

THE ROLE OF AIR FORCES IN CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

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Abstract: *In recent years, due to the technical progress of the experience accumulated amid the evolution of the military phenomenon as a whole, the actions of the air forces have become more frequent and better organized, their place and role gaining new dimensions as it results from the experience of recent or ongoing conflicts. In this context, contemporary confrontations require the redefinition in the military art and the practice of armed struggle.*

It is obvious that most military actions have a common character, although their organizational and spatial components are not always clearly delineated. In this paper, we are considering the classification of forces according to the criterion of the dominant environment in which they act - the terrestrial environment with the land forces, the marine environment with the naval sheets, respectively the air space with the air forces.

As far as air forces are concerned, it is absolutely necessary to review and rethink the definition, missions and modalities of action.

Keywords: *air force, military conflict, air power, airspace security*

1. WHY IS AIR FORCE NEEDED?

For this, we should first see the framework within which they will act - the natural environment, but also the role they play in the political and military decision-making process of state actors, international security and defense bodies.

Airspace, as the dominant airspace of the Air Force, has its own specificity, making it more difficult to investigate. The dangers and threats it generates are even harder to anticipate and counteract. In this context, airspace should be seen as a medium of human activity, but also as an element of national territory, as a subject of public international law.

Airspace - the atmosphere, with specific physical properties, composition, structure and activities (meteorological) - has become, with the accomplishment of the flying machines, the medium of human activity. By its nature, it creates specific vulnerabilities including aircraft fragility, meteorological effects, environmental conditions of air operations, and the need to restore capacity. Aeronautical activity has developed at a rapid pace so that at the beginning of the second century of aviation the defining characteristics are spatial expansion, diversification and crowding of air traffic.

The evolution of aeronautics and the intensification of specific activities have raised concerns for establishing and clarifying the legal status of airspace. The 1944 Chicago International Conference, in which the International Aviation Convention was adopted, recognizes the States' full and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace adjacent to its land and sea. The state territory is bounded by borders within which the state exercises its full sovereignty. Airspace is therefore an element of the territory of the underlying states.

The establishment of state borders is made by delimiting and demarcating them - a political and legal operation to identify and describe the route and limits within the treaties concluded for this purpose.

Regarding airspace in public international law, it is shown that it consists of the air column above the ground and the water space of the state being delimited horizontally through the terrestrial, river or maritime boundaries, vertically up to the inner boundary of the extra-atmospheric space. In some works it is stated that the upper limit is 100-110 km. As a result, airspace as an element of national territory is bordered by the national airspace of the neighboring countries or, where appropriate, by the international airspace corresponding to the open sea, and in the upper part with the cosmic / extra-atmospheric space.

In 1967, the treaty was adopted on the principles to be respected in the field of exploitation and use of extra-atmospheric space. In the cosmic space, there are three main types of activities: - scientific research; - operational purposes (communications, weather, etc.); - space-operated and manned space flights. Freedom of exploitation and use of space does not allow the appropriation, the placement of nuclear weapons or other types of weapons of mass destruction or the use of the moon and other celestial bodies for military purposes.

State sovereignty over its air space materializes primarily through its right to establish the overriding legal regime over its own territory for both domestic and foreign aircraft. Each State governs its internal legislation the conditions for access to and use of its airspace and may prohibit certain military or civilian aircraft from entering that area.

Under these circumstances, the issue of state sovereignty in airspace addresses the following main issues:

- the delimitation of airspace (space);
- the applicability of international regulations;
- national airspace regulations,
- decryption and resolution of situations affecting airborne sovereignty;
- establishing institutions for the materialization of air sovereignty.

In order to manifest its sovereignty over the entire territory, the state needs the necessary capacity / force to supervise and act in the national airspace. The only forces capable of fulfilling these missions are the air forces.

2. WHAT ARE THE AIR FORCES?

A nation must identify, create and use all resources to ensure the sovereignty of the territory, to prevent any attempt to violate national airspace. In most papers, air power is said to be the ability to use airspace for military purposes or as part of military power.

As part of the power of a state, air power has a distinct role and, in our opinion, refers to all the forces and means of civil aviation, military aviation, specific infrastructure, and all terrestrial (and cosmic) forces and means for protection air navigation. We include here, also, the capabilities required to control air operations. Also, all aeronautical companies or those producing the technique or components used in aeronautics can also be considered here. We could say that air power represents the state and capabilities that allow the state to manifest its sovereignty in national airspace and air traffic, all the factors that ensure the smooth running of human activities in the air.

On the other hand, the power of a state can be analyzed from many perspectives, resulting in several components: political, economical, military, social.

In fact, the national power is materialized through a complex of knowledge, resources (forces and means) and actions that allow it to assert itself and to force its will against other state or non-state actors.

Mankind and its economic development have expanded into the air. Since its inception, the military has also been given military equipment, and the state has created a military instrument (to defend or impose its own interests in the airspace) military aviation and later the military air forces. But what is meant by air forces? In the light of previous considerations, the air forces present themselves as an element of the air power, but obviously of the military power, at the intersection of the two components of the national power (Fig.1).

The Romanian Army Doctrine, the 2012 edition, shows that "the Romanian Armed Forces' structure includes the army's forces - ground forces, air forces and naval forces - plus supporting commands, special operations forces and other forces ... ". The Air Force doctrine states that they "designate an important category of forces of the Romanian Armed Forces operating in and out of air space and integrates the actions carried out in this space by the other forces of the army." If we open the SMFA official website, we will find its mission "Defense of Airspace by air, air and ground-air, support of other forces and local authorities in emergencies". Google also shows us, in most cases, that the air forces represent the military aviation of the State Armed Forces. Therefore, the air forces are somewhere at the junction between the air power (in the broad sense) and the military power of the state.

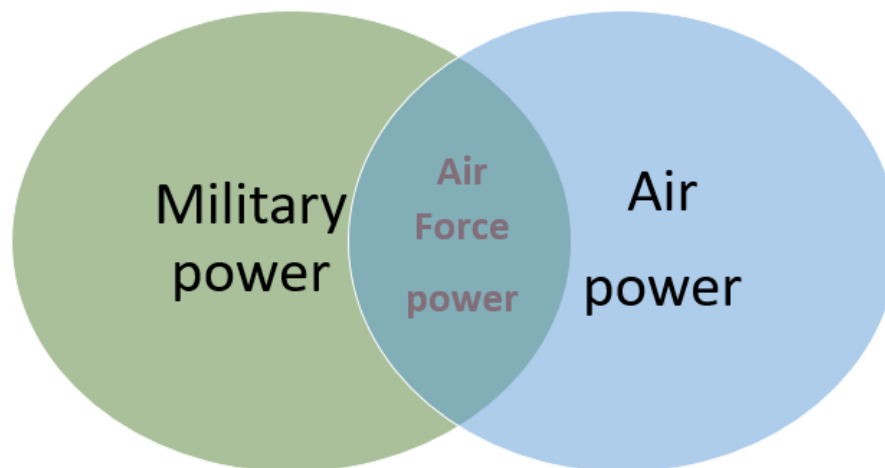


FIG. 1 The place of the Air Force power

We identify two aspects of the air forces. The former refers to air forces as those elements operating in and through air for the purpose of achieving specific military actions in and through this environment. Therefore, in the air forces, radiolocation as a means of airspace research, aviation as a flying platform, and air-to-air means of action against aircraft (artillery, missiles and radioelectronic means) are also included in the air forces.

The second aspect is to organize the army by force categories and thus meet the Air Force as a component of the structure of the military forces of a state. I recall the fact that most countries have the structure of their Air Forces as a distinct category of forces. At the same time, however, in many armed forces, including the Romanian army, there are means and forces capable of taking action in the air and other forces structures (land forces, naval forces). Sure, the destination and missions in the two situations are different.

If for the Air Force it refers to the sovereignty of the state in the national airspace and its representation in the airspace of interests, instead of the structures belonging to the other categories of forces the missions are limited to immediate, immediate and exclusive support.

This is clearly the role of the Air Force in the state's power equation. Understanding this, we will accept that under a certain aspect - that of managing and coordinating the activities carried out in the national airspace, the Air Force must play a leading role in ensuring the unity of action.

Each state has its own conception of organization and endowment of forces for armed struggle, conception resulting from the general policy of the state, based on its interests and possibilities. The stability of the categories of forces within the military system, their judicious proportionation, their role as well as the general and detailed organizational structures, the organization of the command, are considered.

3. AIR FORCES IN MILITARY CONFLICTS

Ever since the first aircraft, the military has intuited their usefulness in specific activities - observation, reconnaissance, liaison missions, and the Army has begun to acquire aircraft and prepare personnel for their exploitation. In a few years aviation has claimed to be a new weapon with the applications and maneuvers of many armies. History records that the first reconnaissance operations and first bombing missions took place at the beginning of the 20th century during the military operations carried out in the context of the 1911 Libyan colonization.

The First World War confirmed aviation as a distinct weapon in the army, highlighting new possibilities for the use of aircraft in the battlefield now and vertically expanded into the airspace.

In the interwar period, on the basis of the geopolitical background characterized by the preparation for a new war, there are theoretically outlined three orientations regarding the concept of aviation use in the war: - as an independent weapon, exclusively for the support of the land troops, respectively - used in co-operation with the land forces and the independent troops. In practice, the aircraft were specialized for certain missions.

In World War II, aviation has strengthened its role as the main category of military forces, indispensable in a war, able to carry out large-scale actions and decisive effects, with increased independence.

The conflicts that took place during the Cold War demonstrate the evolutionary nature of airspace operations through checks and nuances of theoretical concepts, by testing and refining the means of fighting in local wars, against the background of the ideological and political confrontations between the two superpowers (USSR) and their allies.

The disappearance of bipolarism, marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall, also coincides with the prefiguration of a new, ultramodern war, exemplified by the Gulf War (January-February 1991), in which the strategic air operations highlighted the role of new warfare technologies and concepts. However, we note the fact that many military analysts regard this kind of unrepeatable war.

With the involvement of international organizations in new types of operations (other than war), the share of air force missions changes in favor of uncompetitive (airborne research and surveillance of the conflicting parties, humanitarian shipments or the immediate benefit of the forces in the area etc.).

Conflict in the air is, in the classic war, the confrontation between the air forces of the belligerents and is a major way to achieve success in the modern armed struggle.

Confrontation occurs between flying (air-to-air) means or between ground and ground flying (ground-air or air-to-ground) means. The purpose and objectives of the air force can be addressed from the perspective of the "beneficiary" and / or from the "performer" perspective. The place and role of the air forces, the size of the confrontation, are set at the level of the "beneficiary", and the content and physiognomy of the action is the preoccupation of the executor who must ensure the "fulfillment of the mission" in the concrete conditions of the confrontation. This approach can also be applied in the context of "non-classical" confrontations as well as in peacetime or crisis situations.

Air Force Destination - Defending state sovereignty in the national airspace and maintaining its integrity, gaining / maintaining control of a part of the strategic airspace, reducing the enemy's military potential and enhancing the effectiveness of other forces - corresponding to the context in which it operates. Thus, theoretical works, normative acts (doctrines, regulations, manuals) as well as experience in military action theaters (orders and plans of operations, lessons learned) highlight a very wide and diverse range of missions. By grouping these missions according to the particularities of the execution, the technical-tactical characteristics of the means used and the specifics of the training of the involved personnel, we can identify the following classes/ types of missions:

- aerial surveillance - research, discovery, identification and dissemination of information on aircraft and objects in flight as well as meteorological phenomena;
- hitting targets / targets in flight (aircraft, missiles);
- hitting surface targets / targets (land or water, including immersion);
- aerial research - research on a flight platform;
- air transport.

Accordingly, the forces and means involved may be: aviation, ground-to-air missiles, antiaircraft artillery, radiolocation. In turn, aviation can be specialized for air-to-air, air-to-ground, transport, research and radar locations can be on the ground, on ships or airborne. Also, missile and artillery striking means may be disposed on the land surface or on board ships.

CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, the size, content and physiognomy of aerial actions are given by the military component of air power, which is of major importance in the modern army struggle.

At the same time, the actions of the air forces acquire specific characteristics through speed of execution, mobility and freedom of maneuver. The speed of an aircraft allows the direction of air force action at key points and the timely operation of the time. Mobility ensures relative independence from terrestrial infrastructure elements and versatility in action. The freedom of maneuver offers the advantage of rapid adaptation, in real time, to the battlefield reality and the conditions of the target as well as the realization of the surprise.

The effects of air force actions are vital in the context of joint operations, including within collective security structures such as NATO. Air operations may be part of all three NATO military missions: Article 5 - Collective Defense; Non-Article 5 - Crisis response operations; Consultation/ cooperation. Moreover, air forces are a means to create and obtain a wide range of effects including engagement, coercive and disincentive activity at a tactical, operative and strategical level, most often at times when other elements of the armed forces can not fit.

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