

Book Reviews

AIR POWER IN SMALL WARS: FIGHTING INSURGENTS AND TERRORISTS

By James S Corum and Wray R Johnson

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Reviewed by Group Captain Chris Finn

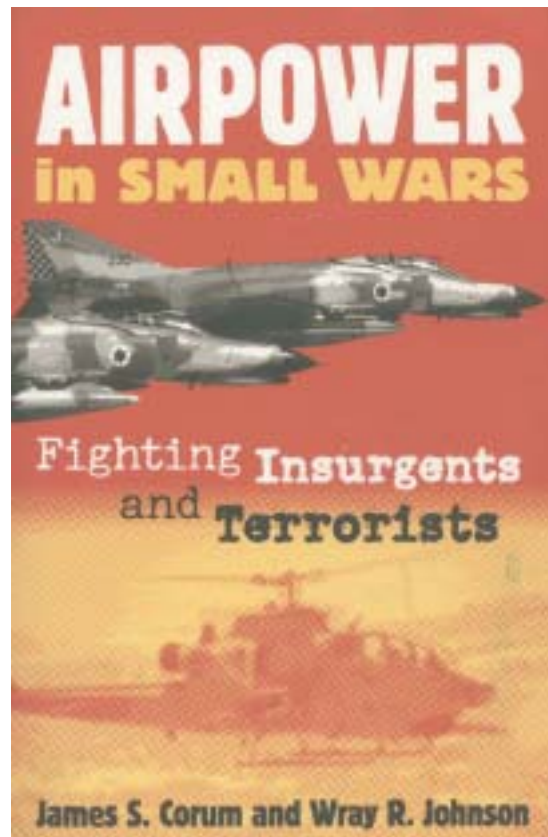
A recent quick survey of the shelves of the Joint Services Command and Staff College's extensive library revealed a plethora of books on air power in support of all aspects of land warfare. There were even more books on the role of land power in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. However, Corum and Johnson's book, of which there were a respectable number of copies, sat in splendid isolation on the shelves between combat search and rescue and electronic warfare. This unscientific survey would, therefore, seem to support the publisher's contention that *Air Power in Small Wars* is the first comprehensive history of the use of air power in conflicts pitting states against non-state groups.

Having defined 'small wars' in terms of their nature rather than their length, the authors examine a series of conflicts ranging from the relatively well known to the almost unknown. The former category includes such examples as the use of colonial air control in the inter war years, and the successful British suppression of the Malayan insurgency of 1948-1960. There are then some lesser known conflicts, such as the French colonial wars in Indo-China and Algeria and, indeed, the use of American air power in South Vietnam in

the decade leading up to the full American military involvement in that country. The latter category includes campaigns such as the Philippine response to the Hukbalahap insurgency and the US Army actions against the Mexican revolution under Pancho Villa. Finally, the authors look at how air power was used against insurgencies in Southern Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Chronologically the book is well structured with each individual campaign being dealt with by firstly examining the historical and political context and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the adversaries, then a brief history of the campaign itself, and lastly the specific air power lessons that can be drawn from it. The contextual aspects of each campaign will be particularly interesting to airmen who generally do not tend to read into those areas, and the authors' analyses give both the pros and cons of the use of air power in each conflict.

However, the authors' detachment slips slightly in their consideration of media and public opinion of the Israeli-Hezbollah/PLO conflict. The only other campaign which the authors could profitably have addressed is the anti-terrorist one in Northern Ireland which has lasted for over 30 years, and which does not seem to fit the authors'

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paradigm in that this conflict involved a terrorist organisation that had a clear political end state it wished to achieve.

The book concludes with the discussion of 11 lessons, which follow on from the analyses at the end of each particular chapter. Among them are the points that small wars require pan-governmental, as opposed to just military, solutions and that those military operations have to be entirely

joint. They also make the interesting point that both high and low-tech elements of air power have their place in these conflicts. Finally, they clearly identify the vital role played by the supporting capabilities of airpower in 'small wars'.

In summary, this is a well researched and well written book dealing with an aspect of the use of air power which has, until now, not had the exposure it deserves.

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