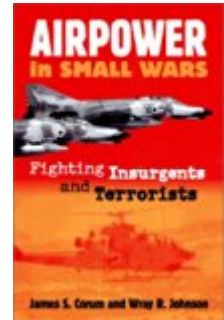


**James Corum, Wray Johnson.** *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003. xiv + 507 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7006-1240-6.



**Reviewed by** Russell Parkins

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Books about air power frequently fall into two broad categories. They are either general histories, such as Robin Higham's excellent *Air Power: A Concise History* (1972) and more recently, Stephen Budiansky's *Air Power* (2003), or specialist studies, such as the two superb volumes edited by Benjamin Franklin Cooling of the United States Air Force Center for Air Force History, *Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support* (1990) and *Case Studies in Achievement of Air Superiority* (1991). Corum and Johnson's *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* is definitely in the second category. The work is a detailed study of nine conflicts in which airpower was employed to combat a range of foes including bandits, insurgents and terrorists. The obvious benefit of this approach is the use of a comparative methodology not possible in other specialist works on the subject, such as David Omissi's *Air Power and Colonial Control* (1990).

Methodology is indeed one of this book's great strengths, allowing the authors to provide the reader with a broad picture of how air power, ground forces, diplomacy, aid and other factors

have been employed to combat insurgents. Creating this picture is made easier by the use of a similar format for each of the chapters, which provide the reader with the political and strategic background to the conflict and then assess tactics employed and the lessons learned or not learned by the air forces involved. The nine case studies span the twentieth century from the period of World War I, to the use of air control techniques between the two world wars, and then to the post-World War II campaigns in Greece, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Vietnam, southern Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Extensive notes that provide a wealth of detail have been placed at the end of the book. There is also a short bibliographical essay as a guide to further reading. Both of these features are worthwhile additions to the work.

While the scope of the book is ambitious, the authors succeed in their aim of providing "military officers [and] policy makers" with a useful analysis of the historical experience of airpower in conflicts less than general war" (p. xi). The success of the study is largely due to the fact that

both authors are experienced military professionals, historians and teachers. Corum is a U.S. Army Reserve lieutenant colonel, currently teaching at the U.S. Army War College, while Johnson is a retired U.S. Air Force (USAF) colonel with a background in special operations and now a professor at the U.S. Marine Corps University. This book grew out of their mutual frustration at the lack of suitable material for their students when they were teaching a course entitled, "Airpower in Small Wars" at the School of Advanced Airpower Studies (SAAS), part of the USAF's Air University.

The final chapter is a list of eleven specific lessons that have been drawn from the case studies. These lessons range from the need for a comprehensive strategy to outlining the best roles for air power in small wars: reconnaissance and transport. The authors also stress the requirement to employ both high- and low-tech air assets, the need for effective joint operations, and the need for specific training for this type of mission. However, in the current context of asymmetric operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, the two most important lessons would seem to be the need for a comprehensive strategy and recognition of the fact that small wars are protracted affairs, involving extensive use of a variety of intelligence assets. Importantly, the work ends with a plea for the U.S. military education system to devote more time to the study of small wars and counterinsurgency operations that would enable the U.S. forces to arrive at doctrines and procedures more suitable to these operations than the current conventional strategies.

*Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* is both a very valuable professional text and a wide-ranging history that outlines the evolution of this highly specialized use of air power. For this reviewer, Corum and Johnson's study strongly underlines the requirement for a comprehensive strategy--what Australian security planners now refer to as a whole-of-government approach--to deal with the problems posed by

asymmetric operations. The case studies and lessons discussed in this book are reinforced by Australia's recent experience in the Solomon Islands. The first step to resolving the security situation in the Solomons did not require a conventional military response, but rather intelligent policies supported by a range of military assets.

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