational and tactical details of the role and use of air power, nor into doctrinal matters, as these will

be covered by a later speaker, but only to indicate the main contributions that I believe air power can make to the networked, joint and combined efforts of African states to combat the asymmetric threats on and to our continent.

Air power as an instrument in the prevention and deterrence of asymmetric threats

The first role of air power in combating asymmetric threats is to lend support to diplomatic initiatives to end conflict and to build peace. This requires rapid and secure air transport for senior politicians, diplomats and peace negotiators, even into remote and dangerous areas. To some extent civil aviation can be used for such missions but air forces will have to plan for and provide more rugged capabilities for inaccessible areas and unprepared landing strips and for escorting transport aircraft and helicopters into dangerous areas.

A second role will be air power support to the African Standby Force for its deployments in peacekeeping, peace-enforcements and intervention missions as provided for in the Constitutive Act of the AU. The last mission involves intervention by the ASF in situations of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity as well as at the request of a member state. Clearly all these scenarios are scenarios that can be caused by asymmetric actors as is the case today in Burundi, the DRC and Sudan. Warlords, rebels, terrorists and organised crime syndicates could and probably would perpetrate such atrocities if not dissuaded or stopped. In this regard all the elements of air power, from combat operations to combat support and non-combat logistical support need to be considered. Currently the debate on the ASF and its regional brigades is rather void of discussions about air power other than to make provision for 'helicopters' and 'international support for strategic air transport'. There are clearly many other roles that air power should play in support of the land elements of the ASF to ensure the creation of truly joint and 'highly networked' forces. At the same time there are also autonomous roles for air power in peace enforcement and intervention operations. I submit that the air power practitioners of Africa should correct this matter. The ASF will be incomplete and inefficient without proper regional and sub-regional air power capabilities.

In the third place air surveillance, reconnaissance and patrol capabilities can make a major contribution to the deterrence of asymmetric threats at an operational level. Such operations will serve to enhance early warning and intelligence gathering and also provide the geographic information required for planning and conducting counter-operations. Currently Africa is plagued by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW); gun-running and the illegal trade in weapons is the order of the day; Africa's resources are being plundered by warlords and criminals and very little is being done or can be done about it. All these activities contribute to insecurity and conflict and play into the hands of the asymmetric actors. To stop these activities will require a major joint effort, but the investment in aerial surveillance, reconnaissance and patrol capabilities can have an immediate effect in detecting, deterring and stopping these activities. Night vision equipment placed on light aircraft and remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs) would be especially suitable for the African environment.

In the fourth place, deterrence requires credibility and this in turn requires the proverbial 'iron fist in the velvet glove'. This is provided by firepower that can be used to execute pre-emptive or punitive strikes should the asymmetric actors commit the deeds of terror, war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity mentioned previously. By the same notion, air power could be used effectively by legitimate authorities, against terrorist, rebel and criminal bases in 'rogue states' that openly allow such activities. This should be aimed at dissuading host countries from supporting such activities. Credible deterrence will require offensive air power, which can be brought to bear on static and mobile targets quickly, accurately and effectively.

Air power as an instrument in fighting asymmetric threats

The role of air power in directly combating asymmetric threats is as varied as the roles of air power in conventional operations. This will range from air defence against aerial attack by conventional and unconventional means to the full spectrum of support to ground forces. To enumerate all these possible roles and operations is not within the scope of this paper. I would, however, like to highlight some areas that I deem to require special attention.

Briefly revisiting the asymmetric threats in and to African states, I defined these as terrorism (both national and international), warlordism and rebel groups and international crime syndicates. The terrorist threat, once launched, cannot easily be combated by air power. To create a comprehensive air defence network against cruise missiles, stolen or hi-jacked aircraft and lesser threats such as light aircraft and model aircraft equipped with bombs, will be virtually impossible. It would only be practical to do so for limited times in defined areas where intelligence appreciates a specific threat. The best air defence against terrorism is thus by pre-emptive actions and deterrence as described above.

On the other hand, air power can and should be more effectively used in Africa against internal threats to the people and legal governments of the continent. In most of Africa's wars against warlords and rebel groups, government forces consist almost entirely of land forces. Given Africa's general lack of transport infrastructure and inaccessibility air power can make a great contribution in support of land forces in surveillance and border control, providing mobility to land forces, providing fire support to ground forces and in direct attacks against rebel bases. It can greatly enhance the rapid response capability of ground forces.

In fighting organised crime syndicates, air power can equally make major contributions in support of police forces. To stop or inhibit piracy, the illegal exploitation of natural resources (both on land and at sea) and the illegal arms trade, will require good in-time intelligence, rapid reaction and firepower. Once again, air power can greatly assist in this through aerial surveillance and patrol, the provision of air-mobility to ground forces and airborne firepower.

Sub-Saharan Africa, in general, does not have much of a focus on the use of air power. There are therefore very few examples of the use of air power against asymmetric threats. One such example, however, is the use of air power by the Angolan and Zimbabwean air forces in support of President Kabila (the first) against rebel attacks from the eastern DRC. Although limited in its application, the Zimbabwean Air Force had a significant impact on the success of operations in the east and the Angolan Air Force greatly contributed to the defence of Kinshasa against rebel attacks. There can be little doubt that air power has a role to play in future African operations against asymmetric threats and can greatly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of African militaries in combating such threats. Currently, however, Africa has very limited air power and unfortunately also very little 'air power mindedness'. This is a matter that should be addressed by the air power practitioners of the continent.

Air power as an instrument in alleviating the effect of asymmetric attacks

Where it turns out impossible to prevent or counter a terrorist or other asymmetric attack, security forces must be able to assist civil society to alleviate the effects of such attacks. In this regard, air power can make important contributions to the saving of lives and maintenance of essential services. In the first place air power is essential for the rapid movement of protection and relief forces into the disaster zone. This will include search-and-rescue teams, medical teams and teams required for the maintenance of essential services. Air power will also be required to rapidly move in relief supplies of water, food, medical equipment and supplies, clothing and shelters for temporary accommodation. Given Africa's poor surface transport infrastructure, general inaccessibility and vast distances, this will require both fixed wing and helicopter capabilities.

Air power is also an essential ingredient of an effective casualty evacuation system in the remote and underdeveloped areas of Africa. In the absence of local medical facilities, well-equipped aircraft and helicopters are essential to rapidly move victims to established medical facilities.

Lastly, air power in the form of tactical air transport and helicopters is necessary to rapidly move leaders into the disaster areas to communicate with the local people in order to avoid panic and build confidence. In the absence of this, the asymmetric forces will gain the propaganda upper hand and gain more support for their negative causes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have focussed on the role of air power against asymmetric threats in post 9/11 Africa. I identified these threats as terrorism, warlordism and rebel movements and organised crime. I argued that to combat these threats effectively requires a holistic approach with the emphasis on conflict prevention and resolution by political means. However, political authority still requires military force as an instrument of power where peaceful means fail to find solutions. Air power is an essential element of military power and needs to be conceptualised, developed and employed correctly and judiciously in support of other forms of military and political power. Within this context, I tried to identify the major contributions that air power can make in deterring and combating asymmetric threats as well as alleviating the effects of such threats once they have been brought to bear. I submit that currently Sub-Saharan Africa is weak in air power and in air power thinking and that well thought out air power concepts and strategies are required to correct this shortcoming. Air power can and should play a much greater role in Africa, especially in preventing and combating the proliferation of asymmetric threats that are stifling Africa's social and economic development.

The argument between spending on the military and on development is as old as civilisation itself and there will be many that argue against spending on any form of military capabilities, including air power. However, NEPAD emphasises the prerequisite of security for development but also recognise the fallacy of security without development. Security and development are therefore clearly two sides of the same coin, and the one is impossible without the other. It is to my mind a waste of time to argue which comes first, as in the case of the chicken and the egg. Security and development need our simultaneous dedicated commitment to build a future for our continent and its people. If air power is to play its rightful role in this future, it needs to get the attention that it deserves.

It is said that the only certainty in the modern world is change. The only thing that we know with certainty about tomorrow is that it will be different and that we will most probably be surprised. To prepare for the future requires flexibility and adaptability to be able to respond to the inevitability of change. Air power is inherently flexible and adaptable and, if correctly conceptualised and developed, will be able to change to meet new demands.

This is not an argument for air power to supplant other forms of military power or for placing the military at the centre of the power base of government, but rather for a balanced look at the total picture and for finding innovative strategies to address Africa's security problems. James Cody, of the School for Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, argues, "One of the keys to success for air planners will be to avoid atrophy of thought. A certain rigidity can harden into extreme dogmatism, a condition that could reduce the potential success of airpower in GWOT (global war on terror). Anecdotes abound concerning the proper application of airpower, but unfounded confidence, arrogance that ignores political and military realities, combined with rhetoric that divides rather than unites, can create an ethos that is more detrimental than it is helpful. [...] However, original thought combined with hybrid strategies appears to be the way of the future for airpower application in GWOT."²⁵ I submit that this is also true for the use of air power against other threats, both conventional

and asymmetric. To ensure the future of air power in Africa, will require an investment not only in air capabilities and infrastructure but also in enhancing the air-mindedness of Africa's people and in developing the conceptual and intellectual capacity of Africa's young air power practitioners.

In closing, I would like to stress three issues. Firstly, Africa is influenced by events in the international community and these will also serve to either aggravate or alleviate the continent's problems including the asymmetric threats to its security. These events should not be dictated by the whims of one or two states but should be influenced and directed by the international community acting in concert. I therefore stress the need for a return to the essential role of the UN as the guarantor of international peace and security.

Secondly, I believe that the developments in Africa regarding the Peace and Security Council of the AU, the Common African Defence and Security Policy and the African Standby Force are extremely positive and should be supported. The asymmetric threats to Africa can best be prevented and thwarted by collective actions.

In the last place, I believe that the role of air power in support of Africa's collective defence and security is not getting the attention that it deserves. Air power, due to its inherent characteristics of mobility, flexibility, adaptability and accurate firepower, can be much better utilised in Africa.

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