

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters have been edited for length. Readers may view letters in their entirety by visiting the NDU Press Web site at <http://ndupress.ndu.edu> and clicking on the cover of this issue.

To the Editor: In my experiences as planner for the joint force air component commander (JFACC) with Pacific Air Forces and U.S. Central Command, I have been encouraged by the ability of action officers in the different functional components to work past Service-centric mindsets to come up with joint, workable solutions to challenging problems.

Seemingly, when we approach similar problems outside of the construct of a joint task force (JTF), we tend to forget the inherent advantages of working closely with our sister Services. As a result, we often end up planning in a relative vacuum, even when we are living next door to one another. I offer a case in point: When I was working as a strategist in the Pacific Air Forces Air and Space Operations Center (ASpOC) last year, I learned that Pacific Fleet was developing its own operational level headquarters, the Maritime Operations Center (MOC), to provide command and control in the maritime domain. This is an outstanding enhancement for the joint force; having a maritime staff dedicated full-time to operational level planning and execution can only make us better able to predict and respond to events in theater. From my parallel experience in the 13th Air Force ASpOC, I can attest to the advantages of having a functionally oriented staff that can concentrate daily on “force consumer” issues rather than the Service-specific “force provider.”

But I saw a problem in the MOC. Seemingly, the Navy and Air Force were not talking about it with each other, which did not make sense. The ASpOC construct had already reached a relative level of maturity and acceptance in the joint force, and it seemed that the Air Force should be actively helping the Navy and Marines steer around their past mistakes and leapfrog onto its advances. At the very least, we should be making sure we are both evolving command and control systems designed to work together.

But no matter whom I asked in my Air Force chain, no one had any official information about the MOC or could tell me what its implications would be for the command and control of joint airpower. When I asked my action officer contacts in

Pacific Fleet, the answers I got were often incomplete or troubling. Based on these discussions, and some Navy O–6 briefings I observed at Third Fleet during an exercise, I started coming to some discomfiting conclusions about the MOC.

It seemed that the Navy was interested in putting the joint force maritime component commander (JFMCC) firmly in charge of “the Maritime Domain,” including the air above the oceans and littorals, and was going to use the MOC to do it. Rather than allocate excess sorties to the JFACC, the JFMCC would retain control of carrier air, including interdiction sorties, and task them out through a maritime tasking order (MTO). As an advocate of functional components and the centralized control of airpower, I was concerned that we were about to create what amounted to *two* JFACCs in the same joint operational area. I could easily imagine this opening up operational seams in intelligence, command and control, and common support functions that could be exploited by a canny or even lucky adversary—not unlike the operational disconnects of Leyte Gulf in World War II, but this time in the sky.

Convinced that it was my job to prevent this, I spent countless hours researching the potential issues. I looked up the *domain* definitions in joint publications. I read historical accounts of airpower command and control disconnects. I prepared bullet background papers and essays about why we should not assign shared domains to single functional or Service components. I prepared a submission for publication to share my views and provoke discussion.

But then, I finally did what I should have done from the start: I called up the folks at the Pacific Fleet MOC and asked them what was going on. Was the MOC being designed to replicate JFACC functions within the JFMCC? Absolutely not. Would the MOC seek to put naval sorties on the MTO instead of the air tasking order? Only outside the joint operational area, not for joint task forces. Was the Navy intentionally hiding its plans from the Air Force? No, it was just trying to get its hands around an enormous task before consulting with

the other Services, and it only had a small staff to do it. In less than 15 minutes, I had resolved months of angst, suspicion, and inter-Service competition conspiracy theories that no one I knew could disprove based on firsthand information.

This leads me to a few conclusions. First, it tells me that despite some notable disagreements between the Services on the best way to structure the joint force to protect the Nation, we are still all very much on the same team when it gets down to doing the job. Second, it tells me that when I feel like someone is not communicating, it is probably at least half my fault, and even more so if I do not ask the right question. Third, it tells me that we should be applying the lessons of the JTF to Phase Zero. Why do we treat steady-state operations differently than other events across the range of military operations? Why do we not have liaisons (not to be confused with joint assignments) between Service headquarters outside of a JTF construct? Why do we not plan Phase Zero activities more collaboratively, rather than execute Phase Zero by Service component? How many opportunities to learn and execute together are we missing by not talking to one another regularly?

The sooner we can bring the JTF teamwork and mindset to our steady-state operations, the sooner we can put ex-conspiracy theorists like me to better uses.

—Major David J. Lyle, USAF
Pacific Air Forces

To the Editor: In his article “A Strategy Based on Faith: The Enduring Appeal of Progressive American Airpower” (Issue 49, 2^d Quarter 2008), Mark Clodfelter correctly points out that the historical record does not match the puffery and, at times, exaggerated advocacy of some airpower strategists. For example, in a recently released White Paper (December 29, 2007) that “charts US Air Force strategy for the next two decades,” Air Force Chief of Staff General T. Michael Moseley asserts, “No modern war has been won without air superiority. No future war will be won without air, space and cyberspace superiority.” Really? The North

Koreans and Chinese battled us to a stalemate during the Korean War without air superiority. We lost the Vietnam War even though guerrillas did not own a single aircraft, and the North Vietnamese did not fly south of the demilitarized zone. Moreover, the United States has enjoyed air dominance over Iraq for 17 years, yet the strategic situation in the current conflict is not altogether favorable.

Airpower is not a silver bullet that offers cheap and easy military solutions to foreign policy problems. Nonetheless, fierce and progressive advocacy of airpower serves an incredibly important purpose: to provide policymakers with expanded options. Dr. Clodfelter suggests that Airmen “jettisoning” progressive airpower ideas would stifle strategic debate and limit ideas precisely at a time when the United States is struggling to find the appropriate formula for success in Iraq. Bombing alone may not achieve political goals in unconventional conflicts, but jettisoning progressive ideas would further emasculate Airmen’s inputs on how best to run a campaign.

Dr. Clodfelter’s criticism of airpower in the Balkans campaigns is a red herring. He states that the central premise of progressive airpower is a belief that airpower makes wars quicker, cheaper, and less painful for all sides than a reliance on surface combat. There never was a debate, though, over the relative merits of airpower versus ground power to combat Serbian aggression; the use of ground forces in the Balkans was simply a political nonstarter. Indeed, President Clinton publicly admitted that he was not even considering the use of ground forces early in the conflict. Furthermore, General Wesley Clark, an Army officer who wanted to use airpower in a conventional manner, determined targeting priorities.

—Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence J. Spinetta, USAF
1st Fighter Wing

Dr. Clodfelter’s response:

I appreciate Lieutenant Colonel Spinetta’s thoughtful response to my article; I hoped that it would engender debate about

the merits of progressive airpower. Yet I am not exactly sure what side of the debate he takes. On the one hand, Lieutenant Colonel Spinetta notes that “the historical record does not match the puffery and, at times, exaggerated advocacy of some airpower strategists.” On the other hand, he remarks that “‘jettisoning’ progressive ideas would further emasculate Airmen’s inputs on how best to run a campaign.”

In regard to airpower in Kosovo, the jury is still out on whether bombing was the key factor that caused the Serbs to leave the province, or whether it helped trigger the ethnic cleansing that it was designed to prevent. The facts remain that fewer than 19,000 Kosovar Albanians had fled to Albania before Operation Allied Force began; 65,000 more had done so 5 days after the bombing started; and 620,000 were refugees a month later. Ultimately, the Serbs expelled 800,000 Kosovar Albanians—roughly half of the population—before the air campaign ended.

To the Editor: In his article “On Airpower, Land Power, and Counterinsurgency: Getting Doctrine Right” (Issue 49, 2^d Quarter 2008), James Corum asserts that “[i]n the Air Force counterinsurgency doctrine, the issue of providing appropriate equipment to Third World allies is not even addressed.” This statement seems to indicate some unfamiliarity with Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2–3.1, *Foreign Internal Defense*, which discusses this issue in some detail, outlining best practices for helping foreign countries field air forces with the right technology for their situations.

Moreover, Dr. Corum seems to hold a pejorative view of the kinetic use of airpower. For instance, he makes the case that “there is a heavy political price to pay when airpower in the form of airstrikes is used,” yet he fails to mention similar, and practically inevitable, consequences of using land power in counterinsurgency, especially when it involves large numbers of American troops in a foreign country. Airpower is among the joint force commander’s most precise, flexible, disciplined, and scrutinized capabilities to apply lethal force. In terms of potential for insurgent propaganda and

recruitment, ground force excesses—including indiscriminate counterbattery fire, “terrain denial” strikes, “harassment and interdiction” fires, heavy-handed searches, imprisonment of innocents, inhumane prison conditions, ubiquitous roadblocks, early curfews, escalation of force events, and so forth—also certainly have the potential for creating more insurgents than they eliminate.

One last point to be made is based on my involvement in directing (at the operational level) and flying (at the tactical level) combat air operations in Iraq and Afghanistan: the assertion that counterinsurgency tasks cannot be accomplished “from 30,000 feet” is more than simply an inaccurate characterization—it is a blatant cheap shot and misinforms the reader.

—Maj Gen Allen G. Peck, USAF
Commander
LeMay Center for Doctrine
Development and Education

Dr. Corum’s response:

Service doctrine ought to provide useful guidance for the commander and staff planner. On the very important subject of equipping the air forces of less developed nations, the only comment of the U.S. Air Force’s new counterinsurgency doctrine is, “The key to Building Partnership Capacity . . . is not finding high or low-tech answers, but the right mix of technology, training, and support that provides a Partner Nation . . . with affordable, sustainable, and capable airpower” (AFDD 2–3, Irregular Warfare, August 2007, p. 29). Contrast this statement with the Army/Marine Corps Field Manual 3–24, Counterinsurgency, which lists the basic capabilities needed by a small nation air force in counterinsurgency, provides recent and current examples of the effective use of simple airpower technologies, and then discusses the advantages and disadvantages of modifying transports as aerial gunships (December 2006, pp. E3–E5).

Which of these doctrines provides the better starting point for the counterinsurgency planner?