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Looking Up: Airpower in UW Conditions and Employment

Morgan, Bill; Olish, Ryan

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Looking Up: Airpower in UW

Conditions and Employment



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Background, Question, Argument

- What are the conditions under which to develop an insurgent air capability during a unconventional warfare (UW) campaign, and how should that capability be employed?
- Air Force Special Operations Command is tasked by SOCOM to conduct unconventional warfare, but no framework exists for the strategy via airpower.
- This study hypothesizes theorized conditions and imperatives for development and employment of an insurgent air capability.



Laotian Pilot Lee Lue

Results

- *Creation of insurgent airpower should take place in limited scenarios. UW is a difficult strategy to employ, and airpower is a costly and time-consuming capability to create. The insurgency's inherent constraints reduce the opportunities to conduct airpower in UW to the later phases of an insurgency. Additionally, there are likely fewer opportunities to employ this strategy as originally thought at the outset of this project.*

The “So What”

- The conditions and imperatives can lay the groundwork for AFSOC doctrine that addresses the strategy for airpower in UW.

Theorized Conditions needed for Insurgent Air Development

The air capability fulfills at least a tactical-level purpose that cannot be satisfied by means other than air. This capability must support the intent of the UW Campaign and Insurgency.
UW advisors and the insurgency have access to safe havens, infrastructure, and equipment within or near conflict zones. If not, the advisors or resistance force can introduce these factors into the environment.
The population possesses individuals with aviation and maintenance experience.
The resistance movement possesses the excess capacity needed to produce, sustain, and integrate a resistance air capability
The resistance air capability is able to exploit weaknesses within the state's air defense systems.
Theorized Conditions needed for Insurgent Air Development
The employment of the air capability cannot elicit a response from the state that the resistance movement cannot endure.
The resistance air capability and the resistance ground force must cooperate to produce optimal effects

Research design

- *Five conditions and two imperatives drive development and employment of insurgent airpower.*
- *This study used the qualitative analysis of two case studies: The Hmong and the Tamil Tigers.*
- *Declassified reports and historical narratives provided the data for this capstone.*



Sri Lankan Air Tiger Pilots

Next Steps

- How will the democratization of airpower impact insurgencies and asymmetric threats.
- Future researchers can dive further into the theorized conditions and imperatives to develop joint doctrine that more fully addresses the strategy.



Thesis author(s): MAJ Bill Morgan and Maj Ryan Olish, Department of Defense Analysis, GSOIS

Thesis advisor(s): Dr. Hy Rothstein, Professor, Department of Defense Analysis, GSOIS

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