AIRPOWER IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

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Air Force foreign internal defense (FID) operations generally focus on support to host nation (HN) aviation forces. The scale of military airpower operations in lesser-developed nations is relatively small in terms of force size, total sortie potential, resource consumption and availability, and overall support costs. The contributions of HN aircraft can be vital to the success of its internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy. When host governments possess only a few aircraft, airframe availability, maintenance turnaround times, flight safety, and sortie generation rates are critical.

Sustainment and supportability are difficult problems with small HN inventories. Funding constraints and supply shortages in host countries can amplify logistics problems. The grounding or combat loss of relatively few aircraft can impair or neutralize an air effort.

Air Force commanders conducting FID operations should anticipate differences between US and foreign organizational structures and personnel policies. These differences should be taken into account in planning and executing FID training and advisory assistance. High degrees of centralization and division of labor are prevalent in the military cultures of developing nations. Giving noncommissioned officers and company grade commissioned officers any significant degree of authority and responsibility is not a priority for most air force units in lesser-developed nations.

Conversely, some HNs recognize and embrace the requirement for new administrative structures and authority distribution. This enhances operational effectiveness during counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations through improved flexibility and organizational effectiveness. There are important opportunities at many locations for senior Air Force officers and enlisted personnel to train and advise foreign counterparts on how to organize, direct, and supervise airpower forces.

The US Air Force model may not translate readily into a HN's situation, nor may a complex organization be necessary in consideration of the HN's air force size and complexity. The US model may not be appropriate for a small HN air force using a smaller, less sophisticated fleet of aircraft. Training and advice should be tailored to the

HN's needs and the operational environment, not simply advocate for recreating the US Air Force on a smaller scale.

HNs threatened by insurgency and other forms of internal conflict usually require some form of outside financial or materiel assistance to acquire, operate, and maintain their air forces. In some cases, their military aviation programs are entirely dependent upon foreign assistance for major weapon systems, aviation support equipment, aircraft spares, training, advice, technical services, survival equipment, specialized clothing, munitions, and even consumables.

AIRCRAFT

HN military aircraft available for COIN operations (air mobility; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); air battle management; and air attack) are typically well-used, older-generation aircraft. In most cases, these aircraft are non-standard to US Air Force inventories and are difficult to maintain because of dwindling sources of spare parts and supplies. FID activities in those countries are complicated by lack of commonality with US Air Force platforms and parts inventories. The cost and complexity of modern aircraft systems usually rule out new procurement and magnify life-cycle support problems. Older-generation, non-standard aircraft may be the only viable option for HNs.

Lesser-developed partner nations generally possess few, if any, precision-guided munitions. Most air forces in the developing world lack the capacity to conduct close air support at night. Many air forces are capable of “area engagement” but not “precision engagement.”

Developing nations may lack an effective strike capability. Many nations in the developing world possess weapons delivery platforms but cannot field them because of restricted funding for operations and maintenance. Most of these aircraft remain grounded because of a lack of spare parts and fuel.

AIR FACILITIES

Aerial port facilities vary. Most capital cities in developing nations are served by major airports. However, conducting military air operations from major civilian airports is often impractical, due to traffic congestion, space restrictions, and political sensitivity. Outside capital cities, civil and military aviation support facilities are relatively primitive. Military aviation units often have access to only a few main operating locations with hard-surface runways.

Forward operating locations usually consist of short, unimproved airstrips with limited approach or runway lighting, central electric power, and no passive defense capabilities. Modern, ground-based navigational aids may be limited. Non-directional beacons are

prevalent, though often unreliable. Except for navigation aids found at air installations occupied by US military forces, there are generally no terminal approach aids outside international airports. Consequently, military flying operations rely extensively on visual flight rules procedures or global positioning system navigation.

INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence capabilities (including collection; processing, exploitation, and dissemination [PED] of the information or intelligence; analysis; counterintelligence activities, and other related skills) are limited in scope. From the multiple intelligence disciplines, human intelligence (HUMINT) is often the best source for intelligence many HNs possess. Additionally, counterintelligence activities against internal and local threats are often the HNs best capability to neutralize and exploit intelligence information received through HUMINT. However, it is limited by the lack of all-source analysis or fusion and uncertain source credibility. Many HNs also possess reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft with limited capability to conduct imagery intelligence and signal intelligence.

The lack of efficient procedures for timely dissemination of tactical intelligence often degrades overall mission effectiveness. Aviation units in developing nations rarely understand how to incorporate intelligence products into the mission planning process. Therefore, it is important to also emphasize (as part of the overall FID mission) the use and significance of basic intelligence analysis skills, to include the PED process. HN acquisition of technical intelligence (collection) capabilities should be accompanied by the use of acquired technology and by the analytical skills that will turn the collection into actionable intelligence.