



# Te Matataua

The Scouting Party of Air Power

## RNZAF Air Power Development Centre Bulletin

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# Air Power as a function of National Power

## Applying air power gradually to meet the aims of government

The RNZAF has undertaken operations at all levels of conflict: from World War Two, the Malayan Emergency, peacekeeping missions such as Timor Leste, to providing observers to United Nations missions such as in the Sinai Peninsula. These examples cover the spectrum of conflict and all are conducted according to the strategic objectives of the Government, and the deployments are described as the military instrument of the national power.

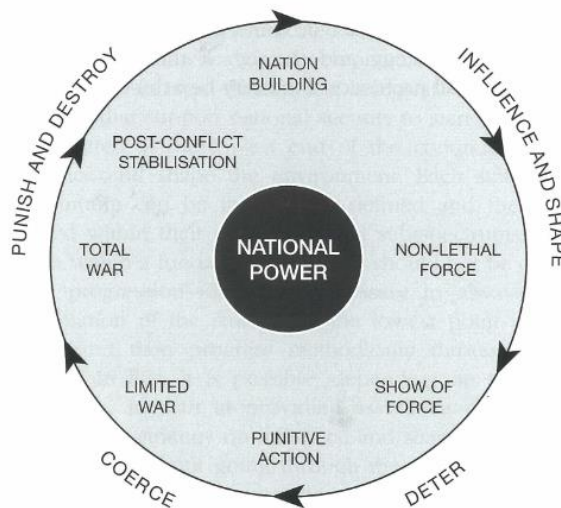
There are two other instruments of national power: the economic and diplomatic instruments, (though some countries also consider 'information' to be an instrument). Together, all three instruments of national power provide a nation with the capability to influence or coerce other nations, or conversely, to resist the influence or coercion of other nations, in order to achieve its national objectives.

A national strategy recognises the basic idea that people tend to group into communities for security, and communities tend to compete for what they believe will maintain their security, once a community, or set of communities, evolve into a nation state with a centralised government, then this competition will inevitably give rise to a military force to secure their national strategic objectives. Put simply, a national security system ensures citizens of a state can go about their daily business confidently, free from fear, and able to make the most of opportunities to advance their way of life.

As a community, New Zealand has identified seven security objectives that are described in the National Security System Handbook. They are: ensuring public safety, preserving sovereignty and territorial integrity, protecting lines of communication, strengthening international order, sustaining economic prosperity, maintaining national values, and protecting the natural environment. National strategic objectives are weighed against the current strategic environment as expressed in the Defence Assessment, which informs the Strategic Defence Policy Statement (or Defence White Paper), which the Government uses to shape the NZDF so it can achieve the military aspects of the security objectives – nationally and internationally - on behalf

of the community.

Air power is a function of the military instrument, and it plays an important and enduring role in national security. It can be applied in a graduated manner worldwide to provide effects at all levels of conflict, or emergencies. But, as involvement increases, so does the allocation of national resources required to employ and sustain air operations. The graduated approach can be illustrated as a cycle of strategies to further national interests, ranging from low intensity influence and shape strategies, to deter, coerce, and perhaps escalating into punish and destroy strategies.



Cycle of military Strategies

Influence and shape strategies attempt to project a positive and long-lasting influence, and can take the form of providing aid and disaster relief as goodwill gestures. These are also a projection of a country's values and commitment to the region. Further, maintaining public safety and territorial integrity through peace requires constant vigilance and interaction to ensure local and regional stability is maintained. Responses can range from having monitors present in a country (that is suffering divisions in society) to observe in a diplomatic capacity; to deploying un-armed troops to assist host government agencies. Support is offered without 'strings' attached to ensure it generates a positive perception among people of the host nation.

Surveillance aircraft can be rapidly deployed to provide imagery of events occurring on the ground, and as they can fly unarmed, they attract minimal political opposition when flying over sovereign airspace of a host nation. Air mobility aircraft can provide a positive influence, as they can quickly deliver aid in the form of food, water and shelter directly to where it is needed. The level of engagement with the local community is more direct at this level as local agencies can be assisted on the ground. This ensures citizens see their government providing primary assistance, which strengthens national trust. Air mobility can also provide an aeromedical evacuation response, and along with providing aid may reduce regional animosities, making bilateral relationships between nations more favourable.

A country facing a breakdown of law and order may request foreign assistance, perhaps with military personnel combining with local and international police forces to restore order. Air mobility and airborne surveillance capabilities are ideally suited to monitor, and transport personnel rapidly to problem areas. Air force personnel may be required to secure airfields and facilities for the safety of personnel, and protection of assets.

Should a civil war break out, then land forces may be required as a first option to stabilise the situation. This is where helicopters have an advantage with their ability to operate at low speed and in close proximity with friendly forces. They allow rapid and close positioning of ground troops over almost any terrain, and can conduct air assault operations by delivering troops in close proximity to opposition forces. This may involve the use of armed escort aircraft to protect the helicopter force.

The deterrence phase of the cycle of strategies may involve the use of strike capabilities to prove

ones resolve by punishing the opposition. Its effect should be large enough to ensure that the cost of challenging ones forces is higher than what the opposition is willing to pay. Combat air power would only be applied in extreme cases as it can escalate a crisis, and get the local population off-side. Strikes on ground targets should be fleeting, perhaps conducted in a single mission, to degrade the opposition's morale or capabilities. There is a fine line between using the effects of lethal force for deterring and coercing, to being a punishment. However, air power may be the optimum capability to deliver low-risk, rapid, and accurate lethal effects when required.

Coercion is the act of employing threats, persuasion, or force to change the behaviour of an opponent. The use of force enhances the credibility of carrying out a threat. At this point, we are entering into a high threat environment, perhaps starting with the enforcement of sanctions and blockades of lines of communication, which may escalate quickly into a limited war – the punishment and destroy phase. Here, the full spectrum of air power capabilities may be needed, including offensive counter air capabilities to defeat opposing air power, and ground based air defences. Increased strike capabilities will be required including close air support, interdiction and strategic attack.

Post conflict stabilisation and nation building completes the cycle of military strategies. Essentially tapering-off to influence and shape activities. The cycle of military strategies reminds us why it is important for air forces to train and equip for the highest level of conflict intensity as regional tensions can escalate rapidly into a limited war. However, the timely application of air power within the cycle of strategies may prevent that occurring.

### Key Points

- [New Zealand's security objectives are described in the National Security System Handbook.](#)
- [The cycle of military strategies is a graduated approach to meet national objectives – which may be projected into another country.](#)
- [Air power can be applied across the cycle of military strategies.](#)

### Further Reading:

1. [Kainikara, The Bolt from the Blue: air power in the cycle of strategies. Available on-line via the RAAF APDC website.](#)
2. [The NZ National Security System Handbook, Defence Assessment, and Strategic Defence Policy Statement are available on-line.](#)

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