

# BOOK REVIEW

**Air Power in The Age of Primacy:**

**Air Warfare since the Cold War**

Edited by: Phil M. Haun, Colin F. Jackson and Timothy P. Schultz

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**ANIL GOLANI**

Wars have continued to plague nations since times immemorial. With advancement in technology in an increasingly interdependent world, great power rivalry almost ceasing after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many conflicts have taken place. The role of air power in these conflicts has gained salience in the overarching context of the use of military power. The achievement of military objectives towards the overall political objective needs to be analysed and studied in order to gain an understanding of the use of the military as an important tool of statecraft. Air power has played a critical role in all the conflicts in the last three decades and this book makes an earnest attempt to dissect, analyse, and derive important lessons from, these conflicts. Edited by the practitioners of air power, Phil M. Haun, a retired US Air Force (USAF) colonel and

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Air Vice Marshal **Anil Golani** (Retd) is Additional Director General at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

decorated A-10 pilot, with combat tours over Bosnia, Kosovo. Afghanistan and Iraq; Colin F. Jackson, erstwhile deputy assistant secretary of state for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia; Timothy P. Schulz, a retired USAF colonel and former dean of the USAF's School of Advanced Air and Space Studies and a U-2 high altitude reconnaissance pilot, the book analyses nine major conflicts in which air power played a decisive role. With chapters written by the editors and prominent air power experts and strategists, this book fills an important gap in contemporary writings on the importance of air power in recent conflicts.

From the first use of an armed Predator to kill terrorist leaders in Afghanistan in 2001 to the Hellfire missiles launched to kill Major General Qasim Soleimani in 2020, the chapter on "Remote Warfare: A New Architecture of Air Power" highlights the use of drones in contemporary warfare. With the incorporation of existing technologies of precision guided munitions, sensor data and global communications integrated with a complex web of air and ground assets, the use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) in various military missions is only going to increase in the coming years. The functioning kill web of this architecture raises important questions on the institutional control, lines of authority and legal issues of assassinating leaders and terrorists. The military and political effectiveness of this important facet of air power has been examined in detail in this chapter.

"Deliberate Force: Ambivalent Success" the 1995 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) intervention in the Bosnian civil war explores the ambivalent success of the NATO air campaign that led to the Dayton Accords and an untenable peace. The employment of air power in this campaign was carried out under the tenet of "centralised control and decentralised execution" for fear of collateral damage and civilian casualties, and each target was vetted and personally cleared by Lieutenant General Michael Ryan, the NATO air forces commander. During the campaign, he deemed force protection and collateral damage as paramount concerns, at times, holding them as higher priorities than achievement of broader political objectives.

"Hoping for Victory: Coercive Air Power and NATO's Strategy in Kosovo" examines the employment of air power as a low cost and quick action that led to a turning point resulting in the capitulation of President Milosevic in 1999. NATO's strategy to rely upon air power alone to achieve victory must, however, be treated with caution, lest wrong lessons be learnt for the future.

The chapter on "Operation Enduring Freedom" examines the US-led coalition's air campaign in the initial phases of the conflict and its effectiveness in toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The use of air power, however, had mixed results, failing to eliminate the leadership of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, while mounting a rapid and sophisticated military response at short notice with little prior planning in conjunction with the ground forces.

The chapter on "The Result is Never Final: Operation Iraqi Freedom" examines the limitations of air power of a technologically superior force, which, despite more than three decades of conflict, has not been able to translate it into the desired political objectives. The calculated employment of weapons and the measurement of physical destruction eludes the human domain and the enemy's intent, as intangibles, place limitations on the use of air power. The "Israeli Air Force Effectiveness during the Second Lebanon War (2006)" is about the overwhelming force that was used by the Israeli Air Force that led to many casualties on both sides along with large-scale destruction. The use of force failed to deter Hezbollah in the short-term, leading many to speculate on the efficacy of air power in achieving the political objectives. This chapter examines the role of the Israeli Air Force, which performed well at the operational and tactical levels, but failed to win the war for Israel, exposing its limitations in operations against non-state actors.

The use of air power to effect regime change in Libya in 2011, exposed the hollowness of the military victory that was achieved. The chapter "Libya 2011: Hollow Victory in Low-Cost Air War" makes an attempt to answer questions about what air campaigns can achieve, particularly under conditions of ambiguous guidance, open-ended political objectives, and

coalition members unwilling to risk long-term commitments. The chapter on “Coercing a Chaos State: The Saudi-Led Air War in Yemen” examines how an authoritarian state approaches the employment of contemporary air power. It discusses the overall utility of air power, both as a coercive tool of first resort, and the potency of independent air strikes as a coercive instrument in an internal conflict.

The chapter on “Russia’s Air War Win in Syria” investigates the conceptual evolution of the use of air power by Russia in counter-insurgency operations, from Afghanistan to Chechnya. It examines the introduction of advanced technologies, battlefield lethality and survivability, and questions the lack of a concomitant change in the doctrine of employment of air power. “Air Power in the Battle of Mosul” examines the US-led coalition’s air campaign to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Air power was the primary killing mechanism, employed in an urban scenario, with a decreased tolerance for civilian casualties. This was a tightly controlled, specifically targeted, careful application of air power that enabled a fractured proxy ground force to capture Mosul, which was well fortified and defended by fanatical fighters.

The use of air power in the age of primacy is a given. The strategies employed, however, vary from democracies to authoritarian regimes, asymmetries in power and technology and the political objectives in the use of military power. It would not be plausible to draw universal lessons from the conflicts discussed in this book, however, their study becomes important for the men in blue as well as academics and strategists to dissect the use of air power in the age of primacy and crystal-gaze into the future, seeking answers about the military and the political efficacy of the use of air power. While the jury is still out on the Russia-Ukraine conflict that has entered the fifth month and the use of air power would continue to be debated and discussed, this book comes at an opportune time, filling a void on the use of air power in the age of primacy. Lucid, factual and detailed, it is a must read for all practitioners of air power.