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THE TOTAL FORCE: HOW CAN THE CINC UTILIZE THE RESERVE TACTICAL
AIR COMPONENT?

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Maritime Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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To meet these challenges, the operational commander must broaden the scope of planning considerations to entertain the combat power resident in reserve tactical air units in consideration of mass, economy of force, simultaneity and depth. This is not a force structure issue; it is an operational commander issue. This untapped resource has tremendous potential for impact at the operational level, but it must make it to the operation commander's "tool kit". It is a crime that active component tactical air units suffer extreme OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO, negative impact to readiness and retention, and limitations to use at the operation level of war, while three F/A-18 squadrons wait in reserve, remnants of an old "force-in-waiting" system, unutilized by the new system.

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Introduction

In an uncertain time of evolving threats, new and varied missions and Government reaction to the horrific events of September 11th, 2001, the challenges faced by the operational commander are impressive. Through analysis of current National Military Strategy and Total Force policy, recent historical operational experience, and the guiding principles of operational art, this paper will show that the operational commander has an unutilized tool available to him that can contribute to mass, economy of force, simultaneity and depth. This is not a force structure issue. It is an operational issue.

The Operational Commander's Dilemma

The continued war on terrorism, coupled with the ever growing infrastructure and demand associated with Homeland defense and the new awareness of the continuously changing terrorist threat, begets an analysis of the operational commander's dilemma: Meet all the requirements of current operations, forward presence, and homeland security, and do so with zero friendly casualties while enduring the gauntlet of target selection by political micromanagement and ever shrinking resources. "Over the next several years, we will face a series of challenges: a range of smaller-scale contingency operations; the threat of large-scale, cross-border aggression; the continued proliferation of advanced technologies; and a variety of transnational dangers. We also will confront increasingly sophisticated asymmetric challenges involving the use of chemical, biological, and possibly nuclear weapons; attacks against the information systems of our forces and national infrastructure; terrorism, as well as any number of the "wild card" scenarios. As we move into the next decade, we also face

the likely prospect of different and possibly more challenging regional threats, a still more demanding range of asymmetric challenges, and the very real potential for threats to the U.S. homeland. Finally, beyond the 2010-2015 period, there is the possibility that a regional great power or a global peer competitor may emerge.”¹ What tools belong to the Operational commander that can be used, or used more effectively, to help solve these gargantuan challenges? How can current Department of Defense resources that remain unutilized or underutilized make substantial contributions to current operations, forward presence, and homeland security?

An analysis of operations in Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan shows preponderance and a voracious, insatiable appetite for air power. The combination of precision weapons employment, diverse employment options, relatively low risk to U.S. forces, and reduced risk of collateral damage, has made this form of combat power the method of choice for the combatant Commander-in-Chief (CINC) and the politician. Air power is the instrument for preparation of the battle space, and in some cases, the only form of combat power employed, as in the case of Operation Allied Force.

The Total Force Concept

In contrast with the ever increasing demand for air power, the supply has decreased. The 1990s was a decade of downsizing, which led to reductions in active component (AC) and reserve component (RC) forces of significant measure. Our National Military Strategy requires “... the visible posture of US forces and infrastructure strategically positioned forward, in and near key regions.”² To accomplish this, our leadership has turned to the “Total Force” for answers. “Today, DoD cannot enforce any element of the National Security Strategy without National

Guard and Reserve forces. During the past several years, a smaller Total Force has led to an increased role for the reserve component. Last year, reserve forces contributed nearly 12.1 million man days to Total Force missions and exercises. This is the equivalent of adding 33,000 full-time personnel to the active force.”³

“On any given day, the Total Force is deployed in support of 10 Joint/Combined Operations and participates in 11 exercises in over 70 countries.”⁴ Air power is almost always a component of these operations and exercises, if not the centerpiece. As a result of diminishing supply and increasing demand, AC tactical air units are spread dangerously thin. While, in certain circumstances, many areas in the department of defense could be considered inappropriately utilized, reserve component (RC) tactical air power is an area that, in consideration of the Total Force, offers some promise for assistance with the operational commander’s dilemma.

The Underutilized Combat Power of Reserve Tactical Air

To accurately analyze the contribution reserve component tactical air units can make to the operational commander, one must first have a general understanding of the combat power associated with them. To contrast and qualify the characteristics of what “stuff” the tactical air unit must be made of to generate real combat power in today’s operating environment, Lieutenant General Short*, when speaking to the Norwegian Air Force Academy regarding Operation Allied Force said, “Quite frankly in this conflict there were a lot of air forces that did not help me, because they could not drop precision, they could not fly at night and they could not fight in all kinds of weather”.⁵ Since Air force Reserve, Air National Guard, Navy Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserve

tactical air units all fly essentially the same hardware (with minor exceptions) as their active component counterparts, on the “big picture” scale, there is not a compatibility issue with regard to hardware or aircrew capabilities. It is worth noting here that Navy and Marine Corps Reserve F/A-18 aircraft are currently undergoing modification to bring them more in line with current active component fleet hardware.⁶

To further differentiate, one must understand the differences in reserve tactical unit employment in the Total Force between the services, and the impact this has on the potential combat power available to the operational commander. In 1994, after a rapid deployment by the Air Force in support of Operation Vigilant Warrior, the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) concept was born.⁷ This concept has facilitated the seamless integration of Air force reserve and Air National Guard tactical air units into the Total Force. By scheduling AEFs for 90 day periods of duty on 15 months cycles, reserve forces can be scheduled into the force utilization plan like any active component force. They are not a “force-in-waiting”, but a seamlessly integrated unit in the Total Force. Therefore, no plausible utilization change for these units exists currently that significantly impacts the dilemma faced by the operational commander, since they are being utilized as part of his “tool kit” already.

Opportunity lies, however, with Navy and Marine Corps Reserve tactical air units. Currently, significant combat power exists in three Navy Reserve F/A-18 squadrons that have not deployed in combat since before Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Although other tactical air units exist in the reserve carrier air wing, they have been and continue to be utilized by the operational commander with great success. For example,

* Lieutenant General Short was the Coalition Force Air Component Commander (CFACC) and the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) for Operation Allied Force.

VAQ-209, the reserve EA-6B squadron, has deployed several times since the mid 1990s in support of joint EUCOM combat operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq. The untapped resource in the Navy Reserve Air Wing lies in the three F/A-18 squadrons of the Naval Reserve.

Four Marine Corps Reserve F/A-18 squadrons exist in the 4th Marine Air Wing that can be utilized as well. In total, there are 36 F/A-18 strike fighter aircraft in the Navy Reserve and 48 F/A-18 strike fighter aircraft in the Marine Corps Reserve.⁸ Each reserve squadron is manned with full time active duty personnel and selected reservist (SELRES) personnel that are hand picked and highly experienced. The squadrons are night, all weather, and precision strike-fighter units. They are capable of suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD). 84 F/A-18s possess a tremendous amount of combat power.

Case Studies in the Operational Commander's Dilemma

History provides an excellent window to view the intricacies of the operational commander's dilemma and the challenges that were overcome through extreme operating tempo (OPTEMPO) and personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO). Consistent in each of the operations below are the impact that air power has had on the battle space, and that current operational doctrine is straining our active component forces.

Operation Desert Storm

The operational commander's use of air power in Desert Storm to achieve operational level goals was dramatically successful. The opening round of Desert Storm was the largest air offensive since World War II.⁹ The coalition tactical air units simultaneously hit virtually every target category in the master attack plan on the first

night.¹⁰ Sortie rates were extremely high, and remained virtually unchanged for the entire operation.¹¹

This, however, was not a come-as-you-are war. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) had five and a half months to plan, build up, and train in theater. It is misleading to expect the same sets of circumstances and to conclude that such a display of airpower should be expected in the future.¹²

In general terms, the operational commander has to be able to generate the same type of air power mass and simultaneity in come-as-you-are scenarios as was generated for Desert Storm, but conditions enjoyed during Desert Storm may not exist. The commander must then find alternative sources for air power augmentation. These sources must have the capability to integrate quickly and seamlessly. The combat power of the Navy Reserve and Marine Corps Reserve tactical air units fits this requirement with respect to hardware capabilities, and air crew training and readiness.

Operation Allied Force

In terms of operational employment, Allied Force was a military success.¹³ NATO generated 78 days of continuous, around-the-clock operations, flew 38,000 sorties with only 2 aircraft losses, and suffered no combat fatalities.¹⁴ On the surface that would seem contradictory to the argument here, but General John Jumper said, “The Kosovo operation drained us. It took everything we had. I’m not sure we could have done much more than we did. We were stressed about as much as I think we could be stressed, and it’s going to take fully six months to get back to the readiness levels we need.”¹⁵

Vice Admiral Herbert A. Browne, Jr. II, then Commander, Third Fleet, made a statement to congress regarding the readiness of our forces and the current manning

level in September 1998. While addressing the committee, regarding the USS Lincoln battle group, he said, “Our forward deployed forces are ready. That said, they're doing so with 12 percent fewer people in that battle group than they had in their previous deployment. So, that means that we're working our sailors harder in order to maintain that forward readiness that we appreciate. It also means that we reduce the flexibility and redundancy that we have in the battle group.”¹⁶

In 1999, when Operation Allied Force began, no Carrier Battle Group was involved for two weeks. The USS Roosevelt Battle Group was diverted to the operation from other commitments in the Arabian Gulf to provide her capabilities to the operational commander. The examples above provide ample evidence that our active component forces are stretched thin.

Analysis of the Reserve Tactical Air Component at the Operational Level

To explore the use of the combat power of the reserve component tactical air units as a tool for the operational commander, an analysis of Operational Art is offered. First, an analysis on the macro level, with further investigation into two principles of war; the principle of mass and the principle of economy of force, and the concepts of simultaneity and depth. “The overarching operational concept in JP 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, is that JFC’s integrate and synchronize the actions of air, land, sea, space, and special operations forces to achieve strategic and operational objectives through integrated, joint campaigns and major operations.”¹⁷ While the above passage refers to integration and synchronization of major force components, integration of the reserve tactical air units is substantial enough in combat power to impact the actions of the air component, thereby impacting the integration as a

whole. The operational commander has failed to integrate a small but powerful segment of his forces.

Operational art requires commanders to answer the following questions:

1. “What military (or related political and social) conditions must be produced in the operational area to achieve the strategic goal? (Ends)” ¹⁸
2. “What sequence of actions is most likely to produce that condition? (Ways)” ¹⁹
3. “How should the resources of the joint force be applied to accomplish that sequence of actions? (Means)” ²⁰
4. “What is the likely cost or risk to the joint force in performing that sequence of actions?” ²¹
5. “What resources must be committed or actions performed to successfully execute the JFC’s exit strategy?”²²

The combat power of Navy and Marine Corps Reserve tactical air units, when applied by the operational commander, expand the possible answers to question number three. If sortie generation, personnel augmentation, and OPTEMPO relief are factored into the equation, new applications of the tactical air power portion of the joint force may be plausible. As additional assets, which are not normally factored into active component OPTEMPO and combat power, contribute to the operation, limitations and restrictions begin to diminish, and risk is reduced. The net effect is an increase in the realm of operational possibilities.

The Principle of Mass

According to the *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, “The purpose of mass is to concentrate the effects of combat power at the most advantageous place and time to achieve decisive results. To achieve mass is to synchronize and/or integrate appropriate joint force capabilities where they will have a decisive effect in a short period of time. Mass often must be sustained to have the desired effect. Massing effects, rather than concentrating forces, can enable even numerically inferior forces to achieve decisive results and minimize human losses and waste of resources.”²³ To concentrate combat power and integrate capabilities, operational commanders have turned to air power with precision weapons. Massing effects often means precision strikes of target sets throughout the theater to simultaneously achieve a desired effect. The addition of combat power in the precision strike area increases the number of targets that can be simultaneously attacked, and the length of time that level of action can be sustained. By including Navy and Marine Corps Reserve tactical air units at the operational level, mass is achieved by increasing the capability to mass effects and sustain operations.

The Principle of Economy of Force

According to the *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, “The purpose of economy of force is to allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts. Economy of force is the judicious employment and distribution of forces. It is the measured allocation of available combat power to such tasks as limited attacks, defense, delays, deception, or even retrograde operations to achieve mass elsewhere at the decisive point and time.”²⁴ The use of combat power to achieve secondary efforts is an area particularly suited to the reserve units. Since the Navy reserve units have not been used

in combat in over 10 years, it is fair to say that they are not considered by the operational commander in planning. Therefore they can be allocated to secondary efforts without net reduction in active component forces available. Once again, since precision strike, air superiority and suppression of enemy air defenses are all capabilities inherent to the reserve F/A-18 squadron; they are a versatile, capable asset to use in limited attacks, defense, deception, and retrograde operations.

Simultaneity and Depth

“The concepts of simultaneity and depth are foundations of joint operational theory. The goal is to overwhelm and cripple adversary capabilities and adversary will to resist. The goal of simultaneity in joint force operations contributes directly to an adversary’s collapse by placing more demands on adversary forces and functions than can be handled. The concept of depth seeks to overwhelm the adversary throughout the AOR and/or JOA from multiple dimensions, contributing to its speedy defeat or capitulation.”²⁵ The ability of a joint operation to produce simultaneity and depth during a phase or operation predominated by air power is directly related to the amount of sorties that can be flown by aircraft that are suitable. These aircraft need to be capable of contributing to the battle for air superiority, deliver precision weapons, and operate from varied locations and attack from multiple directions. Since F/A-18 squadrons can operate from land or sea, and are extremely capable in multiple missions, they are a rich resource for achieving simultaneity and depth.

The Reserve Tactical Air Components Contribution to Solving the Operational Commander's Dilemma

The naval strategy outlined “...calls for the integration of the Active and Reserve components into a seamless and cohesive Total Force capable of meeting all requirements in peacetime and in war.”²⁶ The Navy Total Force Policy states that, “During peacetime, Navy will employ Reserve forces and personnel to relieve stress on Active operating Tempo (OPTEMPO) and Personnel Tempo (PERSTEMPO) by deploying, when practicable, and by fulfilling close-to-home Commander in Chief (CINC) requirements that enable the deployment of Active forces and personnel.”²⁷ Recall the operational commander's dilemma: Meet all the requirements of current operations, forward presence, and homeland security, and do so with zero friendly casualties while enduring the gauntlet of target selection by political micromanagement and ever shrinking resources.

Each area of the dilemma can be addressed in some fashion by employment of reserve tactical air units. Current operations can better embody the tenants of operation art with more precision strike, air superiority, and SEAD platforms. More combat power is available in those areas so endurance to lengthy target selection will improve. The flexibility and sustainability achieved will lessen the negative impact to operational principles. If reserve tactical air units are deployed autonomously, without the constraints of carrier basing as the only method of utilization, forward presence can be increased. Navy and Marine Corps reserve tactical air units have already proven their worth in the homeland defense role by manning local combat air patrol stations around the country in response to September 11th. OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO can be

reduced for respective active component forces by utilizing the reserve tactical units for individual augmentation as well as the items mentioned above.

VAQ-209, the EA-6B squadron that is part of the Navy's reserve carrier air wing, is an outstanding example of creative employment methods of reserve tactical air units to enable use of their specific combat power. Since the EA-6B is a high demand/low density platform, its use is husbanded carefully. The squadron, though part of the reserve carrier air wing, has been shore based, deployed aboard ship for shortened periods or at less than full squadron strength, and used to augment active units to facilitate use of its combat power while meeting the specific employment peculiarities of a reserve squadron. It is an example of the numerous solutions to the reserve integration issues presented by six month ship deployments normally accomplished by active component forces. The use of VAQ-209 proves that the operational commander can tap the available resource and integrate it into the Total Force when necessary. In our traditional mantras of "do more with less" and "make it happen", we relegate ourselves to an OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO that is not required if we allow paradigms to be broken.

Conclusion

"Using the Guard and Reserve to counter threats to national security helps promote the national will. It also enhances public support of the military, because it draws members from the local civilian community."²⁸ Tens of thousands of reservists from all the services have answered the call for operations Desert Storm, Allied Force, and Enduring Freedom. In large measure the Total Force exists and is enabling the practice of good operational art across the spectrum of employment. The critical area of

combat air power, arguably the pivotal issue for battle space shaping, has unutilized potential.

Out of the box thinking like the utilization of an aircraft carrier as a special forces operating base for operations in Afghanistan is what is required here. Land basing of reserve carrier air wing assets, manipulating the composition of the traditional carrier air wing, in theater, to surge combat power for short durations, augmenting active squadrons with aircraft, aircrew, and maintenance personnel to achieve specific results are all ways to utilize the substantial combat power of the tradition “force-in-waiting”.

The operational commander must broaden the scope of planning considerations to entertain this aspect of combat power in consideration of mass, economy of force, simultaneity and depth. This is not a force structure issue; it is an operational commander issue. This untapped resource has tremendous potential for impact at the operational level, but it must make it to the operation commander’s “tool kit”. It is a crime that active component tactical air units suffer extreme OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO, negative impact to readiness and retention, and limitations to use at the operation level of war, while three F/A-18 squadrons wait in reserve, remnants of an old “force-in-waiting” system, unutilized by the new system.

Recommendations

In April 1998, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen issued the *Fiscal Years 2000-2005 Defense Planning Guidance*, which directed the Department of Defense to conduct the Reserve Component Employment 2005 (RCE-05) Study. “The study reviewed employment of the reserve component (RC), and developed several

recommendations to enhance the role of the RC in the full range of military missions from homeland defense to major theater wars (MTWs). The study examined how to make the RC easier to access and use, and how to better train, equip, and manage it to ensure effective mission fulfillment.”²⁹

In examining the RC role in the future, the RCE-05 Study focused on three areas: homeland defense, smaller-scale contingencies, and MTWs. Certain key themes emerged as particularly important to ensuring an effective future Total Force. The most important of which is to achieve seamless integration and access with the reserve component.

“ Homeland Defense. Given the increasing threats to the territory, population, and infrastructure of the United States, the RC should play an expanded role in providing homeland defense capabilities.” ³⁰

“Smaller-Scale Contingencies. While U.S. participation in smaller-scale contingency operations (SSCs) will continue to be selective, the demand for SSC operations is likely to remain high over the next 15-20 years. Increasing the role of the RC in SSCs where feasible will provide some operational tempo relief for the Active Component (AC), and build RC operational skills.”³¹ The study recommends new ways for the RC to provide additional high-demand, low-density capabilities for SSCs and assume a greater role in sustained operations like the one being conducted in Afghanistan.³²

“Major Theater Wars. The most stressing requirement for the U.S. military remains our commitment to being able to fight and win two MTWs nearly simultaneously. While substantial portions of the RC are already integral to the war

fighting effort, its role, can be further clarified.”³³ The study highlights new ways to augment critical combat capabilities in specific war fighting areas, develop post-mobilization training standards and deployment timelines, and integrate the RC more fully into the deliberate war plans.³⁴

To achieve seamless integration and access in Homeland defense, smaller scale contingencies, and major theater wars, cultural barriers between the active component and the reserve component must be removed. Out of the box thinking with regard to employment methods must be adopted and accepted. The reserve component must stand up and take responsibility. They must fight to find ways to ensure every facet of their combat power is ready and available to the operational commander. Vital areas of combat power like all weather, night precision strike fighters from the reserve component must be there to facilitate operation art concepts like mass and economy of force, and relieve OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO so that the active component can have a greater impact when needed. The operation commander is the key to this. He must put these forces to work.

Notes

¹ Department Of Defense, Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, (Washington, DC: May 1997), Section IV, < <http://www.fas.org/man/docs/qdr/sec4.html> > [24 April 2002]

² Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Military Strategy of the United States, (Washington, DC: 1997), 3.

³ Department of Defense, Reserve Component Programs: Fiscal year 2000 Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board, (Washington, DC: May 2001), xxxi.

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Military Strategy of the United States, (Washington, DC: 1997), 13.

⁵ Lieutenant General Michael C. Short, USAF (Ret.), “An Airman’s Lessons from Kosovo,” in John Andreas Olsen, ed., Maneuver Warfare to Kosovo, Trondheim, Norway, Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy, 2001, 277.

⁶ Department of Defense, Reserve Component Programs: Fiscal year 2000 Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board, (Washington, DC: May 2001), 84-87.

⁷ Tech. Sgt. Eric Robinson, “Jumper Talks about AEF Concept”, Air Force News, 10 May 1996, < http://www.af.mil/news/May1996/n19960510_960446.html >, [19 April 2002].

⁸ Department of Defense, Reserve Component Programs: Fiscal year 2000 Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board, (Washington, DC: May 2001), 6.

⁹ Benjamin S. Lambeth, “Storm over the Desert: A New Assessment,” Joint Force Quarterly, (Winter 2000-01): 31.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 33.

¹² Ibid, 32.

¹³ Department of Defense, Kosovo/Operation Allied Force After-Action Report, (Washington: 2000), 79.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Flight International, “US-Air Power Drained After Kosovo (Sep 20/FI)”, Daily Defense News, Periscope, 20 September 1999, no page number, <<http://www.periscope.ucg.com/docs/news2/1999/news.19990920.6.shtml>> [02 May 2002].

¹⁶ Vice Admiral Herbert A. Browne, Jr. II, “Statement,” U.S. Congress, House, Committee on National Security, Readiness Realities, Joint Hearing Before The Military Readiness Subcommittee Meeting Jointly With Military Installations And Facilities Subcommittee And Military Personnel Subcommittee Of The Committee On National Security House Of Representatives, 105th Cong, 2d sess., 25 September 1998, 29-30. <http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/security/has268030.000/has268030_1.HTM#28> [22 April 2002].

¹⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations, Joint Pub 3-0 (Washington, DC: 10 September 2001), II-6.

¹⁸ Ibid, II-3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, II-3.

²³ Ibid, A-1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, II-11.

²⁶ Navy Department, Total Force Policy, OPNAVINST 1001.21B (Washington, DC: 10 June 1998), 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Department of Defense, Reserve Component Programs: Fiscal year 2000 Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board, (Washington, DC: May 2001), xxxi.

²⁹ Department of Defense, Report of the Reserve Component Employment Study 2005, (Washington, DC: 1999), 1.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

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