

New Wars, New Challenges: Rethinking Strategic Advantages of Air Supremacy in Modern Warfare*

Nuevas guerras, nuevos desafíos: Repesando las ventajas estratégicas de la supremacía aérea en las guerras modernas

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Abstract

The objective of the following article is to conduct an analysis of air power and its role in modern warfare. Air power has been used in the last century as an important military tool, due to its strategic advantages. These advantages reflected a military supremacy in traditional wars between states, evidenced in the international system.

The new century has highlighted the existence of a new form of struggle with different characteristics than traditional warfare, as these new confrontations face new threats which deviate from conventional warfare. Amidst these struggles, irregular warfare techniques are employed as asymmetric means to fight, questioning the military advantage provided by air power.

Keywords: air power, armed conflicts, new threats, asymmetric wars, non-state actors, military supremacy, modern warfare.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el papel del poder aéreo en las guerras modernas. El poder aéreo ha sido utilizado en el último siglo como una herramienta de gran importancia en términos militares, ya que dadas sus ventajas estratégicas, reflejaba supremacía militar y lograba incidir en el resultado favorable de las tradicionales guerras interestatales, evidenciadas en el sistema internacional.

El nuevo siglo ha resaltado la existencia de una nueva forma de lucha con características diferentes de las guerras interestatales, pues las nuevas confrontaciones encaran nuevas formas de amenazas propias de la guerra irregular, emplean medios asimétricos de lucha y, por ende, la ventaja militar del poder aéreo se ve cuestionada.

Palabras clave: poder aéreo, conflicto armado, nuevas amenazas, guerras asimétricas, actores no estatales, supremacía militar, guerras modernas.

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It is possible to go behind the fortified lines of defense of the enemy without penetrating those lines. Air power makes this possible.

Giulio Douhet

1. INTRODUCTION

The successful implementation of air power in a war scenario is a relatively recent phenomenon in modern history. According to Mueller (2010), air power became an important element of military warfare as soon as civil aviation itself existed, but with the latter occurrence of World War I and World War II, military applications for airplanes and airships quickly multiplied.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Italian General Giulio Douhet (1921, p. 3), predicted that aeronautics would open up a new field of action: a field situated above ground. He also anticipated how the speed and free reign of airplanes as instruments of reconnaissance would later be used to attack enemies on and behind their own lines. Two decades after the end of the First World War, quick implementations of aeronautics into military affairs vastly altered traditional warfare, which made battlefields of these new wars above ground apparent. Additionally, it highlighted air superiority as an extraordinary tool of military force to achieve victory.

Traditionally, states have utilized wars as a way to violently intimidate an enemy, settle disputes and achieve multiple objectives. However, the escalating levels of destruction achieved with air attacks during World War II intensified war to levels never seen before. During World War II, Allied air forces dropped nearly 2.7 million tons of bombs over enemy territory. This impressive number suggests that raids on Germany destroyed 3,600,000 dwellings, heavily damaged or destroyed approximately 20 percent of the total number of buildings in Germany, killed around 300,000 German civilians, and wounded 780,000 more (Rigole, 2002, pp.1-7).

During the last decades, air supremacy has faced challenges posed by new forms of threats which deviated from the conventional inter-state war observed during the last century. These threats include states using asymmetrical tactics and non-state actors conforming transnational terrorism organizations, creating a wide range of security challenges that air supremacy must counter through adaptation and innovation.

2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES

Although defining air power is not the objective of this paper, early development of aviation and air forces should be seen as a concept worth embracing. This includes a wide range of elements upon which the air forces are directly or indirectly dependent on. Therefore, this paper provides some definitions of air power in order to explain the concept itself, its main characteristics, strategic advantages, and challenges.

According to military standards in the United States, air superiority is defined in the Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, as that degree of dominance in the air battle of one force over another which permits the conduct of operations by the former and its related land, sea, and air forces at a given time and place without prohibitive interference by the opposing force (Cate, 2003, p.1).

Accordingly, Lombo (2002, p. 233) explains how EURAC, a forum comprising 17 air chiefs of European nations, defines air power as the ability to project *military force* in air or space by or from a platform or missile operating from above the surface of the earth. Both definitions reveal special characteristics of air power dominance of the third dimension and refer to air operations and military force in an offensive or defensive form through any aircraft, such as a helicopter or an unmanned air vehicle.

The Royal Air Force (2009, p. 16) explains how air power explores the third dimension with special characteristics such as speed, reach, and height, which allows for generally greater reach than naval vessels or

land vehicles. Speed permits rapid projection of military power and aids in the quick completion of missions, which reduces exposure to hostile fire and increases survivability. Reach enables distant or isolated targets to be attacked and potential restrictions to be circumvented, while height allows airmen to observe and dominate activities on the surface of the globe and above the sea. This strategy enables direct fire to be used against an adversary's forces.

These same characteristics are reaffirmed by Lombo (2002, pp. 236-237), explaining how height allows air power to observe with remarkable levels of precision and how it facilitates the ability to efficiently see what is happening in the surface in real time operations. He continues describing speed as a powerful source for completing missions as quickly as possible, which allows the reuse of resources several times within a short time frame. Lastly, Lombo mentions how reach is utilized in over-flights of entire oceans in just a few hours, overcoming natural barriers in any weather conditions.

The political tension and armed conflicts existing in the international community in the decades after World War II paved the way for the evolution of these particular characteristics into strategic advantages. According to McWilliams and Piotrowski (2001, p. 49), the Cold War, which had its origins in Europe due to tensions mounted between East and West over the status of Germany, Poland and other Eastern European countries, experimented a change of venue especially towards regions like Asia and the Middle East.

These political tensions in Asia allowed air power operations to be widely conducted during the Korean War between the years 1950-1953 and in Vietnam between 1965 and 1972. But air power was especially important in the Middle East. That air power played a key role in the outcomes of the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, where Israel executed a preemptive, surprise attack that destroyed the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) and established air superiority over Egypt. With complete control of the air and superior combat effectiveness, the Israelis were able to seize the initiative on the ground and defeat the Arab land forces without having to defend against enemy air forces (Dupuy, 1978, p. 335).

As Jones affirms (1996, p. 1), Israel initiated the Six Day War with preemptive air attack on Egypt, and within a week, Israeli armed forces occupied the Sinai Peninsula, to the east bank of the Suez Canal; the West Bank and the city of Jerusalem; the Golan Heights; and the Gaza Strip. Within a few days, the Egyptian and Jordanian military forces were destroyed and the Syrian Army had been routed. This resulted in an overwhelming victory by a country surrounded by hostile nations that possessed superior numbers of troops and weapons.

Additionally, air power played a relevant geostrategic role in the Middle East on June 7, 1981, when Israel launched one of the most ambitious preventive attacks in modern history, destroying the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak. This would become one of the earliest displays of what has become known as *precision strike*. During this operation no IAF planes were lost, and despite the political repercussions, the raid was considered a great success, as it put an end to the Iraqi nuclear ambition (Raas & Long, 2007, p. 8).

These examples provide an insightful lesson concerning the contribution of air power in modern warfare during last decades of the past century. Lamberth (2000, p. 115) states that air power took a significant development in credibility and perceived importance during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 due to the convergence of high technology, intensive training and determined strategy attested by the allied coalition's successful air campaign against Saddam Hussein's troops.

The air supremacy displayed by the allied forces allowed them to engage against Iraqi objectives at will, day after day, with media coverage that provided viewers with an impressive display of the new, pinpoint accurate high-tech weaponry used against defenseless Iraqi targets (McWilliams & Piotrowski, 2001, p. 431).

The coalition force of nations led by the United States obtained remarkable achievements in the military field against the Iraqi troops, which resulted in the successful ending of Operation Desert Storm less than two months after it had begun. This victory reaffirmed the geostrategic imperatives of the United States in the region and showed how

air power had developed the strategic effects of stealth, engagement capability, and precise targeting.

Until then, most air power operations had lacked these advantages, tending instead towards excessive collateral damage, limited effectiveness at the operational and strategic levels, and few of the intended results. Today, in contrast, air power is able to make its presence rapidly known and can impose effects on an enemy from the outset of combat that can have a governing influence on the subsequent course and outcome of a joint campaign with more efficiency and secrecy than ever before (Ibid, 213).

The First Iraq War was a breakthrough in the strategic effectiveness of air weaponry after a promising start in World War II and more than three years of misuse in the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign against North Vietnam of 1965-68. The Gulf War was the first war where air power was able to play a critical role in defending a well-positioned ground force before supporting ground attacks began, inflicting significant damage to the Iraqi forces. That includes the desertion of approximating 84,000 Iraqi personnel and the destruction of 1,385 Iraqi tanks. Furthermore, it damaged nearly 60 % of Iraq's major command centers and 70 % of its military communications, while disabling 75% of Iraq's electric power generating capability (Cordesman & Wagner, 1996, p. 481).

3. CHALLENGES OF STRATEGIC AIR POWER

While we have cited major wars and campaigns with impressive battle damage assessments, strategic air power is not without its limitations. In previous wars, countries such as the US and Israel have gone to war with conventional armies, utilizing traditional battle formations such as divisions, brigades, etc. However, without proper placement of forces and resupply of forward and rear air-defense systems, these armies succumbed to the opposing countries' air forces and sustained heavy losses.

During many wars of the past century, air power became a relevant military tool to inflict remarkable damages to hostile adversaries. However, in the first years of the 21st century, several threats to national security have been presented in different ways from the traditional interstate confrontation, presenting serious challenges to air superiority as a reliable means to eliminate those challenges. These challenges are usually presented in asymmetric conflicts, which refer to those wars waged against non-state actors which usually adopt guerrilla and terror warfare.

As it is stated by Anastasiei, Boscoianu, Mihaita and Necas (2011, p. 75), among these challenges, terrorism is one of the most significant because it has been used by some countries in the international system as a strategic weapon, which is likely to replace conventional war. The challenge heightens because terrorism, as a social and political phenomenon, does not have a single, covenanted, binding or universally accepted definition and therefore it is understood and fought differently among states, as it can occur due to political, religious, economic or ideological reasons, through local, national, or even transnational violent actions against civilian populations (Melamed, 2011, p. 292).

A relevant historical background related to the use of air power to fight terrorism as part of a combined arms operation is presented in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially during the Second Intifada. According to Olsen (2011, pp. 166-167), the Israeli Air Force undoubtedly played a significant role during the Second Intifada as it was employed throughout the conflict amidst an increased tendency to target Palestinian infrastructure and objectives by the military, from six in 2000, to thirty-six in 2001, and sixty-four in 2002.

Israeli air superiority became a central tool in antiterrorism operations during this episode and granted strategic advantages, as it allowed Israel to conduct regular strikes against terrorist leaders and relevant infrastructure, without involving or compromising large numbers of ground troops. Phinney (2003, p. 51-52) describes some of these strategic advantages as he explains how Israeli helicopters and jets employed precision weapons to target terrorists and their infrastructure

while army ground troops stopped the flow of terrorists to Jewish territories, based on mobile covering fire and aerial intelligence.

During the Second Intifada, targeted killings became one of the most controversial counterterrorism strategies used through air power, in order to eliminate specific individuals who were labeled by the Israeli Government as high value targets due to their involvement, initiation, coordination, and conduct in terror acts and by the remarkable level of threat they posed for the Israeli society. Strong arguments are presented in favor and against the implications and effects that this counterterrorist strategy produced in the long term during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Supporters defend targeted killing operations because of the effectiveness in the elimination of high profile terrorist leaders in order to disrupt their organizations. However, the opposition refutes this practice as illegal and inconvenient due to the boomerang effect that generates more terror attacks (Carvin, 2012, pp. 531-535).

Without entering into the debate of the pros and cons of targeted assassinations, it is important to understand how most targeted killing operations during the Second Intifada were conducted through air power, using Apache Helicopters firing Hellfire missiles. Between October 2000 to December 2001, they were used to assassinate over 60 high value Palestinian militants (Cordesman, 2002, p. 54).

Shortly after the Second Intifada, the international system was shocked by the terror attacks of 9/11, which reaffirmed the level of threat to national security issues posed by transnational terrorist organizations. This reality was influenced by the development of a new model of war doctrine known as the *Afghan Model*, which was to be implemented first in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. The rise and implementation of the *Afghan model* of warfare meant the replacement of significant American conventional ground troops, with U.S. air power and small numbers of U.S. special operations forces, toppling the ruling Taliban regime without compromising large U.S. ground forces in the battlefield (Biddle, 2005, p.161).

The role of air power in Iraq during Operation *Iraqi Freedom* proved to be multi-faceted, including providing critical Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, and facilitating mobility, particularly given the lack of mass transit of troops by ground (Dale, 2009, p. 59).

According to Beck (2008, p. 22), the usage of precision weapons progressively increased during operation *Iraqi freedom*, and while the percentage of precision guided munitions (PGM) used during the 1991 Gulf War was less than 10 percent, by the time of the Kosovo air campaign this percentage increased to above 35 percent, and during *Iraqi Freedom* in 2003 usage was at 68 percent.

Despite the remarkable increase of air power as a military option in modern warfare scenario, this did not translate into the effectiveness of achieving a decisive military victory at the end, as we see in the Afghan and Iraqi scenarios. These wars deviated from the conventional warfare scenario in which the United States and other western powers could use their technological superiority to their military advantage. Non-conventional adversaries using insurgency military techniques proved to be more difficult to defeat.

These circumstances challenge strategic air power and its proponents, like Douhet and his theory of specific targeted operations against civilian centers, and Trenchard, who advocated direct bombing of war facilities and the indirect effect of bombing on industrial population centers (Stockings & Fernandez, 2006).

Post-9/11 warfare with Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom exposed the weakness of Douhet's and Trenchard's theories. In these two operations, bombing campaigns were utilized at the onset of hostilities. In Afghanistan, cruise missiles and gunships were used to target terrorist training camps and Taliban command and control centers, and while these strikes were initially effective in removing the enemy from their cities, they were limited in their lasting effect on affecting the enemy's will to fight.

US advancement in air tactics was evident with Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, allowing ground forces to speed to Baghdad without encountering heavy armored units or threats from surface to surface attacks or air attacks. Its effectiveness was further shown with the killing of Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, an Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, using F-16 smart bombs. Unlike Afghanistan though, using air power in urban centers had drawbacks and the enemy would exploit these as both wars dragged on.

These same difficulties were presented in the 33 day asymmetric war waged between Israel and Hezbollah during the summer of 2006. During this conflict, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) launched a wide air strike campaign destined to destroy the physical infrastructure of Hezbollah in Beirut and southern Lebanon, as well as the communications infrastructure, roads and bridges linking southern and northern Lebanon hoping to isolate Hezbollah. Despite the fact this air campaign caused significant physical damage in Lebanon, it did not prevent Hezbollah to continue operating and launching rockets towards civilian areas in Israel, which clearly illustrates the IDF's inability to get a decisive edge against this non-state actor (Pahlavi & Ouellet, 2012, p. 36).

A similar situation can be observed in Gaza where, since 2001, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups have fired thousands of rockets deliberately or indiscriminately at civilian areas in Israel. These attacks virtually stopped during a ceasefire that began in June 2008, but escalated in November 2008 (Esveld, 2009, p.1).

Based on these circumstances, over the past years Israel has conducted several military campaigns like Operations *Cast Lead*, *Pillar of Defense* and *Protective Edge* among others, in order to disrupt and deter Gaza-based militant groups including Hamas. After hundreds of air strikes over Gaza, a sustainable security condition has not been reached for Israel and the general situation continues to deteriorate. According to the Institute of Palestinian Studies (2009, p. 175), Israel opened Operation *Cast Lead* with a shock and awe campaign which involved 64 warplanes dropping more than 100 tons of explosives and hitting more than 50 Hamas-related security targets in Gaza. This operation began

on December 27 (2008) and ended on January 18 (2009) and, despite the Israeli air superiority and ground operations deployed during those three weeks, Gaza remained as a sensitive security issue for Israel due to the consistent threat posed by Hamas, its underground tunnels to enter Israeli territory, and the firing of rockets towards the most relevant urban areas of the country.

This circumstance was later reaffirmed by the constant security threats arising from the Gaza strip, unfolding the next round of confrontation in 2012 with the implementation of Operation *Pillar of Defense*. Accordingly, Lappin (2012) explains how this operation began in response to the launch of over 100 rockets at Israel during a 24-hour period. Israel officially launched this operation on November 14, 2012 with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, chief of the Gaza military wing of Hamas. Despite the fact that the initial attack accomplished major gains while the most valuable targets were hit, as the operation continued there were less and less valuable targets to hit, and the only way to keep momentum was through a massive ground operation which not occurred (Shamir, 2012, p. 3).

The main objective of the Israeli government during this operation, according to Golov (2012, p. 23), was to obtain a sustainable state of deterrence, hoping to restore security in the southern part of the country. Israel expected to obtain this goal by conducting air strikes against Hamas and other different militant groups, in order to undermine their military strength and operational capabilities. Israel's military air superiority therefore played an important role during Operation *Pillar of Defense*. However, a significant ground invasion to control Gaza was not implemented due to several political and social reasons, which eventually allowed Hamas and other militant groups to rearm.

Because of this, a fragile ceasefire was established, but at the end Gaza remained as a conflict zone of cyclical confrontation. The most recent round occurred on July-August 2014, when the Israeli Government implemented Operation *Protective Edge*, triggered by the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers for which Israel holds Hamas responsible. Restoring deterrence to achieve another period of quiet, striking

a severe blow against Hamas and other smaller terrorist organization, eliminating commanders, operatives, launching capabilities, and production capacity were some of the objectives of this military campaign (Yadlin, 2014, p.1).

Since the initial escalation, Hamas and other Palestinian militants launched more than 2,600 rockets into Israel with longer ranges than in past conflicts, and Israel conducted more than 4,100 air strikes on various targets in Gaza (Zanotti, 2014, p.1). According to Cohen and Scheinmann (2014):

Despite Israel's clear technological edge, air superiority and notable intelligence capacity, it could not accomplish all of its objectives through air power alone. Even by the most optimistic Israeli military estimates, the air campaign neutralized very few of the estimated 20,000 Gaza-based fighters in Hamas's al-Qassam Brigades. Additionally, for all of Iron Dome's successes, neither the air campaign actually stopped Hamas from firing rockets. Nor did it destroy Hamas's extensive tunnel network. Moreover, despite all the Israeli intelligence assets devoted to Gaza prior to the incursion, even the IDF was surprised by the extent of the tunnel network. In short, even the most sophisticated surveillance systems and weaponry have limitations.

Under these circumstances, it is important to remember that while aerial dominance allows greater freedom of movement, air power has limited use when fighting an enemy that bears no uniform, blend in with the locals, and, most importantly, utilizes asymmetrical tactics to counter more advanced militaries. These factors not only are challenged by Douhet's and Trenchard's strategic air power theories, but also by another set of military practitioners, including Colonels John Boyd and John Warden and their theory of strategic paralysis, which de-emphasizes economic warfare based on industrial targeting, and emphasizes the targeting of enemy command and control centers (Stockings & Fernandez, 2006).

While these statements may be true in a conventional fight, US and Israel wars of the last ten years lack the command structures that Boyd and Warden are accustomed in their strategic paralysis theory (Fadok,

1995). Terror groups, crime syndicates and guerrilla organizations employ more flexible, non-linear command structures. Simply put, when one cuts off the head of the snake, another will take its place. These decentralized groups operate in a way where there can be multiple commanders who can be interchanged or replaced at will. Oftentimes, this might lead to a decrease in operational activities, but the new commander's learning curve will decrease with each operation.

We should consider the assassination of Osama bin Laden. While not accomplished with a smart bomb from a high altitude aircraft, it was intelligence and advanced rotary wing machinery that enabled members of the Special Forces to eliminate him. The assassination of a top Al-Qaeda leader should have incapacitated the enemy, but it failed to do so. Al-Qaeda conducted a rapid change of leadership under Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri and continued to lend operational support to global jihad groups.

4. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of war is closely linked to human history, and the nature of its violent practice is related with the pursuit of political, economic, social, cultural or ideological objectives. Clausewitz (2008, p. 29) affirmed that war was indeed a social phenomenon that resembles a duel on a larger scale, in which each fighter is trying to impose their will on the adversary through the use of force.

What we usually think of as war is a specific phenomenon that took shape in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, closely linked to the evolution of the modern state, and has experienced several changes since then. One of these changes relates to the implementation of air power as an instrument of combat.

As Douhet states (1921, p. 4), men have lived close to earth's surface and, for this reason, began his battles there. It is hard to know when he began to navigate the seas or the time he started naval warfare, but we definitively know that for the past century, skies had become of

great interest to man, as had land and sea before. Indeed, air power has constituted a remarkable battlefield of equal importance.

Mary Kaldor (2007, pp. 17-32) explains how the asymmetric actors and techniques of irregular wars have provided the basis for new types of socially organized forms of violence, which are not guided by the same principles of conventional warfare observed during much of the twentieth century. Therefore, if this new bellicosity is confronted through conventional ways, the results may not be as positive as in past experiences, where military superiority yielded significant advantage in the battlefield.

These asymmetrical conflicts are usually low intensity and discontinuous confrontations, in which two conventional armies do not face each other directly. Many times these confrontations are diffuse in their objectives, as one of the parties involved in the conflict does not seek control of a specific territory, but instead seeks to exploit the weaknesses of the strongest enemy, always avoiding direct confrontation (Hernandez, 2009, p. 32).

Strategic advantages of height, speed and reach, as well as weapons delivery systems, have transformed air superiority into a key element of conducting war. Therefore, strategic air power will always be a dominant strategy, but only when coupled with ground warfare, as air superiority alone does not win wars.

Nevertheless, many theorists claim that a successful air campaign against the enemy can break its will to fight. Ten years of warfare for Israel in Gaza and for the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, against an enemy without air assets, proves otherwise. Air superiority has not succeeded at defeating the enemy in current asymmetric wars.

Conventional interstate wars allowed air power superiority to achieve remarkable victories. However, new threats and modern warfare are facing air supremacy with new challenges which, if not considered properly, could compromise the effectiveness of air operations and result in the misallocation of strategic military resources. The

beginning of the 21st century has seen the return of insurgencies and counter-insurgency warfare. Despite this, most Western militaries are primarily structured to fight conventional wars. Modern offensive air power with its far-reaching and decisive strategic effects is well suited to conventional warfare, but there is a lack of understanding of its capabilities and limitations when applied to counter-insurgency warfare (Beck, 2008, p. 2).

The existence of new types of wars and non-state armed actors does not mean an automatic decrease in the strategic importance of air supremacy. Military capabilities are continuously adapting to face evolving threats, and air supremacy in modern combat theater of operations remains as a relevant tool to overcome new security challenges and nonconventional forms of threats, including terrorism.

Air power offers civil and military leaders a powerful tool to fight terrorism, and due to its speed, range, and flexibility, it is one of the most powerful military tool used in conventional wars. However, as proven by this work and by world events, the application of military air force alone cannot win the war against terrorist organizations that employ asymmetrical fighting techniques. While airpower and other military forms of power provide a way to check terrorism, diplomacy and statecraft will have to address the many difficult issues that foster terrorism (Phinney, 2003, p. 70).

This new reality has been determinant to promote a new integrated battle doctrine to serve as a relevant component of military strategy, known as Air-Sea Battle. The Air-Sea Battle concept is similarly designed to attack-in-depth, but instead of focusing on the land domain from the air, the Concept describes integrated operations across all five domains (air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace) to create advantage against conventional and unconventional enemies.

This conjoint effort allows to conduct an analysis of the threat and a set concepts of operations describing how to counter and anti-access and area denials (A2/AD) environments, both symmetrically and asymmetrically, and develop an integrated force with the necessary characte-

ristics and capabilities to succeed in those environments (The Air-Sea Battle Office, 2013, pp. 1-4).

According to Van Tol, Gunzinger, Krepinevich and Thomas (2010), A2/AD, which stands for anti-access area denial, is defined as enemy actions which inhibit military movement into a theater of operations, and activities that seek to deny freedom of action within areas under the enemy's control. Considering these facts, Mote (2013, p. 6) describes how Air-Sea Battle is about preserving strategic options, access and freedom of maneuver for joint forces in air, land, sea, space or cyberspace.

Concordant arguments about this matter are expressed by Etzioni (2014, p. 3) who claims how Air-Sea Battle envisions "interoperable air and naval forces" executing "networked, integrated attacks-in-depth to disrupt, destroy, and defeat enemy anti-access area denial capabilities," clearing the way for traditional expeditionary warfare to proceed safely. These concepts are not necessarily promoting Air-Sea Battle as doctrine in which the air force is per se the dominant force in a modern military campaign and, as is expressed by Neri (2014, p. 4), the army can and should play a significant role shaping the area for air and sea forces to engage conventional or unconventional enemies.

We should consider how during the Kosovo air campaign of 1999 and in the conduct of the conventional phases of both recent Iraq wars, much was made of air power's ability to contribute to a swift and decisive victory. The traditional functions of air power—hitting critical targets deep behind the enemy's lines, destroying command and control functionality, and impeding the enemy's ability to deploy and sustain his forces—were all evident in these campaigns (Beck, 2008, p. 9).

However, this cannot be translated into a false reality in which air superiority will be able to achieve military victory in the battlefield by itself, as we have witnessed how international and non-international armed conflicts are evolving into a much more complex scenario in which old lessons may not be useful for the new challenges.

Air power is not a decisive force by itself, as Joint Doctrine states that it is possible that any dimension of combat power, meaning by land, sea, or air, it can be dominant and even decisive in certain aspects of an operation or phase of a military campaign. However, victory comes from a commander's ability to synchronize and integrate joint force capabilities. Air forces typically operate in this joint, interagency, and coordinated team with remarkable strategic advantages that cannot be interpreted as a stand-alone solution to all national security challenges (Williams, 2002, p. 18-19).

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