

Deterring Hybrid and Asymmetric Threats

Good evening

Your excellences' Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for this generous invitation to speak at the Air Chiefs' conference on a topic that I am truly passionate about. I am Brigadier General Abed Almajeed Bani Melhem, the Director of Training at the Royal Jordanian Air Force and on behalf of the Commander of Royal Jordanian Air Force I would like to thank you for your warm welcome.

It is my honor to stand here and talk about Deterring Hybrid and Asymmetric Threats.

I. Introduction

- a. In his 1966 classic "*Arms and Influence*", Thomas Shelling forever changed military theorists' definition of military victory. Instead of seeing a victory as the completion of an enemy's defeat, it was the "art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence". Shelling thought the capacity to hurt and harm your enemy must be used as a motivating factor BEFORE a conflict ensues and thus, the most effective weapons are those held in reserve.¹ With this prescription came a warning and an opportunity. The warning was that when deterrence failed the outcome was catastrophic. The opportunity, on the other hand, was to defeat your enemy even before the conflict began, thus keeping your fiercest weapons in reserve and saving your military and population from the chaos and destruction of war.
- b. A lot has changed since the 60s and these days, we're much more interested in asymmetric threats and the emerging use of those tactics in concert with hybrid warfare. Jordan is no stranger to the terrible damage that can be inflicted by asymmetric actors. But we are now entering an era where the asymmetric actors are merely a tool in a vicious catalogue of means brought to bear by hybrid war.

- c. The purpose of this talk is to examine what it means to deter in today's strategic environment and what this deterrence looks like moving forward into the future. By dissecting this thing called deterrence and what it means in today's military context, I hope to illustrate how important this work is and what specific means we bring to bear in the Royal Jordanian Air Force.
- d. It is no secret that Jordan has long been a target for terrorist and other groups attempting to impose heinous, asymmetric tactics against our military and the Jordanian population. Our geographic location has made it mandatory that we take a stand against ISIS while being an international partner on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism. We have a proud history of confronting these threats rationally and effectively with legislation, law enforcement and military security.ⁱⁱ

II. [What are Hybrid and Asymmetric Threats]

- a. Before talking about how to deter hybrid and asymmetric threats, it is important to understand what they are. The term "Asymmetric" originates "from Andrew J. R. Mack's 1975 article "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars" in which "asymmetric" referred to a significant disparity in power between opposing actors in a conflict."ⁱⁱⁱ These asymmetric actors were willing to use whatever means necessary to inflict a win on a stronger enemy, even it meant resorting to terror and other tactics. This is something we are all familiar with these days.
- b. Alternatively, modern militaries are struggling to understand and respond to Hybrid threats. According to NATO "Hybrid threats are those posed by adversaries, with the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives."^{iv} Just as Schelling suggested the most effective weapons are those held in abeyance, hybrid tactics turn this prescription on its head.
- c. Hybrid actors use the ability to pass in and out of conventional and non-conventional arenas as a means to escalate in a "cross domain escalation path."^v Simply, this means, a hybrid actor has the ability to increase pressure on an enemy without hitting any political "red lines" or "trip wires" which would draw out a damaging military response.^{vi}

III. [How do you enact deterrence?]

- a. This dangerous hybrid military strategy has gained vogue in recent times, especially by regimes looking to meddle with the international order while possessing limited conventional capability or international legitimacy. Luckily, a volume of scholarly work, coupled with lessons learned from recent hybrid war incidents, have built a roadmap not only to address this strategy, but to deter the events even before the first shot is fired. To that end, the Royal Jordanian Air Force, is aggressively adapting our organization into an agile and lethal instrument for both deterrence and kinetic action, if necessary.

IV. [What we are doing in the RJAF?]

- a. In a recent RAND study, King Mallory suggests deterrence of hybrid warfare requires both the ability to recognize and respond to hybrid tactics while supplying a preventative environment with the threat of retaliatory measures.^{vii} This requires weapons and organizational structures to capture superior surprise, technology, doctrine and the ability to integrate enablers, such as cyber, into the military portfolio.^{viii}
- b. Few things outside of a modern fighter plane allow an air force to counter or create a tactical surprise. The RJAF's fleet of F-16s is the cornerstone of this deterrence posture. Of course, maintaining a fleet of this caliber is no easy task. The continual evolution of technology and the crushing pace of operations placed on these aircraft require very careful management of this precious resource. One of the realities of the modern hybrid environment is the requirement to prioritize quality over quantity. Historical conventional military wisdom suggested the optimal strategy was to invest in large quantities of a platform, even at the expense of technology and

reliability. This is no longer the case. The need to muster surprise in a cross-domain encounter prioritizes adaptability and flexibility to address an ever maneuvering and changing threat. This adaptability requires multi role fighters capable of carrying large quantities of differing weapons to quickly find, fix and destroy a variety of targets. To this end, the RJAF has committed to a bold reorganization, recapitalization and restructure of the F-16 fleet to make it a modern, flexible and lethal sovereign deterrent and a viable addition to any coalition.

- c. The next imperative in hybrid warfare is technology. Because the hybrid enemy possesses the low cost and low technology advantage of asymmetric tactics, they are incentivized to strike first. This must be deterred by possessing a more superior, networked, force that promises a quick and measured response. The instantaneous fusion of updated intelligence distributed throughout the network allows retasking across the entire spectrum of threats. The RJAF is embarking upon an impressive infrastructure overhaul extending from a massive investment in a fiber and microwave based C2 system all the way up to new radars capable of absorbing the new Mode 5 coalition standard.
- d. Mallory's final imperative is doctrine. Just as the nature of the battlefield is changing, the way we organize our military forces must adapt with these changes. Because the hybrid battle takes place across many domains, the ability to mass forces quickly is placed at a premium. With that goal, a recent reorganization of our rotary wing force has resulted in the Unified Helicopter Command (UHC) which concentrates all rotary wing assets under the umbrella of a single commander. This creates the maximum amount of efficiency and flexibility to mass and retask close air support and air mobile assets without unnecessary layers of communication. A short response for the application of forces not only increases military mass to bear at a given incursion, it represents a tangible indicator to the population of the resilience of the state's security apparatus.

V. [Conclusion]

- a. My fellow airmen, indeed we find ourselves in interesting times. The enemy does not look like the thing we were all trained to fight in our

youth. Now, the adversary seeks to leverage hybrid warfare namely asymmetric tactics to exploit not only the military, but the population. This adaptive enemy requires us to step up our technological development along side our organizational and doctrinal structures. Forums like this allow us to share lessons learned while preparing for the inevitable future brush with a hybrid enemy. Only we can decide if we will have the luxury to deter and hold our best weapons in reserve, thus sparing our population the horrors of war!

ⁱ Thomas C. Shelling, "Arms and Influence," <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm52s>

ⁱⁱ US Department of State. "Country Reports on Terrorism 2017-Jordan":

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1f9ea.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asymmetric_warfare

^{iv} NATO Allied Command Transformation, 2011.

^v King Mallory, "New Challenges in Cross Domain Deterrence," Rand Corporation. RAND_PE259.pdf.

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} Ibid, 12.

^{viii} Ibid,16-17.