

# **Aviation and Guerrilla War: Proposals for ‘Air Control’ of the North-West Frontier of India**

**By Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Roe**

In early 1925 Wing Commander R. C. M. Pink tested the utility of air control against the mountain strongholds of the Mahsud tribesmen on the North-West Frontier of India. The 54-day air campaign was a success – with the loss of only two British lives – and proved to be a timely catalyst for an ambitious plan for the RAF to take full control of the precipitous frontier. But unlike Mesopotamia, Transjordan and Palestine, policing by bomber gained little traction on the frontier, despite repeated attempts. Pulling the many competing threads together, this article highlights the discourse behind the proposals to employ aircraft to control the frontier, exposes the inter-Service relations, and brings to light the key personalities involved.

*But the really revolutionary development, and the one which may contain a lesson for the future in a far wider and more important context, was that of air control.*

Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue*

## Introduction

In 1925, Wing Commander R.C.M Pink conducted a 54-day air campaign without army support against noncompliant Mahsud tribesmen in Waziristan. The operation led to a peace treaty at the cost of two airmen and one aircraft. Although opinion about the wider significance of 'Pink's War' remained divided along service lines, Marshal of the Royal Air Force (RAF), Sir Hugh Trenchard was delighted with the outcome of the action. He immediately devised an ambitious plan for the RAF to take full control of the North-West Frontier of India, with aircraft dealing exclusively with unrest and raids in tribal territory. His scheme – policing by bomber – saw an increase in the number of frontline squadrons, with a compensating reduction in infantry battalions. The initiative gained little traction with the General Staff, and the proposal temporarily faded into the background noise of frontier uprisings. However, in 1927, a Mohmand *lashkar* (tribal armed force), totalling approximately 1,400 tribesmen, crossed the administrative border from tribal territory and attacked a number of police block-houses. The tribal aggressors only dispersed after two days' of concentrated bombing by three squadrons of aircraft, resulting in approximately 30 enemy casualties. Likewise, a year later, intensive bombing forced two Mahsud sections

to release their Hindu captives after conventional negotiations failed.<sup>1</sup> The success and relative economy of both operations again raised the issue of the RAF assuming responsibility for the frontier and questioned the future allocation of scarce resources. The discourse behind the use of aircraft to garrison and control the precipitous frontier, the personalities involved, and the psychological impact of air power are worthy of examination for air power academics, historians, soldiers and airmen alike.<sup>2</sup>

## The Evolution and Realities of Air Control

The arrival of fabric-covered biplanes on the frontier in 1916 offered the potential to revolutionise control of an area of over 27,000 square miles of inhospitable mountainous terrain. Despite a number of alternate initiatives, decades of heavy-handed army incursions into tribal territory, designed to inflict sharp lessons on the inhabitants, resulted in almost no advancement in the pacification of some areas. Such activity, which routinely sought to achieve maximum damage by killing men, animals and damaging property, resulted in the tribesmen becoming increasingly reluctant to fight in a conventional manner. Instead, the Mohmands, Afridis, Wazirs, Mahsuds and Bhattanis developed skilful guerrilla tactics against government forces.<sup>3</sup> The days of coloured banners, beating drums and head-on knife-charges were almost a thing of the past.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, it was harder to punish an elusive, persistent and difficult prey. Superior tribal surveillance skills and an effective warning system meant that villages were often found empty when a punitive force arrived

to exact retribution. Moreover, since destroyed or damaged buildings were quickly re-built or repaired, the effect on the tribesmen was temporary at best. Air Commodore H. Le M. Brock, C.B., D.S.O. provides a useful précis of the traditional retaliatory army operation:

*In the past the tribesmen has relied upon his inaccessibility. His village, all his material resources, his base of operations, his crops, his cattle, have either been out of our reach altogether or only to be reached by fighting our way a long distance through the hills to them. To punish him, we have tried to bring him to battle, but the many new resources of our troops have made him more reluctant than ever definitely to oppose them. We have, in the past, in order to punish him, had to penetrate with difficulty, and with great cost in money and lives, to his villages, and shell them or otherwise destroy them.*<sup>5</sup>

Many critics felt that such a destructive technique engendered a lasting legacy of hatred and contempt against British rule.<sup>6</sup> They also felt that punitive expeditions united the tribesmen in armed insurrection and convinced Britain's enemies that there was considerable opposition to British rule. Due to their high cost, expeditions were mounted infrequently and only when the need for action had been demonstrated repeatedly by accumulated crimes.<sup>7</sup>

Aircraft offered a unique combination of mobility, striking power and invulnerability to frontier control. They also proffered an inexpensive, timely and effective means to observe and punish rebellious tribal behaviour. No longer solely employed in co-operation with other

arms, aircraft were increasingly considered as a 'new weapon' capable of securing a change of heart with the minimum amount of force. Their mobility enabled them to conduct surprise attacks on a desired village without the need for painstaking preparations and long marches through tribal territory. The use of airpower also allowed the government to disrupt the normal pattern of life of the tribes to such an extent that a continuance of hostilities became intolerable, by driving the tribesmen into cave dwellings and neighbouring territory, scattering flocks and preventing routine harvesting. Such an approach also barred the tribesmen from having a fight on equal terms and acquiring loot, particularly capturing a good British service rifle.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, air attack was a tactic that the tribesmen considered unfair and unsporting. The justification behind this technique was the tribal principal of communal responsibility – 'what the India Office called 'the time-honoured method of enforcing on a tribal community responsibility for the acts of its individual members.'<sup>9</sup>

Such activity was governed by clearly defined rules. Tribes were warned of government demands or an impending air operation either by messenger (via the Political Agents who endeavoured to control the tribes), during a tribal *jirga* (assembly or parliament of tribal representatives), or by coloured leaflets scattered liberally from the air. White leaflets were dropped a number of days prior to the bombing, followed by red leaflets twenty-four hours before the attack. This allowed

the tribesmen time to consider their position and, perhaps, to comply with government demands. It also allowed the RAF the opportunity to conduct detailed photographic reconnaissance of the area and to become familiar with the country.

Leaflets set out the reason and nature of the action and when reprisals would begin. They also clearly articulated the government's terms (e.g. the payment of a fine in cash, rifles (tribal and government) or livestock; the return of captives or stolen property; the production of hostages or the expulsion of undesirable agitators; attendance at a *jirga*; the evacuation of a specific area – another tribe's grazing grounds for example – of which the tribe was in illegal occupation; or a number of other possible conditions)<sup>10</sup> and the date by which submission must be made. Additional details could include: evacuation of a specified village or a prescribed zone by a precise time – including women and children as well as livestock, household goods and agricultural implements; an explanation of the physical dangers of entering a prescribed zone until terms had been accepted in full; a warning that delayed-action bombs would be employed, set to explode at uncertain intervals; the hazards of unexploded bombs – a popular form of architectural ornament; and what to do if a tribe decided to submit.<sup>11</sup> After the expiration of the warning, aircraft would immediately appear over the area and begin bombing those charged with misbehaviour.

To be effective there had to be no misunderstanding about the object of the operation and the aims of the

government. However, not all warning leaflets contained specific detail and many were brief and left open to degrees of tribal interpretation.

*Whereas lashkars have collected to attack Gandab and are to this end concentrated in your villages and lands, you are hereby warned that the area lying between Khapak-Nahakki line and the line Mullah Killi-Sam Chakai will be bombed on the morning of [date] beginning at 7 a.m. and daily until further notice.*

*You are hereby warned to remove all persons from all the villages named and from the area lying between them and the Khapak and Nahakki Passes and not return till further written notice is sent to you. Any person who returns before receiving such further written notice will do so at his own risk.*

Signed Griffith-Governor,  
dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 1933.<sup>12</sup>

There were other challenges in employing coloured notices. In error, leaflets were sometimes dropped on the wrong village, causing confusion, or were blown off target by strong mountain winds. The many defiles which led up to tribal territory were often difficult to distinguish from the air causing further geographical confusion. Despite extensive aerial survey, maps of the frontier remained unreliable, and it was sometimes difficult to positively identify a specific village, especially as villages were of identical construction. Moreover, most tribesmen were illiterate and could make little sense of a written demand, no matter what colour the paper. Only those who had experienced repeated bombings understood the escalatory colour system employed by the

government. Besides, even literate tribesmen could sometimes find the detail of the text difficult to understand. Referring to 'lines' or specific areas caused confusion; there was rarely anybody to turn to for clarification in the time available. More fundamentally, the tribesmen loosely employed the *Hijri* or Islamic lunar calendar, whereas government forces relied on the Gregorian solar calendar. The difference between the two is great and added further to the misunderstanding when specifying dates.<sup>13</sup> Others, like the Fakir of Ipi, a notorious religious firebrand, cleverly exploited the employment of leaflets. In a society heavily influenced by superstition, paranormal beliefs and half-truths, many of his followers viewed the dropping of leaflets as physical evidence of the Fakir's mystical powers of being able to turn bombs into paper.<sup>14</sup>

However, unlike a traditional retaliatory army expedition, the RAF hoped that operations would be conducted against an empty village or vacated area. Air Commodore C.B.E. Burt-Andrews, C.B., C.B.E. recalls: '... I can testify from personal experience, the entire [village] population could be seen sitting in grandstand formation on the hills round the area to watch the show.'<sup>15</sup> Advanced notices allowed the tribesmen ample time to relocate their families and as much of their movables, valuables and livestock to a place of safety in order to avoid casualties. However, this was not always the case and many chose to stay put, despite elaborate attempts to secure their removal. A number of tribesmen remained to protect

their property, for fear of being robbed by their fellow countrymen. Air Commodore N.H. Bottomley, C.I.E., D.S.O., A.F.C. recalls: 'Bitter complaints came from a tribesman of the Burhan Khel, who had had a large store of *ghee* [clarified butter] which had disappeared from his house. He was 'between the devil and the deep sea,' whether to stay, protect it, and be bombed, or to leave it and be robbed. He left it, for fear of bombs, and lost his *ghee*.'<sup>16</sup> Captain Munford points to a further grouping that had little choice but to sit tight: 'Air-bombing of the villages strikes hardest at the poor – the weak, the aged, the sick – who stay at home.'<sup>17</sup>

Tribesmen generally sought refuge in surrounding caves, which were flea-infested and extremely uncomfortable, or became unwanted guests in neighbouring villages. *Pushtunwali*, the uncompromising Pathan code of honour, ensured that requests for provisions and refuge were approved without protest, but should any fighting occur with government forces, receiving villagers ran a substantial risk of being mistaken for the misbehaving tribesmen. Likewise, those found sheltering tribesmen would be warned by coloured leaflet and, should they fail to expel their guests, subsequently bombed. Colonel F.S. Keen points to a shortcoming of this tactic: 'By driving the inhabitants of the bombarded area from their homes in a state of exasperation, dispersing them among neighbouring clans and tribes with hatred in their hearts at what they consider 'unfair' methods of warfare, bring about the exact political results which it is so important in our own

interests to avoid, viz., the permanent embitterment and alienation of the frontier tribes.<sup>18</sup> Others, unsurprisingly, questioned whether collective tribal responsibility and punishment was the best and most humane way of dealing with the tribes. Such comments were stiffly ignored.

Throughout the British Empire, this evolving method of controlling tribesmen by airpower alone was to become known as 'air control.' The official definition states:

*The political administration of undeveloped countries inhabited by backward and semi-civilised populations, rests in the last resort upon military force in one form or another. The term 'air control' implies that control is applied by aircraft as the primary arm, usually supplemented by forces on the ground, which may be armoured vehicles, regular or irregular troops, armed police or tribal forces – according to particular requirements.*<sup>19</sup>

As a means of controlling the Empire's outer reaches within the economic constraints of the day, air control became the system by which an area was dealt with primarily by air action, in which the RAF was the predominant arm and the responsible commander an airman. This method was honed over time in response to complex situations on the frontier, unrest and banditry in Iraq, disturbances in Aden, and revolt in Palestine and Transjordan. However, Air Vice Marshal E.R. Ludow-Hewitt notes in a lecture to the Imperial Defence College in April 1933 that: 'I must admit that I have been in the habit of using the term in a rather broader sense, namely to describe the

use of air forces for the purpose of maintaining good order and security in certain districts irrespective of whether the Commander-in-Chief is an Air officer or an Army officer.'<sup>20</sup> Sir John Slessor, who recognised the essence of tribal control, cautions in *The Central Blue* that: 'In point of fact you do not control a country from the air, any more than from the business end of a gun. It is the civil administration, the District Commissioner or Political Officer, and the policeman who *control* the country. The Services, whether Air or Army, have an important influence by providing the necessary visible backing of force behind the civil administration.'<sup>21</sup> Slessor recognised the importance of political primacy and the necessity for the military commander to cooperate closely with the political authorities; both had to understand and appreciate each other's point of view.

However, to attain a rapid political solution by the minimum use of force, air control required a detailed knowledge of the country and a nuanced understanding of the tribesmen.

*It is useless having the power to deal with trouble at great distance within a few hours if it takes weeks for the information of the trouble to reach Headquarters. Further, one cannot deal with the trouble effectively unless one knows about those responsible for it, about the causes and the actual circumstances of the disturbance, so that one knows where and what to attack and how to deal with it. Consequently air control depends upon a first-class system of intelligence and also upon efficient means of transmitting that intelligence. Hence, considerable use is made of W/T [wireless telegraphy],*



*because we have in wireless a cheap means of giving the necessary wings to our intelligence information.*<sup>22</sup>

It was essential to understand the habits, religion, customs, philosophy, industries, values, heritage, gender rules, and social outlook of each tribal section and sub-section. It also required a comprehensive familiarity of what villages or valleys were inhabited and the exact houses of all *maliks* (tribal leader or elder) and mullahs, as well as the source and location of all water supplies. This intelligence was necessary to determine the decisive points at which to apply pressure. Some of this was well-known by the political authorities, scouts and *kassadars* (tribal levy or policeman). Further information was contained in a comprehensive 'tribal directory,' as well as annotated on maps of the frontier.<sup>23</sup> These were supplemented by aerial photographs, which proved invaluable to conduct detailed planning. Sir Stuart Pears, writing in 1924, posits: 'Thanks to aerial photography we have acquired a large amount of knowledge concerning various important tracts of Waziristan of which we knew practically nothing in former times ... it has enabled us to fill in all these large gaps in our maps with a considerable degree of accuracy ...'<sup>24</sup>

Photographic intelligence duties also demonstrated the ability of government forces to go anywhere at any time. Air Commodore N.H. Bottomley, C.I.E., D.S.O., A.F.C. recalls: 'The airman may see few tribesmen on these [photographic] reconnaissance's, but thousands of tribesmen see aircraft, and in it they recognize the Government's power.'<sup>25</sup>

However, equally important, aircraft permitted the political officers greater coverage of their areas. Sir Norman Bolton, a former Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier, notes: 'It

is easy to show that by means of the aeroplane a Political Officer can obtain a far more intimate knowledge of his charge than was ever possible in the past.'<sup>26</sup> Any increase in understanding helped reduce the risk of punishing the guilty and innocent alike. The political authorities, who routinely viewed the employment of aircraft as an opportunity, were hardly ever opponents of air control. Indeed, some scouts took to the air to help the RAF identify villages.

Therefore, air control sought to achieve results in timely fashion with minimum casualties and loss of material. The 'moral effect' was achieved on the tribesmen by his helplessness and his inability to reply effectively to the attacks; not via a traditional fight resulting in significant casualties on both sides. This was an important characteristic, as after successful operations, aircraft would be used as a means of positive contact with the tribesmen. Teams would be despatched to the area to blow up unexploded bombs and to offer medical assistance. However, not all agreed that air control alone could alter the behaviour of those influenced by some deeper motive for resistance, such as religious fanaticism. The tribesmen's belief in the teachings of their *mullahs* and occasional fanatical *fakirs* (holy men) was total, especially if such men advocated a *jihad* (holy war) against the infidel.<sup>27</sup> The jury was to remain undecided on the merits of air control on the frontier, despite repeated

attempts to secure its introduction.

### Bringing the Tribesmen to Heel by Airpower: Control without Occupation

*It is not jealousy that makes us say, "either do it with the Army or by the air method;" it is the fact that the two methods are like oil and water in that they will not mix: the air method drives the tribesman away, the army punitive expedition makes him stand and fight; the air method gets its results by boring the tribe, by being impersonal and by giving it nothing to hit back at; the army expedition causes intense excitement and its essence is battle and death, or glory and loot, for the tribesmen.*

C.F.A. Portal, "Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire"

The idea of the RAF controlling the frontier was first uttered in August 1922 by the Chief Commissioner, Sir J.L Maffey. He cautioned that 'we [the government] are up against a new class of armament and a spirit of independence which our spasmodic hammerings have merely hardened.'<sup>28</sup> He believed that a fundamental change in approach was required. Brian Robinson provides a useful précis of Maffey's radical proposal for maintaining order amongst the tribes in *Crisis on the Frontier*: 'He believed that the presence of the army in tribal territory was a constant provocation and temptation to the tribesmen. His solution was to withdraw completely from tribal territory and to protect the settled areas by defending the Administrative Border... Any incursion or outrages across that border would be invariably and immediately punished. Otherwise the tribes would be left to their own

devices.'<sup>29</sup> The ground-breaking feature of Maffey's proposal lay in the suggestion that the army would be prohibited from entering tribal territory, and that the role of enforcing control would be handed over to the RAF to manage thousands of square miles of country relatively unaided.

Maffey's proposals occurred at exactly the same time that Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond, K.C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O. submitted a detailed 37-page report to the Viceroy on the state of the RAF in India.<sup>30</sup> In early summer 1922, Salmond, accompanied by Wing Commander A.J. Chamier, had been dispatched on the request of the Prime Minister to undertake a searching inquiry into the low state and efficiency of the RAF in India. This initiative occurred only after a thorough campaign of protest letters to the national press damning the government for the terrible state of affairs.<sup>31</sup> The Indian sub-continent lagged behind the air forces in Europe, but in the early 1920s it was in a particularly perilous state of serviceability. The effect of this on operational efficiency was profound and pilots were rapidly losing confidence in their machines. Salmond's comprehensive terms of reference included to 'represent to the Viceroy of India and his senior political and military officers the possibility of effecting economies by the increased use of the Air Force, in co-operation with the Army, for controlling territory,' and also to 'study the existing organization and administration of the Royal Air Force in India with a view to ensuring the future maintenance of air units in that country in a state



of efficiency.<sup>32</sup> Salmond found an appalling state of affairs and a stubbornly reactionary conservatism to his recommendations. His clear-cut summary of the state of the RAF in India was scathing:

*It is with regret that I have to report that the Royal Air Force in India is to all intents and purposes non-existent as a fighting force at this date. The number of aircraft on the authorised establishment is 70; of these two-thirds or 46 should be constantly serviceable in any climate. In the Royal Air Force in India on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1922, the total number shown as serviceable was 7 (or 15 per cent of expectation) and of this number a percentage are so old and decrepit that they should have been already struck off charge, while some are flying without the incorporation of technical equipment essential to safety.<sup>33</sup>*

In addition to recommendations for increases in personnel, barracks and technical accommodation, two additional squadrons, a separate financial budget,<sup>34</sup> and a thorough reorganisation of the RAF in India, Salmond also stressed that significant economies could be achieved by the wider employment of the RAF in India, and particularly on the frontier.<sup>35</sup> Consequent on the uplift of two squadrons, the report included a detailed proposal for the RAF to assume overall responsibility for Waziristan, the storm centre of the frontier, as the sole weapon for the control of the tribesmen. However, this proposal differed in concept from Maffey's scheme in that it did not go as far as to exclude the army completely. Robinson posits two reasons for this difference: 'Firstly, the RAF's success in air control, in

Iraq, Somaliland and the Sudan, had been in close cooperation with ground forces, and secondly, in 1922 the RAF was fighting for its continued independence and Salmond and the Air Staff were cautious about treading on too many toes.'<sup>36</sup> Moreover, there was a great advantage to have ground forces to consolidate success, to show the flag, or to bring relief to the tribesmen in times of hardship.

The Commander in Chief at the time, General Sir Henry Rawlinson, remained unconvinced by the RAF's claims to be able to police the tribesmen. In August 1922 he wrote: 'After very considerable experience of the potential and limitations of aircraft, both during the Great War, in northern Russia and here upon the frontier, I am unable to accept the optimistic predictions set forth [by the RAF].'<sup>37</sup> Even though the RAF had proved its value on the frontier in cooperation with the army, Rawlinson rightly pointed out that air action alone had not been decisive against the troublesome Mahsuds in 1920, owing to a lack of favourable targets. The upshot was that extensive ground and air operations were required to make the tribe submit. This included the employment of two six-inch howitzers to carry out a continuous and irregular shelling of tribal villages; a role the RAF had failed to fulfil.<sup>38</sup>

Although not referred to in the supporting evidence, there were other well-known examples of where air power had seemingly fallen short. For example, during a raid against Mahsuds in the Ahani Jangi Gorge on 14 January 1920, and despite inflicting heavy casualties, three

Bristol F.2 Bs were shot down by accurate tribal fire; two aircraft were wrecked and their crews killed, while the third managed to crash-land in a riverbed without serious injury to its crew.<sup>39</sup> Overall British losses for the day totalled nine officers killed and five wounded.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Rawlinson made clear that he was 'not willing to make any reductions in the covering troops or in the field army until the experiment [of air control] has incontestably proved a success' in Iraq [the principal proving ground].<sup>41</sup> Further evidence was required to make a final judgement. Moreover, there was a wider feeling that there would be no independent role for the RAF on the frontier until self-contained operations had been thoroughly tested, and this experiment was not to occur until early 1925.

Rawlinson was not alone in his scepticism; doubts also came from across the international border. Consecutive British Ministers in Kabul disputed the effectiveness of air control and questioned the morality of its employment. Sir Francis Humphry believed that aerial attack would increase the extreme dislike and bitterness of the British amongst the tribes. Sir R. Maconachie, Humphry's successor, believed that the RAF was simply unable to discriminate from the air between friendly and unfriendly villages.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the employment of delayed-action bombs to keep tribesmen away from their fields during the hours of darkness, the targeting of man-made water sources to prevent irrigation, and the employment of incendiary bombs were all open to strong

condemnation. The Air Staff was fully cognisant of such criticisms, but worked hard to sell the virtues of air control. This was particularly true on humanitarian grounds, in that the RAF acted mainly as a nuisance in the interruption of life, but also in that the tribesmen could only sit helplessly on a hillside and watch the destruction of their property.

However, this was far from a straightforward difference of opinion. Lecturing in 1937, Air Commodore C.F.A. Portal, D.S.O., M.C. highlights the ongoing challenges faced by the Air Ministry:

*Police work by the Air Force as a primary arm ... has developed since the War in an atmosphere clouded at times by misunderstanding and fogged by controversy, and although I am happy to say that the controversy is now dead there is still, in some quarters, misunderstanding, or perhaps I should say, a lack of understanding, of how Air Force police operations are conducted and how they differ, in concept and in execution, from land operations.*<sup>43</sup>

While the RAF and its supporters began magnifying the virtues of air control on the frontier, the army became increasingly entrenched in its opposing position. Flight Lieutenant C.J. Mackay, M.C., D.F.C. in his Gold Medal (RAF) Prize Essay for 1921 notes astutely:

*Like every new weapon of war, the aeroplane finds on one side ardent supporters, who in their enthusiasm are liable to exaggerate its potentialities regardless of its limitations, and on the other side it finds antagonists who see in it a weapon of very restricted power. It should be our object to investigate both*

*sides of the question dispassionately, and, by so doing, find the happy medium which will define the influence of aircraft on modern war; our policy should then be moulded accordingly.*<sup>44</sup>

However, this was far easier said than done. The discourse in India was less than balanced, despite the best attempts of the RAF leadership to avoid offending the army. Besides, as Sir John Slessor recalls, this was not simply an even debate: 'And anyone who is tempted to think that RAF officers of the inter-war years were unreasonable or prone to extravagant claims should remember that, from their earliest youth, they were constantly faced with disparaging criticism ...'<sup>45</sup> Slessor's point was valid: every single advance in the use of air power had to be fought through a generally obstinate and often pig-headed opposition from the older services.

Although air control proposals for the frontier wallowed under token consideration, Salmond's wider findings were provisionally approved, and some conditions improved. Chaz Bowyer notes cautiously in *RAF Operations 1918-38*: 'Yet within a year, and indeed for a decade thereafter, air power as a factor of overall operations in India was ignored by successive army and Vice-regal committees when policies were debated and proposed. Even the two extra squadrons recommended by Salmond – and agreed by the authorities in 1922 – were not actually despatched until six years later.'<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Salmond's findings had little affect on the squadrons' maintenance problems, and spares remained in short supply. Money, predictably, was driving factor in the

operational effectiveness of the RAF on the frontier.

Emerging victorious but worn out from the Great War, the Treaty of Versailles resulted in major cuts in the size of the RAF as a whole and the termination of new aircraft development. The government, under considerable pressure to achieve Service economies, did its bit to reduce outgoings, and the RAF squadrons on the frontier were an easy target. Sir John Slessor recalls: 'Indeed I think it was inevitable that among the senior advisers of the Viceroy the combination of ignorance about Air matters, ingrained tradition, and the Englishman's national suspicion of anything new should have had the result that, when cuts in military expenditure were required, they should fall upon this new Service, which no one understood.'<sup>47</sup> To make matters even worse, '... the Army high command in India now began a systematic campaign to make the RAF Squadrons on the frontier completely subordinate to army formations – a kind of cavalry at their beck and call.'<sup>48</sup> Despite financial constraints, ignorance and attempt to subordinate the RAF on the frontier, the squadrons continued to operate above tribal territory with great skill and tenacity, reflecting great credit on the pilots and on the airmen who maintained the aircraft.

Although the RAF tried to reinvigorate the employment of air control on the frontier in the 1920s, especially after the success of Pink's War, the moment for change had seemingly passed. Air control, once *de rigueur* in many circles, was

slowly dropping out of the frontier vernacular. Indeed, in a lecture given in 1939, titled "The Work of the Royal Air Force on the North-West Frontier," Air Commodore N.H. Bottomley, C.I.E., D.S.O., A.F.C., who commanded the RAF Group in Peshawar from 1934-37, makes no reference to the wider employment of air control and even goes so far as to suggest that it was never attempted on the frontier.<sup>49</sup> This was perhaps not only due to a lack of knowledge, but also due to the rigid constraints placed on the use of aircraft that made the technique almost impossible to employ. These were often dictated by lack of understanding, prejudice and external pressure. Sir John Slessor, who was particularly cognisant of increasing restrictions aimed at limiting casualties, notes that the RAF in frontier warfare were '... cribbed, cabin'd and confined' by all sorts of ludicrously out-of-date instructions on the height we should fly, when, how and against what we might use our weapons and so on ...<sup>50</sup> Aerial attack could only occur if sanctioned by the political authorities, and then only after due warning to the tribesmen. Although the death knell had finally tolled for air control of the frontier, the detailed Air Staff proposal of 1930 is worthy of evaluation as it highlights significant economies.

### **The Air Staff Scheme for the Control of the North-West Frontier of India**

In July 1930, the Air Staff submitted a detailed proposal for the quasi-administrative control of the North-West Frontier Province, the rugged valley of the Zhob and the whole

of the relatively open country of Baluchistan – referred to as the 'Frontier Zone' – by air control. The proposal referred specifically to replacing the covering forces permanently stationed on the frontier, amounting in strength to the equivalent of four divisions, in so-called 'control' of tribal territory.<sup>51</sup> No recommendations were made for the forces employed on internal security duties, approximately 17,000 irregular forces – scouts, frontier constabulary and *kassadars*, or the role of the wider Field Army. The scheme was based on the assumption that the plan for war against Afghanistan (the 'Minor Danger') or Russia (the 'Major Danger') – i.e. an initial air offensive followed by a military advance – remained unchanged, requiring considerable RAF involvement from the outset. The underlying principles and recommendations of the proposal were:

- Airpower was to be employed as a replacement for mobile columns<sup>52</sup> as the primary striking force against the tribesmen.
- Regular military forces would be employed for the physical protection of all centres of importance. This included all aerodromes and landing strips, as well as a chain of frontier posts, to prevent the infiltration of tribesmen out of a blockade area. In addition, mobile forces would be retained to protect any improvised landing ground, or, if needed, to assist in the security of road construction parties, as well as to collaborate to 'secure the full fruits of success of an air operation' after the main resistance has been overcome from

the air.<sup>53</sup>

- To achieve their primary role, the RAF would require an increase of three squadrons, of which two would be heavy transport bomber squadrons 'of the most modern type.'<sup>54</sup> Additionally, as personnel became available, a fourth squadron would be formed as an Indian Air Unit.
- Employing the latest heavy bombers as troop carriers, two squadrons could transport a reinforcement of about half a battalion of fully-armed men to any town or landing strip throughout the frontier in a single day. This, it was highlighted, would be a supplementary role to their main purpose as large-capacity long-endurance bombers.
- The employment of airpower as the primary striking force to overcome tribal resistance would allow for the release of a number of military and administrative units from the forces allocated to frontier control. The proposal posits that these units could be transferred to another function, such as internal security, or utilised to meet the needs of the Field Army. 'If, however, not required elsewhere, their disbandment would make possible considerable reductions in defence expenditure should that be the more urgent need.'<sup>55</sup>
- All forces would be under the control of an A.O.C – so that the maximum strength and economy of force could be utilised – in direct contact with the political authorities.<sup>56</sup> The principal political officers would be delegated certain discretionary powers to call for air action in consultation with the

A.O.C. In addition: 'Political centres would be provided with R/T [radio telegraphy] or W/T [wireless telegraphy] communications to political and air Headquarters. To ensure the closest liaison with political officers, and in order that the tribal intelligence available shall be of the best, certain special service officers for intelligence purposes would be provided.'<sup>57</sup>

- The air command would be similar to the other commands in India and would sit under the Commander in Chief (C-in-C). In addition, there would be an A.O.C. in Chief (A.O.C. in-C) at Army Headquarters under the C-in-C. The A.O.C.-in-C would attend all meetings whenever important defence matters were discussed and when any matter affecting the RAF was up for consideration. The proposal notes: 'The A.O.C.-in-C should, in addition, have access to the Viceroy in regards to air operations.'<sup>58</sup>
- The government scheme of opening up tribal territory through the construction of roads, which, up to 1930, had only applied in Waziristan, would continue in full. Although expensive, time-consuming and frequently provoking opposition, experience elsewhere in the Empire had shown this to be both practical and beneficial under a system of air control.

In 1930, under peacetime arrangements, the covering forces on the Frontier Zone amounted to: five British battalions, 41 Indian battalions (including two pioneer battalions), four Indian cavalry regiments, three armoured car companies, 17 British



and Indian artillery batteries and seven RAF squadrons. Alan Warren notes that: 'This was the heaviest concentration of troops and police to population anywhere in the Indian Empire.'<sup>59</sup> The proposal aimed to release 22-25 Indian battalions (including one pioneer battalion), one cavalry regiment and 12½ artillery batteries for an increase of three RAF squadrons (including two heavy transport bomber squadrons).<sup>60</sup> The proposal also noted with some optimism that economies in administrative units and services (e.g. headquarters staff administrative services and engineer services), as well as equipment, transport assets and reserves could be made. It was also likely that a revised force structure could see further cutbacks in training units (four-five Indian training battalions), schools, hospitals and veterinary clinics. However, the proposal notes:

*The Air Staff scheme has been prepared on a most conservative basis and the regular military forces retained are relatively far larger than those which have hitherto been found necessary elsewhere. The Air Staff wish, on this point, to emphasise that their proposals have been deliberately framed on the most conservative scale in order to allay any possible apprehension that the methods advocated by them entail any undue risk. They also wish to accord with the policy of the Government of India that any change on the frontier shall be made most carefully and gradually.*<sup>61</sup>

In fiscal terms, the Air Staff proposal amounted to an annual saving of Rs. 3,40,66,666 (£2,555,000), with an increase of yearly expenditure of Rs. 82,13,333 (£616,000). Therefore, the net annual saving was Rs. 2,58,53,333

(£1,939,000). The additional expenditure of three squadrons would be Rs. 1,54,66,666 (£1,160,000), with an supplementary Rs. 53,33,333 (£400,000) to be spent on accommodation. This was appealing as the frontier was becoming a bottomless pit down which the government's budget was slowly disappearing. However, while many civil officials were in favour of reducing the extent of the administration's financial commitment on the frontier, the idea of the army losing its authority as the primary striking force was a different matter. Likewise, the subordination of the political authorities to the RAF in times of crisis would also prove challenging. The proposal cautions with a degree of apprehension: *It will be seen that these proposals involve certain changes in the military commands in India. The Air Staff do not, however, consider that these will raise any insoluble problems in the system of command or administration and believe that an organisation can be devised which, while securing conditions necessary to the most efficient use of air forces, will fully safeguard the position or the responsible military authority.*

*Nor do they see cause for the apprehensions sometimes expressed at the prospect of an air officer undertaking command of military forces. The Air Officer Commanding does not require to exercise tactical command, but needs only to allot tasks and issue through his Officer Commanding Military Forces the necessary instructions to ensure co-ordination.*

*While they feel sure that a satisfactory system on the lines laid down above can be devised, they have, on the other*



*hand, had ample experience of the grave disadvantages which may, and do, arise under the present anomalous system. In their view this system has only too clearly resulted in the past in a serious decrease in the efficiency of the air power available in India and is in grave need of alteration.*<sup>62</sup>

However, like Trenchard's proposal in 1925, opinions remained divided among soldiers and politicians alike. This was principally because the proposal suffered from two main difficulties: it sought to enforce a colonial policy that was fast becoming insupportable and outdated; and air control proved of only limited application on the precipitous and broken frontier.

### **Economies at the Price of Reduced Security?**

The Air Staff proposal afforded a number of recognisable and appealing benefits. Not only did it offer financial savings without reducing security, it also allowed the release of a considerable number of units permanently based on the frontier, as well as the potential for a number of administrative and logistic economies. These, it was argued, could be employed usefully elsewhere; ideally for internal security duties, where existing levels were deemed insufficient. In addition, the two new heavy transport bomber squadrons could, when not required on the frontier, constitute a very valuable asset ferrying troops on internal security duties or evacuating endangered civilians or wounded personnel. Whilst the latter option was attractive, not all towns possessed a suitable landing ground with

petrol instillations to permit aircraft to support such requests. Their provision, maintenance, and security would be inescapably expensive.<sup>63</sup> However, it was widely recognized that the prompt arrival of troops, even a small force at first, was the most valuable factor in restoring confidence and order to any disturbance. The heavy transport bomber squadrons offered an impressive reach of 400-500 miles in five hours' flight, compared with the ponderous advance of military columns.

Tribal control was only a part of the problem of the defence of India. The proposal also provided the government with a twofold increase in available striking power. This was a central component of any future confrontation with Afghanistan, and many felt that existing resources were inadequate. A request for two additional bomber squadrons had already been made in 1927 to remedy this perceived deficiency.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, an increase in striking power would also provide a steadying influence on the tribesmen, due to an increase in flights over tribal territory. Both uses were not mutually exclusive. Aircraft available for instant use in tribal control could, without changing their normal locations, be immediately re-allocated objectives across the international border. The plan for war against Afghanistan saw an initial air offensive lasting 15 days approximately, permitting the mobilization of the Field Army, including reinforcements from overseas, to take place. The proposal confirms:

*The Air Staff are confident that this initial air offensive will prove overwhelming and decisive. At their*

*present strength the air forces in India could deliver an attack of over 20 tons per day against the military objectives, barracks, arsenals, aerodrome, &c., in Kabul, Jalalabad, Ghazni and other Afghan centres. No objective moreover is so favourable for air action as a second-class native army. This air offensive is our first means of striking a heavy blow at Afghanistan. It is ready at any time, in all seasons. It is the only blow which can be delivered at Kabul itself for six months.*<sup>65</sup>

However, should the air offensive fall short, necessitating an advance on Kabul, the cost would be considerable. 'Lord Rawlinson, when Commander-in-Chief estimated its cost at 100 crores of rupees (some £70 million), exclusive of the reinforcements and other assistance required from the Home Government.'<sup>66</sup> The cost of the additional squadrons would amount to a fraction of this approximation. It is little wonder that the proposal suggests that every means of increasing a decision for the uplift of striking power should be taken. Moreover, events of 24 May 1919, when the Afghan capital was bombed by a single elderly Handley Page V-1500, piloted by Captain Robert 'Jock' Haley, causing panic and the evacuation of about half the inhabitants, provided useful supporting evidence; the raid was an important factor in producing a desire for peace at the headquarters of the Afghan government.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, 31 Squadron's attack against the military quarters in Jalalabad and the contribution of aircraft to raising the siege of Thal produced equally positive results. Therefore, the proposal to double the striking power, without entailing any expenditure

on external defence, could only be viewed positively – especially as it would come about as a consequence of additional aircraft for frontier control. An increase in aircraft would also provide a formidable deterrent to dissuade Afghanistan from going to war, although many were opposed to the idea of strategic bombing.<sup>68</sup>

The proposal also highlighted the realities of having a legation in Kabul and, therefore, the necessity for a permanent troop-carrying capability for the movement of personnel and casualty evacuation. Only a year and a half previously, the British Minister in Kabul, Sir Francis Humphreys, an ex-RAF pilot, had requested an air evacuation of personnel due to the increasing pressures of civil war in the Afghan capital.<sup>69</sup> However, in 1928-29, the RAF in India possessed no troop-carrying capability, and appropriate aircraft had to be flown 2,500 miles from Iraq to carry out the evacuation. Fortunately, the tactical situation permitted the recovery of 586 personnel from 13 nationalities and 24,193 lbs of baggage to take place over several weeks, ending on 25 February 1929, when the British Minister was the last European to be air-lifted out. The proposal posits: 'A very serious situation which might have entailed extensive operations, great loss of life and vast expenditure was thus obviated.'<sup>70</sup> However, despite immediate requests, the emergency in Kabul resulted in no uplift of troop-carrying aircraft, and the RAF in India were just as ill-equipped to meet a similar commitment in 1930 as they were in 1928-29. With no other means of meeting the commitment, the proposal presented the pressing need

for an adequate number of troop-carrying aircraft. Despite raising the issue of cost, the scheme again pointed out that substituting aircraft for military units would see a reduction in overall defence expenditure.

The Air Staff Scheme also looked beyond the immediate challenges facing the government. The proposal notes: 'India may in the future find herself involved in an Imperial War beyond her frontier against a power possessing air forces. In such a war paucity of communications on the ground would delay a collision between the land forces for several months, during which army reinforcements would arrive *ex-India*. There would be no such delay in air attacks against India.'<sup>71</sup> As early as 1921 the Afghans raised the possibility of buying British aircraft. Although indifferent to the request, officials recognised that if Britain did not supply the machines, another country most certainly would.<sup>72</sup> In due course, Italy sold the Afghans a small number of aircraft. The proposal not only highlighted the moral effect of air attacks, but also the reality that air ranges were steadily increasing and that advanced airstrips could be improvised without too much difficulty. 'It is, therefore, unsound to depend for defence against these air attacks upon air reinforcements arriving *ex-India*, and it is important for India to provide on her own soil as large air forces as she can afford, since these initial attacks must be met mainly from her own air forces.'<sup>73</sup> Therefore, highlighting the dual role of aircraft, the proposal noted that while controlling the frontier, an increase in machines was

essential if India became engaged in the future with a foreign power possessing air forces.

Moreover, at a time when there was a perceived deficiency in both the strength and equipment of the Field Army to carry out the defence of India, there were also question marks over its level of preparedness. The proposal states unmistakably: 'The many deficiencies in Indian military preparedness are described in detail in C.I.D. Papers Nos. D.I. 8 and D.I. 19, to which the attention of the Committee is invited. The list is formidable.' The Air Staff scheme, therefore, suggested an all-round improvement in the efficiency of the military machine as a whole. Likewise, compensatory reductions in Army units and services – necessary in order to establish the scheme with no additional expenditure – made possible the disbandment of the less efficient units. Significantly, the reduction in the size of the Army in 1923 resulted in some notable improvements in efficiency. Deficiencies in personnel and material of the striking force were made good by the disbandment of other units.

In addition, subordinating all forces to the A.O.C. promised an immediate authority to act by speeding up the decision making process. It was widely recognised on the frontier that tribal disorder, unless immediately acted upon, could rapidly escalate out of control. The existing process was languid, often requiring the approval of a number of authorities, and arguably one of the biggest obstacles to effective air control. Slessor notes: 'It is perhaps one of the

greatest merits of the Air Method (in countries where it can be applied) that the Air can act so quickly that it can – and constantly did – nip these troubles in the bud and prevent them assuming serious proportions.’ He goes on to caution: ‘It is, however, no good being able to strike right in the heart of a tribal area within literally a few hours of a decision being made, if it takes weeks of correspondence and reference to all sorts of remote authorities thousands of miles away before that decision can be obtained.’<sup>74</sup>

### Out of Tune with Modern Ideas?

As was to be expected, not all agreed with the merits of the proposal and, after considerable deliberation, the initiative, like its predecessors, was rejected. ‘The Looker-On’ recalls in ‘The North-West Frontier in the Thirties–I’ that the government turned down the RAF offer on the following grounds:

- The real solution to the Frontier problem was giving the tribesmen something more useful and lucrative to do than shooting each other and raiding the settled areas. The modified forward policy, bringing with it roads, lorry transport and a good deal of employment was working slowly to that end: it would be a retrogressive step if the tribesmen were to see nothing of the Raj but bombing planes.
- The Irregular Corps, efficient as they were within their limitations, were wholly Pathan and might not be entirely reliable if Regular troops were withdrawn. (Airborne troops were not yet envisaged).
- Whatever their success in the open plains of Iraq, air operations, in

this very close and difficult country, would become less effective as the tribes became accustomed to them and learned to mitigate their effects.

- Public opinion at home, more or less indifferent to ground operations on the Frontier, might be emotionally upset by reports of the RAF bombing ‘helpless villagers.’<sup>75</sup>

Aside from the official reasons given, there were more deep-rooted motives not to support the proposal. As early as March 1923 India’s Foreign Secretary, Sir Denys Bray, warned: ‘Come what may, civilisation must be made to penetrate these inaccessible mountains, or we must admit that there is no solution to the Waziristan problem, and we must fold our hands while it grows inevitably worse.’<sup>76</sup> Relying on a small number of carefully chosen political officers and a handful of British officers serving with the scouts was deemed insufficient to encourage good government to take hold and grow on the frontier.

The accepted view was that the solution to the tribal problem depended on civilising influences, achieved through regular, targeted and structured contact. Over time it was hoped that the tribesmen would abandon their unruly ways and gradually accept peaceful incorporation. This was achieved by opening-up hostile territory by building roads and introducing the tribes to the possibilities of profit by peaceful trade; although this was a long and slow process, partly because of tribal suspicion and partly because of the difficult terrain. It was no longer seen as acceptable to punish

the tribes without redeeming them from their savage ways as required by nascent penal theory. At its centre, this approach required good and safe ground lines of communication; something that RAF could not guarantee from the air. However, there were insufficient funds for public works or social services to support the policy. Only allowances and military service put legitimate money in the hands of the tribesmen. The reality was that there were inadequate resources to civilise the frontier.<sup>77</sup> This was control on the cheap and something the RAF could replicate.

Moreover, the very presence of troops, it was suggested, could deter unrest. As one former Commander in Chief cautioned, 'It is not wise to withdraw our troops from the actual sight of the people.'<sup>78</sup> The political risks of such a move were great in the eyes of many, even among more liberal minds. Moreover, the British-Indian Army's frontier garrisons provided routine support and a much needed steel backbone for the irregular forces in times of hardship. 'The Looker-On' concludes his summary by positing: 'One cannot help feeling that, valid they [the official reasons] were, to them should be added some military resentment at RAF empire-building and a determination by the Army to keep the leading part in the drama to itself, allowing the RAF only a supporting role.'<sup>79</sup>

The stakes were particularly high for the army. In the inter-war period British governments, in a drive to cut outlays, had reduced the service budgets. The army's finances had been reduced from £36.7 million

in 1925 to £32 million in 1930.<sup>80</sup> Losing its pre-eminence on the frontier would undoubtedly lead to more fiscal reductions. However, Group Captain P.W. Gray points to another more profound reason: 'The government of India was loath to embark on the risky course of entrusting vital frontier defence to new-fangled aeroplanes – particularly if the *quid pro quo* was widespread unemployment among Indian army officers and a reduction in their treasured policy of road building.'<sup>81</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the proposals for air-control primacy were coldly received by the army at every level. Such a reaction was hardly surprising under the circumstances. The air staff comprised of only a handful of relatively junior and inexperienced officers, in marked contrast to the hundreds in the army headquarters, many of whom had a lifetime of understanding of traditional frontier methods. To them, the established system of operation on the frontier, although slow, was the soundest method that could be employed for this type of enemy and terrain. Moreover, as Sir John Slessor cautioned: 'We are a conservative people and the impact of a new idea is always a painful experience and usually gives rise to an initially unfavourable reaction.'<sup>82</sup> More fundamentally, bombing villages in order to punish a tribe for the actions of a minority seemed not only morally doubtful – on the grounds that it was liable to inflict casualties on guilty and innocent alike, and even on women and children – but also politically risky.<sup>83</sup> Aerial bombings were becoming a source of embarrassment to the



government. Destroying villages and starving people into submission was simply unacceptable. 'By the early twenties strong criticism had begun to appear both in the Indian vernacular and in the British national press of the 'inhumane' bombing of the tribes. Quixotically, the critics almost invariably accepted the need to mount punitive ground operations to protect settled territory yet ignored the testimony of the sheer fact that tribal losses were usually much greater in army operations than in air attacks.'<sup>84</sup> Other commentators criticized air control because its effects were transitory. Attacks against villages had little or no long-term effect on the tribesmen. Continuous operations against a nomadic and cunning enemy, with limited possessions, at best achieved a temporary result. However, it was a mistake to believe that a temporary outcome which spared the lives of the tribesmen was any less effective than one which inflicts heavy losses.

After a good deal of ill-tempered argument – which marred to some degree inter-Service relations – the real question became not how the air arm could be used in substitution for the army on the frontier, but instead how could the RAF better cooperate with the land forces they were supporting for policing and controlling tribal territory. Paradoxically, this was exactly the same position General Sir Claud Jacob, K.C.B., K.C.S.I., K.C.M.G., Commander-in Chief in India, reached after analyzing 'Pink's War' of 1925. In the introduction to the official report he notes: 'Satisfactory though the results of these operations have been, I am of the opinion that a

combination of land and air action would have brought about the desired result in a shorter space of time, and next time action has to be taken, I trust that it will be possible to employ the two forces in combination.'<sup>85</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> D.E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 48.

<sup>2</sup> Of course one might ask the question: is not the U.S. attempting to do a version of the same thing in Waziristan today using Predator drones?

<sup>3</sup> D.S. Richards, *The Savage Frontier* (London: Pan Books, 1990), 181.

<sup>4</sup> A. Skeen, *Passing It On – Short Talks on Tribal Fighting on the North West Frontier of India* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1932), 52.

<sup>5</sup> H.Le M. Brock, "Air Operations on the N.W.F., 1930," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 19 (1932): 24.

<sup>6</sup> J. Martineau, *Life of Sir Bartle Frere* (London: John Murray, 1895), 1: 363-368.

<sup>7</sup> D.J. Dean, "Airpower in Small Wars: The British Air Control Experience," *Air University Review* 34 (July-August 1983): 3.

<sup>8</sup> C.J. Mackay, "The Influence in the Future of Aircraft upon Problems of Imperial Defence," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 67 (February to November 1922): 299.

<sup>9</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections* (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1956), 55.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Major W.J. Cumming recalls conducting a search of a frontier village: 'The highest [watch] tower evidently belonged to a well-to-do



Mahsud and no doubt about it, it was the one clean building we saw and had some large, well-ventilated rooms adjoining it, and on the flat roof he had collected about twenty or thirty dud bombs, dropped by the Royal Flying Corps. With these, by spreading them out at regular intervals, he had decorated the parapet of his extensive dwelling' W.J. Cumming (Ed. J Stewart), *Frontier Fighters: On Active Service in Waziristan* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2010), 91.

<sup>12</sup> A.S. Ahmed, "An Aspect of the Colonial Encounter in the North-West Frontier Province," *Asian Affairs* 65 (1978): 324.

<sup>13</sup> For example, 1 January 1930 in the Gregorian calendar is 1 *Sha 'baan* 1348 A.H.

<sup>14</sup> A.M. Roe, *Waging War in Waziristan: The British Struggle in the Land of Bin Laden, 1849-1947* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 208.

<sup>15</sup> C.B.E. Burt-Andrews, "Guarding the Mountain Wall: Air-power on the Northwest Frontier of India," *Hawk Magazine*: 213-14.

<sup>16</sup> N.H. Bottomley, "The Work of the Royal Air Force on the North-West Frontier," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* 193 (1939): 779.

<sup>17</sup> C.F. Andrews, *The Challenge of the North-West Frontier* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937): 124.

<sup>18</sup> F.S. Keen, "To What Extent Would the Use of the Latest Scientific and Mechanical Methods of Warfare Affect Operations on the North-West Frontier of India?" *Journal of the United Service Institution of India* 53, no. 233 (1923): 400.

<sup>19</sup> E.R. Ludow-Hewitt, Air Staff Memorandum No. 52, "Air Control," a lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College, London (April 1933), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> E.R. Ludow-Hewitt, "Air Control," 6.

<sup>23</sup> The tribal directory was a form of encyclopedia which contained the resources, population and other data of every known village in the frontier region. It was a book of reference used by military intelligence as well as by the political authorities.

<sup>24</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 66.

<sup>25</sup> N.H. Bottomley, "The Work of the Royal Air Force on the North-West Frontier," 771.

<sup>26</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 57.

<sup>27</sup> E.R. Ludow-Hewitt, "Air Control," 11.

<sup>28</sup> IOL MSS EUR E 238/24 (Reading Papers), no. 50, Sir John Maffey, 'Unsolicited Views on an Unsolvable Problem,' 2 August 1922, 377.

<sup>29</sup> B. Robinson, *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan 1919-20* (London: Spellmount Ltd., 2004), 243.

<sup>30</sup> R.A.F. Museum, Salmond papers, B2690 – "Report by Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond, K.C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O., on the Royal Air Force in India," dated August 1922.

<sup>31</sup> C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38* (London: William Kimber & Co. Ltd., 1988), 163.

<sup>32</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 35-6.

<sup>33</sup> R.A.F. Museum, Salmond papers, B2690 – "Report by Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond K.C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O., on the Royal Air Force in India," dated August 1922.

<sup>34</sup> The RAF was the fiscal responsibility of the Government of India and came under the operational control of the Commander in Chief in India as Army Member of the Viceroy's Council. J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> In both the number and cost of maintenance of troops of occupation,

and in the cost of punitive operations

<sup>36</sup> B. Robinson, *Crisis on the Frontier*, 244.

<sup>37</sup> P.A. Towle, *Pilots and Rebels: The Use of Aircraft in Unconventional Warfare, 1918-1988* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1989), 40.

<sup>38</sup> B. Robinson, *Crisis on the Frontier*, 236.

<sup>39</sup> C. Bower, *RAF Operations 1918-38*, 161.

<sup>40</sup> A. Warren, *Waziristan, The Faqir of Ipi, and the Indian Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>41</sup> P.A. Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> C.F.A. Portal, "Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire," 348.

<sup>44</sup> C.J. Mackay, "The Influence in the Future of Aircraft Upon Problems of Imperial Defence," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. LXVII (February to November, 1922): 310.

<sup>45</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 56.

<sup>46</sup> C. Bowyer, *RAF Operations 1918-38*, 166.

<sup>47</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 34.

<sup>48</sup> C.B.E. Burt-Andrews, "Guarding the Mountain Wall," 212.

<sup>49</sup> N.H. Bottomley, "The Work of the Royal Air Force on the North-West Frontier," 769-780.

<sup>50</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 121.

<sup>51</sup> Air Commodore N.H. Bottomley notes: 'Some people are apt to think that we exercise a measure of control over all tribal territory. There are admittedly certain tribal areas in which a high degree of law and order reigns, so that Europeans can move about in complete safety ... But I think I am right in saying that no white man, except one who forced-landed in an aircraft, has been in the heart of the Tirah since 1897; no European moves in Mohmand country or Bajaur unless with a military force, and now no Briton moves about even on the roads of Waziristan unless he has a strong

scout or military protection.' N.H. Bottomley, "The Work of the Royal Air Force on the North-West Frontier," 770.

<sup>52</sup> These came from the British-Indian Army's frontier garrisons – brigade groups based on Peshawar, Nowshera, Kohat, Bannu, Razmak and Wanna.

<sup>53</sup> Air Historic Branch, "Memorandum by the Air Staff: Air Staff Scheme for the Control of the North-West Frontier of India," 1 July 1930, 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> The issue of primacy had always been a source friction and resentment. In his Despatch No. 3, Secret, dated 9 August 1923, Lord Peel referred to the danger of sound old frontier methods falling into disuse, owing to the power that aircraft placed in the hands of political officers to interpose spasmodically and dramatically in tribal matters. Peel recognized the possibility of misuse inherent in airpower, unless carefully controlled. In a despatch from the Government of India (Foreign and Political Department), (No. 11 of 1925), to the Secretary of State for India, 15 October 1925, it was noted that: 'It is largely for this reason that we have thought it advisable to retain the control of all forms of active air operations almost entirely in our hands. Expect when our forces are actually being attached – and there may be other cases of emergency where it may be essential to act immediately – aircraft may not be employed offensively without our previous and specific sanction.'

<sup>57</sup> Air Historic Branch, "Air Staff Scheme for the Control of the North-West Frontier of India," 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> A. Warren, *Waziristan, the Faqir of Ipi, and the Indian Army*, 62.

<sup>60</sup> The cost of two heavy bomber transport squadrons was Rs. 1,28,00,000 (or £960,000); the cost of the additional squadron was Rs. 26,66,666 (or £200,000).

<sup>61</sup> Air Historic Branch, "Air Staff Scheme for the Control of the North-West Frontier of India," Appendix 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, a network of runways throughout the frontier had a number of additional advantages: medical dispensaries could be established and visited at regular intervals by a doctor and his medical staff; more serious cases could be transported by air to hospital; and urgent letters or requests could be rapidly transited and addressed. Above all, political officers could visit the districts more frequently to settle disputes, give advice, and keep the government informed of local conditions.

<sup>64</sup> P.A. Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Air Historic Branch, "Air Staff Scheme for the Control of the North-West Frontier of India," 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Despatch by his Excellency General Sir Charles Carmichael Munro on the Third Afghan War, 1 November 1919 (Simla, 1919). Ironically, the aircraft never flew again due to the discovery of extensive damage by termites to its wing spares.

<sup>68</sup> P.A. Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, 37.

<sup>69</sup> See N. Macmillan, *Great Flights and Air Adventures* (London: G. Bell, 1964) and A. Barker and R. Ivelaw-Chapman, *Wings Over Kabul* (London: William Kimber Co., 1975).

<sup>70</sup> Air Historic Branch, "Air Staff Scheme for the Control of the North-West Frontier of India," 8.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> P.A. Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Air Historic Branch, "Air Staff Scheme for the Control of the North-West Frontier of India," 8.

<sup>74</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 65.

<sup>75</sup> The Looker-On, "The North-West Frontier in the Thirties – I," *The Army Quarterly* (January 1969), 254.

<sup>76</sup> Bureau of Public Information, *India in 1925-26* (Calcutta, 1925), 203-4.

<sup>77</sup> N. Charlesworth, *British Rule and the Indian Economy 1800-1914* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 66-71.

<sup>78</sup> D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 215 (note 1).

<sup>79</sup> The Looker-On, "The North-West Frontier in the Thirties – I," 254.

<sup>80</sup> P.A. Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, 35.

<sup>81</sup> P.W. Gray, "The Myths of Air Control and the Realities of Imperial Policing," 27.

<sup>82</sup> J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 55.

<sup>83</sup> Sir John Slessor notes: "There was no truth whatever in the charges of brutality or of special suffering imposed on women and children, and there is no evidence that air action created special resentment or rancour – indeed the reverse was the truth.

We went out of our way to minimize the loss of life and human suffering that is inevitable in any form of warfare – and, be it noted, these are small wars that I am describing." J. Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 67.

<sup>84</sup> C.B.E. Burt-Andrews, "Guarding the Mountain Wall," 213.

<sup>85</sup> E. Ellington, *The London Gazette*, supplement, 17 November 1925, 7595.



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