

Posturing for the Durand Line - 'We Can and Must do Better'?

Paul Smyth

Introduction

On 10 July 2008, the Pakistan *Daily Times* reported a political agent in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) as stating that the Pakistan-Afghanistan border had been 'completely sealed' to criminals¹. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation along the forbidding 2430km border is rather different, and the 24 coalition casualties suffered in the insurgent attack against a joint US/Afghan outpost in Eastern Afghanistan on 13 July, clearly illustrated the severe consequences of instability in the border zone. Unsurprisingly, when speaking about security in the border region at a Pentagon press briefing on 16 July, Admiral Michael Mullen (Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff) said '*we can and must do better*'². While this sound-bite has more application in Washington, Islamabad and other capitals than in-theatre, he was right, and with the significance of the border area indubitably set to increase, his public sentiment is a timely catalyst to consider the 'border problem' in a little more detail.

The Growing Importance of the Border Zone

When he delineated the boundary between Afghanistan and British India in 1893, Sir Mortimer Durand may have done the British Empire a positive service, but today the existence of an international boundary that bisects the Pashtun region in which numerous insurgent groups operate is an unwelcome obstacle to counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts.

As the COIN campaign in Afghanistan properly enters its third year, the area of the 'Durand Line' is becoming an increasingly important feature in the campaign. First, as the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) make persistent security gains within Afghanistan, the existence of an insurgent haven on the Pakistan side of the border balloons in value. Although indications suggest that their ranks are being swelled with fighters from further afield (e.g. by Punjabis), the insurgent groups opposing the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) remain essentially Pashtun in make-up. Hence, as Afghan insurgents are steadily evicted from Afghanistan their reliance on supporters in the contiguous FATA and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) grows, as does their ability to safely transit to them. This generates two information requirements for ISAF planning staffs: where are the insurgent bases within the FATA and NWFP? And how are the insurgents travelling to and from Afghanistan?

¹ 'Pak-Afghan Border Sealed', *Daily Times*, 10 July 2008, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\07\10\story_10-7-2008_pg7_10.

² Pentagon Channel Briefing, 16 July 2008, http://pentagontv.feedroom.com/?fr_story=3ed5c4915915a57f1f8ed419d93e2e27b8eefea5&rf=rss.

Second, an easing of Pakistani pressure on indigenous extremist groups within the FATA and the NWFP has enabled elements of these groups to embark on violent activities within Afghanistan, which might partially explain the substantial increase in attacks that the US-led Regional Command (East) has experienced during January-May 2008 (a 40% rise over the same period in 2007³), and in May 2008, on conclusion of a peace agreement with the Pakistan authorities, Baitullah Meshud, leader of *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* (Taliban in Pakistan), publicly announced that his fighters would conduct attacks in Afghanistan⁴. Such claims cannot simply be dismissed as rhetoric, although it is too soon to judge whether Pakistan-based fighters were involved in the 13 July assault on the coalition outpost at Dar-e Pech in Eastern Afghanistan, which inflicted the highest combat losses in a day on US forces in Afghanistan since June 2005.

Third, as ISAF and ANA forces extend their presence along the Afghan border they are increasingly being targeted by insurgents firing from within Pakistani territory. This development has already led to very public cross-border returns of fire and the US has made it clear that the point of origin of insurgent attacks will not prevent kinetic responses in self-defence. The reported deaths of eleven Pakistani Frontier Corps soldiers following a US airstrike on 10 June illustrates the danger violence on the border can pose to supposed allies⁵, and the potential for such violence to cause a deterioration in relations between Pakistan and the GOA/ISAF underlines the need for accurate intelligence on what is happening on both sides of the Durand Line.

A Problem of Posture

Although the border zone is increasing in importance, ISAF is not optimally postured to conduct COIN operations in that area. Despite approximately 75% of ISAF's 53 000 troops being deployed in the two Regional Commands (East and South) with Areas of Responsibility (AORs) which border Pakistan⁶, these troops are insufficient to successfully police a border of over 1900km. They are not even adequate to monitor the border as the topography comprises vast areas of inhospitable desert and remote mountainous terrain which, though riddled with ancient trails that facilitate smuggling and local movement, are devoid of an infrastructure to support unit manoeuvres. In addition to the geographical difficulties along the border, hitherto, ISAF has lacked the political determination to deploy an abundance of reinforcements to the border with Pakistan, or even to its violent environs in Southern Afghanistan. The resulting ratios of troops to Afghan population or acreage are too low to permit more rapid or decisive progress in the COIN campaign, so in order to redress what is effectively an insurgents' geographical advantage ISAF must look to other means, and principally to its use of air power.

The current military focus on irregular warfare, stability operations and COIN campaigns has not only created challenges for land forces that are equipped and conceptually focused on conventional inter-state warfare, but for air forces too. The tensions between Cold War legacy equipment and capabilities, the demands of current operations and the often competing requirements of potential future conflicts encompass more than the Land domain. For example, defeating conventional military opponents equipped with large armoured/mechanized formations, hardened aircraft shelters and underground command and control facilities, generated the need for weapons with larger warheads and greater destructive power (e.g. bombs such as the UK's 2000lb Paveway III and the US 'bunker-busting' BLU-109), but the vogue for

³ Pentagon Channel Report, 15 July 2008, http://dodvclips.mil/index.jsp?fr_story=FRdamp283071&rf=rss.

⁴ 'Pakistani Taliban Leader Vows Jihad In Afghanistan', By Alamgir Bitani, Reuters, 24 May 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/asiaCrisis/idUSISL274902>.

⁵ 'Pakistan Angry As Strike By U.S. Kills 11 Soldiers', Carlotta Gall and Eric Schmitt, New York Times, 12 June 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/12/world/asia/12pstan.html>.

⁶ International Security Assistance Force factsheet, http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/isaf_placemat.pdf.

greater destructive power is reversed by the current imperative to kill individuals who are operating in civilian environments - generating a conflicting need for smaller warheads and more localised lethal effect. The air power community is cognisant of the need for fresh research, development and acquisition to meet new operational challenges (e.g. the Royal Air Force has procured four Reaper Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs) with an aspiration to acquire ten⁷), but the community's inherent flexibility cultivates a pragmatic approach which masks the true extent of the changes required to optimise air power's contribution to current conflicts.

For air power, the enduring and insurgent characteristics of the campaigns in Iraq, and especially Afghanistan, call for a fundamental review of the traditional balance of emphasis given to kinetic and non-kinetic air activities (i.e. where striking targets outweighs information gathering). Although it is an over-simplistic error to typify conventional warfare as being the primary domain for kinetic capabilities and COIN as the 'home' for non-kinetic effects, COIN campaigns are sufficiently distinct to demand a transfer of emphasis from the primacy given to kinetic capabilities. In particular, the COIN imperative to win and maintain the consent of both the indigenous population in theatre and the domestic audience at home places an additional constraint on the use of force which has reached unprecedented levels of scrutiny. However, this does not remove the need for lethal force in a COIN campaign and the war in Afghanistan is replete with examples of the battle-winning impact of Close Air Support (CAS) to isolated or outnumbered ground forces. However, the increased priority that non-kinetic capabilities should attract in a COIN campaign has been disguised by two factors: first, the insurgents' imprudent attempt (in 2006-07) to fight ISAF in force-on-force engagements and, second, the international community's rather scant deployment of troops to Afghanistan. Both factors reinforced the necessity for CAS, and in so doing modified the balance of capability requirements which a COIN campaign fought in a region like the Hindu Kush should routinely place on air power.

In a discretionary expeditionary intervention like that in Afghanistan, contributing nations display a range of commitment. Similarly, the level of risk to which they are prepared to expose their deployed forces also varies markedly. Political concerns about the domestic ramifications of military casualties often dictate that severe restrictions are put on the employment of those forces, and place a premium on force protection measures. This approach may cause friction within ISAF over perceived burden-sharing, but such constraints are a reality of allied 'wars of choice' and a necessary consequence of broadening the coalition. Much is made of the tactical liability of such restrictions but it is also possible that the COIN campaign is being handicapped by choices of an operational, not political nature, which mean ISAF is not postured for greatest effect – neither in the forces it has been granted nor in its employment of them.

For instance, with respect to the use of air power the task afforded the highest priority is CAS for 'Troops in Contact' (TIC). This mission has obvious value to the troops whose lives are in danger, but it also has a strategic value in that if ISAF were to have an entire unit slaughtered/captured by the insurgents, or an isolated base overrun, it would not only embolden the enemy, but severely undermine ISAF's credibility within Afghanistan and potentially erode support for the ISAF mission among coalition partners. There is considerable merit, therefore, in elevating direct support for land forces to the chief priority. However, it must be recognised that by placing such a heavy emphasis on CAS/TIC some air assets will be unavailable for other tasks elsewhere, and their wider utility will consequently be significantly constrained. The emphasis placed on CAS/TIC is therefore not without operational cost and this penalty must be

⁷ 'RAF Reaper Deploys Ground Attack Munitions', Royal Air Force official website, Friday 6 June 2008, <http://raf.mod.uk/news/archive.cfm?storyid=5DC13BC6-1143-EC82-2E885837D31A0610>, 'Britain Requests 10 MQ-9 Reapers for over \$1B', Defense Industry Daily, 20 July 2008, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/britain-requests-10-mq-9-reapers-for-over-1b-04536/>.

weighed against the obvious benefits of direct support to land forces to ascertain which air power missions have the greatest impact on the overall COIN campaign.

From a Joint (tri-Service) perspective the issue under consideration is whether a truly Joint Campaign is possible in a conflict where one Component is paramount, which for airmen distils to whether air power is being used to optimum effect. For example, is air power's best contribution to the COIN campaign in its focus on CAS/TIC, or would reconnaissance sorties along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to enable interdiction of insurgent supplies and reinforcements achieve a greater campaign effect? Similarly, should air tasking priority be given to areas where ISAF units are deployed or to building an improved intelligence picture of insurgent intentions before they leave the FATA?

If insurgent groups are more vulnerable to attack or capture when in transit to their targets and operating areas in Afghanistan, obtaining judicious intelligence and conducting interdiction might prove a better approach than defeating the insurgents piecemeal at a time and place of their choosing, but it should be understood that without an increase in air assets the consequences of a switch to increased Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) activity might include the death of ISAF soldiers who are deprived of timely CAS. Obviously, such a severe penalty could not be countenanced unless it were clearly evident that enhanced ISTAR activity had a tangible and indisputable effect on bringing the COIN campaign to a speedier conclusion, thereby reducing the total casualties suffered before achieving a successful outcome.

A Necessary Shift in Focus?

Unless ISAF receives substantial troop reinforcements which produce a significant improvement in force densities across the operating area, the increasing importance of the border zone will place a growing demand for airborne ISTAR, not CAS/TIC. To alleviate this burgeoning competition for apportionment of air effort and allocation of air resources, a logical division of responsibility is useful. The geographical reality along so large and inaccessible a border is that aerospace assets provide the most encompassing ISTAR coverage, which cannot be replicated by land-based alternatives, while for fire-support missions there are potential substitutes to the use of fast-jet (FJ) aircraft. It is therefore in the non-kinetic realm that air power has a distinctive contribution to make, but to meet the growing imperative for greater situational awareness of what is happening in the border zone there must be a corresponding realignment of air campaign objectives and air power assets should be postured accordingly. Although some adjustment could be achieved through apportionment and allocation decisions that modify the employment of existing air assets, to have optimum effect the ISAF Order of Battle (ORBAT) would need amendment, both in its air and ground composition.

Less Reliance on CAS

On the ground, to compensate for a reduction in the direct kinetic support available from CAS, alternative fire-support weapons such as the 70km-range Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GLMRS)⁸, heavy artillery and perhaps even Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) or self-propelled artillery would have potential utility as alternative providers of lethal force. GLMRS and artillery units have already deployed to Afghanistan and their reinforcement should be contemplated. As for MBTs, in British military thinking the use of 'heavy armour' is often considered inappropriate for patrolling areas where troops are seeking to gain the consent of the

⁸ *'Precision Rocket System Fired For The First Time In Afghanistan'*, UK MOD Defence News, 24 July 2007, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/EquipmentAndLogistics/PrecisionRocketSystemFiredForTheFirstTimeInAfghanistanvideo.htm>.

local population, but the deployment of such fire-power *within* isolated fortifications for defensive purposes should not be discounted, especially if it is linked to a reduction in the availability of CAS.

In addition, the main objection to the use of MBTs in COIN operations (that they ‘alienate the population’) is somewhat undermined when military necessity demands that ISAF continues to conduct activities which cause the greatest local offence in Afghanistan (namely the kinetic use of air power and the searching of private homes). As the military benefits of air attack and house searches guarantee their continued practise, a similar analysis should be made of the value of MBTs in a COIN campaign, especially when the Danish⁹ and Canadian¹⁰ contingents in Afghanistan include MBTs in their ORBATs.

Furthermore, the attack on the coalition operating base at Dara-e Pech was a potential disaster for ISAF with some insurgents successfully forcing their way into the coalition camp, and it would be a worrying development if such attacks became the norm. Although it is too soon to identify a shift in insurgent strategy from one focused on Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and suicide bombings, to one of raiding by larger groups of fighters from within the FATA/NWFP, the 13 June successful attack on Kandahar prison and the 13 July assault at Dara-e Pech suggest an increased insurgent capacity to plan, coordinate and commit forces, while on 16 July the Governor of Paktika Province (on the border with Pakistan) reportedly claimed that 350 insurgents had crossed into Afghanistan to attack security targets (with heavy losses)¹¹. As ISAF/ANA units advance closer to the Durand Line the opportunity for enemy raiding naturally increases, underlining the need for early warning of any attack and the ability to interdict insurgent forces in a timely fashion. Ultimately, and especially when bad weather impedes air operations, remote or isolated bases must be able to defend themselves. Although topography and accessibility would prevent the deployment of a MBT to many outposts, in those where physical constraints do not apply, the use of heavy armour to enhance the defence of an isolated position may prove to be a prudent precaution and one where logistic and other administrative concerns deserve to be overcome.

More Emphasis on ISTAR

Moving from potential adjustments to the ISAF land ORBAT, the coalition’s extant air ORBAT also requires review. The ISTAR capabilities provided by its current composition significantly falls short of what the Air Forces in its member nations are capable of. Consequently, ISAF commanders are employing sub-optimal air power. Of course, this might reflect that commanders are satisfied with the existing air contribution to the COIN campaign; but worryingly, it might also manifest an ignorance of what air power could contribute to the conflict, and more seriously that airmen have failed to articulate the difference. Regardless of the underlying reason, the ISTAR arena offers a prime illustration of the gap between current in-theatre capability and what could be provided.

As with the deployment of ground equipment, there are significant physical limits to what air assets could be deployed to Afghanistan, the most obvious constraint being a paucity of airfields that are capable of supporting air operations by fixed-wing aircraft. In addition, with respect to long-range ‘strategic’ ISTAR assets (such as the E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar

⁹ ISAF official website, Video Archive 2007, <http://www.nato.int/isaf/media/video/2007/> (at entry dated 21 November 2007).

¹⁰ ‘Protection The Top Priority With Tank Acquisition’, Canadian Forces official News Release NR-07.022, 12 April 2007, http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=2251.

¹¹ ‘US, Afghan Troops Abandon Base Overrun by Militants’, Voice of America News, 16 July 2008, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2008/07/mil-080716-voa01.htm>.

System (JSTARS)) which could be based elsewhere in the region, there are often diplomatic issues which restrict their use because such reconnaissance aircraft transit over other countries before reaching their operating areas. Nevertheless, within the constraints of Afghanistan's air infrastructure there is ample latitude to configure a force which has an enhanced ISTAR capability, while the additional deployment of 'strategic' ISTAR assets to the Gulf Region would not set a precedent and empirically negotiated solutions are routinely achieved to alleviate diplomatic concerns.

The long-range of 'strategic' assets means that from certain regional bases they could support the campaigns in either Iraq or Afghanistan, which raises the question of what apportionment of effort should be allocated to each operation. Given the present security trends in each theatre the balance of tasking for such key assets should be rapidly biased to ISAF's requirements, for if insurgents are repeatedly able to mount mass attacks against ISAF/Afghan outposts, it is quite possible that one would eventually succeed, with severe consequences for a coalition that has never lost an engagement with insurgents. The loss of a hundred or more ISAF personnel (either killed or especially captured) would be a significant reversal to the COIN campaign in Afghanistan, so if a transfer of ISTAR effort to Afghanistan was deemed to expose gains made in Iraq to unacceptable risk then additional aircraft must be sent into theatre to meet the burgeoning danger in Afghanistan. Although the recent announcement that the RAF's new Sentinel R1 Airborne Stand-Off Radar (ASTOR) reconnaissance aircraft may make its inaugural operational deployment to Afghanistan is welcome news, but the security problem along the Durand Line poses a more immediate challenge to which existing assets (e.g. JSTARS) should be allocated.

When considering shorter-range ISTAR assets which could be operated from within Afghanistan, current options comprise Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and FJs equipped with specialist reconnaissance systems (such as the Luftwaffe's ECR Tornado) or others with targeting pods that have a useful secondary function as ISTAR sensors (so called 'Non-Traditional ISR' (NTISR) assets such as the sniper laser pod on the UK's Harrier aircraft). These various systems (together with space and long-range ISTAR assets) should be viewed as complementary and not competing capabilities. For example, UAVs can have a greater endurance and thus persistence, but are relatively slow and vulnerable to ground fire, while FJs can move swiftly across the battlespace, but are relatively noisy and have limited stand-off sensor capability. The existing mix of ISAF ISTAR platforms is impressive, but insufficient for the specific demands of an operating area that covers tens of thousands of square miles, is bisected by an international boundary and in which the enemy may adopt a raiding strategy. It is therefore prudent to look further afield for additional capabilities among ISAF-member nations, and here the Royal Air Force (RAF) operates what is arguably the most advanced FJ reconnaissance system in the world.

The RAPTOR (Reconnaissance Airborne Pod for Tornado) system carried by aircraft in the RAF's Tornado GR4 fleet is a dual-sensor, real-time, digital reconnaissance pod which provides imagery of extraordinary quality in day-light or at night-time and in many weather conditions. The pod's Electro-optical and Infra-red sensors can gather data from various ranges which can be displayed in the cockpit and also immediately transmitted to ground stations for intelligence exploitation. However, with Tornado GR4s presently supporting the coalition campaign in Iraq and Harriers providing fast-jet support in Afghanistan, RAPTOR is not used for ISAF missions, even though the burden and priority of UK military effort has clearly switched from Iraq to Afghanistan. Although it has been announced that from April 2009 Tornado GR4s will replace the Harrier detachment Kandahar¹² this move is more to relieve the stress of persistent

¹² UK House of Commons Debates, Oral Answers to Questions, 16 June 2008, <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2008-06-16b.675.0>.

operational commitments on the smaller Harrier fleet than a move to enhance the ISTAR capabilities in Afghanistan. If RAPTOR is to have its full effect on operations in Afghanistan then it must deploy in time to meet operational imperatives and its deployment schedule should be reviewed accordingly.

Options for a Swift Response

The seriousness of the security situation along the Durand Line demands an ISTAR-focused response before next spring. An ideal solution would be to immediately deploy a RAPTOR or equivalent capability to Afghanistan. However, options to do so are limited. Although the Goodrich DB-110 reconnaissance sensor in the RAPTOR system is also flown by the Japanese Defence Force (in P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft¹³) and has been selected for use on F-16 fighters in the Hellenic and Polish Air Forces it is unlikely these nations could or would respond in time. For domestic reasons Japan has followed a policy of supporting the international intervention in Afghanistan financially rather than militarily. There is significant resistance in the Japanese parliament to foreign military interventions and the political difficulties associated with Japan's use of its military overseas even extended to the provision of a fuel vessel (oiler) in support coalition naval operations in the Indian Ocean. Despite a desire within the Japanese government to become engaged in ISAF militarily, on 18 July Japanese officials were reported to have deferred an attempt to gain parliamentary approval for a military deployment to Afghanistan¹⁴; Japan's DB-110 reconnaissance capability will therefore not become available to ISAF in a meaningful timeframe.

As for Greece, it has been a consistent military supporter of ISAF but with a bias toward non-combat roles (e.g. engineering and medical capabilities) and its Air Force contribution has been limited to air transport aircraft. The deployment of F-16s would therefore mark a significant departure in policy and might take months to approve politically and enact militarily, although six Hellenic F-16s are presently holding a NATO Reaction Force commitment¹⁵. However, it is not clear whether the F-16s available for foreign contingencies are DB-110 capable or even whether the two reconnaissance pods ordered by Greece are yet in operational service¹⁶; therefore it appears unlikely that Greece can meet ISAF's immediate ISTAR requirement.

Turning to the Polish Air Force (PAF), its F-16s are the most modern version (Block 52) available and were delivered from 2006 as part of an US Foreign Military Sales package which included seven Goodrich DB-110s¹⁷. As the Poles have many troops in Paktika Province (bordering the FATA), have recently increased the size and scope of their ISAF commitment and have an aspiration to take security responsibility for one of the provinces (Ghazni) in RC(East), they may have a parochial interest in boosting the ISTAR coverage of the border region; conversely, however, after increasing the size of the Polish ISAF contingent by 400 troops (to 1600¹⁸) and (eventually) eight helicopters (including two for use by Canadian forces)¹⁹, there

¹³ 'Goodrich Digital, Real-Time, Tactical Reconnaissance System Approved For Use By The Royal Air Force', Goodrich official website Feature Story Archive, 28 October 2002, <http://www.goodrich.com/Feature/SingleStory/0,1285,18,00.html>.

¹⁴ 'No Japanese SDF Mission To Afghanistan', UPI, 18 July 2008, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2008/07/18/No_Japanese_SDF_mission_to_Afghanistan/UPI-65191216359047/.

¹⁵ Non-classified NATO factsheet, <http://www.nato.int/issues/commitment/docs/080325-greece.pdf>.

¹⁶ 'Goodrich DB-110 Dual-band Reconnaissance System (United States), Airborne Systems - Observation And Surveillance - Reconnaissance Systems', Jane's Information Group, <http://www.janes.com/extracts/extract/jeos/jeos1244.html>.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ 'Handover Of Command In Afghanistan', Polish Ministry of National Defence News Release, 16 May 2008, <http://www.mon.gov.pl/en/artykul/4891>.

¹⁹ 'Canada Getting Access To Polish Helicopters By Summer', CBC News, 6 June 2008, <http://www.cbc.ca/story/canada/national/2008/06/06/poland-helicopters.html>.

may be little enthusiasm or defence capacity in Poland for any further increases in its substantial commitment to ISAF. Finally, as with the Hellenic Air Force, it is not yet clear whether the PAF has reached an operational status with the DB-110 system, and it too does not appear to provide a ready solution to ISAF's growing security problem.

The only immediate option for a fast-jet ISTAR enhancement of the highest quality is the RAF's RAPTOR system. This would require one of two things: an early (albeit partial) implementation of the planned GR4 deployment to Kandahar, or the integration of the existing GR4 detachment in Qatar into the ISAF campaign. To reach the Afghan operating area from the Gulf would involve lengthy Tornado sorties, but through a combination of air-to-air refuelling (AAR) and temporary stop-overs at ISAF bases in Afghanistan these sorties would remain well within operational limits. However, if it was deemed essential to continue supporting operations in Iraq at the same time, this might place an acute burden on RAPTOR availability as the original Goodrich contract with the RAF was reportedly for only eight pods²⁰. As this procurement plan pre-dated the requirements of two simultaneous and enduring COIN campaigns in arduous and inaccessible environments, there appear to be strong operational grounds for reviewing it.

In the context of an MOD financial Planning Round (PR08) which should have been completed by the Spring of this year but which has still not been made public, it is highly unlikely that sufficient funds exist within the routine Defence budget to increase the number of RAPTOR (or DB-110) pods in service. Enormous amounts of money are being spent on ISTAR projects across Defence, but much of it is being channelled to realising a Network Enabled Capability rather than appropriating more collection assets. This reflects a credible argument that in the intelligence model of Direct-Collect-Process-Disseminate the UK (especially when on operations with US forces) has shortfalls in the 'Process' and 'Disseminate' areas, not in collection assets. Unfortunately, what may be true institutionally or with regard to the UK's future ISTAR structure and capabilities does not address the immediate need for better intelligence collection in the Hindu Kush.

With respect to the enduring operation in Afghanistan, it is unclear whether commanders in theatre or policy staffs in Whitehall have assimilated that, behind the genuine successes of CAS and NTISR, recent progress in the COIN campaign and the enemy's developing conduct are exposing an area where air power is underachieving; if this were accepted then it may be justifiable to construct a case for acquiring additional RAPTOR pods through the Urgent Operational Requirements (UOR) process. Although this could not be completed in time to meet the immediate security requirement, and would assume that Goodrich had the capacity to shoulder additional demand above existing production orders, it would provide the latitude to employ the existing RAPTOR fleet with more urgency without prejudicing RAPTOR's longer-term viability.

Conclusion

At a recent RUSI conference, Lieutenant General Lamb (the Commander UK Field Army) highlighted that with respect to the established 'Find, Fix, Strike' construct, today's operational challenges place an overwhelming onus on 'Find'. The need to shift from a traditional emphasis on 'strike' places a burgeoning imperative on air power which airmen have not yet fully absorbed. The changing nature of conflict is being brought into sharp focus by the developing campaign along the Durand Line and it remains to be seen whether the ISAF coalition is able to respond accordingly. Unusually perhaps, it is not the US but the UK that holds the best solution

²⁰ 'Hellenic Air Force Selects Goodrich Airborne Reconnaissance Technology For F-16s', Goodrich official website Feature Story Archive, 4 June 2007, <http://www.goodrich.com/Feature/SingleStory/0,1285,127,00.html>.

to an emerging security problem that encompasses both Afghanistan and the FATA/NWFP. The question remains as to whether the UK will meet that need.

Time is of the essence. With elections planned for Afghanistan in 2009 it is essential that maximum progress is achieved against the insurgents in 2008. For example, concerns over security have already contributed to a decision to delay the Presidential election from May to late 2009 and it is important that neither doubt in the GOA's ability to stage the election, nor the popular perception that insurgents are growing in influence are fuelled by an incident where ISAF suffers a tactical defeat. As ISAF and Afghan security forces continue to make significant gains in Afghanistan their vulnerability to raiding from beyond the border grows and the criticality of the FATA and NWFP increases accordingly.

The traditional military imperative to know what is happening (or will happen) behind a hill, mountain or border is growing daily in Afghanistan. If recent insurgent activities manifest a change in strategy which is shaped by constraints that the Durand Line places on the jurisdiction of ISAF/ANA units, there will be growing calls (particularly in Washington and Kabul) for pre-emptive or retaliatory action against insurgent targets within Pakistan. The risk that such strikes could lead to a strategic setback following the unintended deaths of innocent Pakistani civilians or government employees is very real, therefore before considering such a precarious course of action ISAF must exhaust its options within Afghanistan. The re-posturing of military capabilities, both with regard to fire-support and especially to airborne ISTAR, could enhance the coalitions' capacity to defeat an insurgent raiding strategy and extend security to the Afghan border. The unprecedented performance of the RAPTOR system is potentially a fundamental key to addressing the rising operational challenge in the border zone. The considerable intelligence potential that it offers is such that any difficulties with its early commitment to the COIN campaign in Afghanistan should be overcome. If RAPTOR is not deployed to meet ISAF's immediate operational needs airmen should at least ensure that this is not because ISAF ground commanders are ignorant of its capabilities.

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