

A HISTORY OF INVOLVEMENT

Jet aircraft do not typically come to mind when the subject of military operations other than war (MOOTW) is discussed. Instead, images of Marines slogging through tropical rice paddies or soldiers patrolling Mogadishu's dusty backstreets better exemplify small-scale conflict for most people. These popular images notwithstanding, the USAF and its predecessors¹ have been heavily involved in MOOTW for 80 years, flying in over 800 such operations since 1916.² From the Berlin Airlift to more-recent operations such as Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia, the USAF has been deeply involved in all types of lesser conflicts and noncombat operations. In particular, recent peace operations have dramatically increased the "peacetime" demands on the USAF.

THE EFFECT OF MOOTW ON USAF COMBAT READINESS

Most USAF MOOTW have been relatively short-lived, small-scale disaster-relief or humanitarian-aid missions that do not significantly increase the peacetime operations tempo. Since 1990, however, peace operations have proved to be more of a problem, owing to their larger size, longer duration, overlapping nature, and the demands they place on specialized assets (e.g., Airborne Warning

¹The Army Air Service, Army Air Corps, and Army Air Force.

²See Appendix A for more information on these operations.

and Control System [AWACS], intelligence platforms, and Special Operations Forces [SOF] aircraft), as well as on the fighter force. Indeed, although they represent only 9 percent of USAF MOOTW since 1989, peace operations account for 90 percent of the USAF sorties flown in MOOTW since 1990.

As the USAF force structure has been reduced, the remaining forces and personnel have been stretched thinner and thinner across these peace operations, combat training, and exercises. As a result, many units are experiencing annual temporary duties (TDYs) greatly exceeding the USAF 120-day goal, and some fighter units have found that peace operations cut significantly into time and sorties available for combat training. Thus, if the current pace of peace operations continues, particularly in the face of additional force-structure reductions, the USAF is likely to encounter a growing training, readiness, and morale problem. In short, peace operations are the cause of the USAF's optempo problem: Solve this problem, and the "MOOTW problem" will go away.

A NEW APPROACH TO PEACE OPERATIONS

The USAF and the Department of Defense (DoD) have three options for dealing with this challenge.³ First, they might determine that a somewhat lower combat readiness for some units or the USAF at large is acceptable, given expected threats and warning times. Second, they might determine that a greater percentage of USAF force structure needs to be in the active component, where it can assist more readily with peace operations. Third, they might attempt to influence the demand side of the equation by seeking to limit the number or size of DoD commitments to peace operations.

The first option does not appear to be feasible in the near term, given the short-warning threats predicted in Southwest Asia and Korea. It may be worth reconsidering in the future if the threat situation changes fundamentally. The second option is likely to be problematic because of the increased costs associated with moving forces from the Reserves to the active force, but it nevertheless deserves a

³We assume that increasing force size is not an option in the near term.

closer look. At the least, the USAF should explore ways that Reserve forces might contribute more to ongoing peace operations.

In our judgment, the greatest near-term leverage on this problem is found on the demand side. What we have in mind is not so much that DoD question the wisdom of participating in peace operations, although there is value in asking tough questions prior to sending forces to those operations. Rather, we suggest that the Joint Staff, theater commands, and the services look very hard at the putative requirements for these operations. Current deployments, plans, and concepts for air peace operations reflect an operational orientation more appropriate for high-intensity combat than for peacekeeping. This situation suggests that a new approach to peace operations is called for: employing military forces in a manner consistent with the unique political and military objectives of peacekeeping. We propose that the USAF take the lead in developing this new approach to air peace operations.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Joint Staff, USAF, and theater planners need to look hard at U.S. objectives in a particular operation to ensure that the deployed forces are sized to those objectives. For example, it is appropriate to ask what U.S. (and allied or U.N.) leaders hope to accomplish when they create and enforce a no-fly zone. In many cases, the objective is likely to be to deny the adversary routine use of some specified airspace. It is not necessary to hermetically seal the no-fly zone to accomplish this mission, especially if the rules of engagement permit a wider range of responses than merely engaging enemy aircraft caught violating the no-fly zone. Thus, under these circumstances, combat air patrols need not be flown 24 hours a day. Good surveillance, combined with random patrols, should be sufficient to deter most flights. This approach could significantly reduce the number of aircraft needed to enforce no-fly zones, easing optempo for all affected units.

Technology also can make a major contribution by reducing the number of expensive manned platforms that need to be deployed to such contingencies. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and air-implanted ground sensors can meet many surveillance requirements at lower cost and with fewer deployed personnel than can manned platforms. Investing in these systems may, ironically, be the most cost-effective way of enhancing USAF capabilities for major regional conflicts (MRCs). By freeing expensive manned systems to focus on

their MRC tasks, relatively cheap UAVs and ground sensors contribute to both the MOOTW and MRC missions.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In this report, we identify ten existing and four new operational-level tasks that the USAF is currently doing, is expected to be prepared to accomplish, or could plausibly be assigned in the next 10 to 20 years. In our judgment, such taskings are going to come to the USAF whether or not the institution finds MOOTW an attractive mission. Even if the USAF makes no special effort to develop MOOTW capabilities, the inherent characteristics of air and space power—particularly global situational awareness, responsiveness, long range, precision strike, and potential to minimize friendly casualties—will make it the force of choice in many situations. If the USAF chooses to embrace MOOTW and develop some of the technologies described in this report, air and space power could become the most versatile military instrument of the twenty-first century, able to decisively influence the outcome of events spanning the spectrum from peace operations to major conflicts.

For this vision to be realized will require more than the development of new technologies. It will require that air-and-space-power theorists think more expansively and creatively about the application of that power in unconventional settings, and develop new doctrine, tactics, organizations, and procedures to meet the messy challenges of the early twenty-first century.