MILITARY AVIATION CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS IN INTERVENTION OPERATIONS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is the identification and description of the capabilities and limitations of military aviation in intervention operations. Over the last two decades, military aviation was treated by political decision-makers as a remedy for solving international crises and conflicts. Intervention operations with the participation of military aviation included: humanitarian intervention, crisis response operation and regional ethnic conflicts in many areas of the world. Short analysis of the above-mentioned operations shows a tendency for military aviation to possess attributes (capabilities) which distinguish it from other services. Doctrinal attributes describing military aviation, that is to say, speed, reach, height, ubiquity, agility and concertation, give the intervening coalition an advantage over the enemy from the beginning of the intervention. However, the doctrinal capabilities of military aviation in many cases are not sufficient for conducting air operations during an intervention. It is believed that military aviation may create other capabilities that are very important in the context of the political and military end state of intervention. These might be: possibility of enforcement of no-fly zones as an element of military deterrence, creation of psychological effects against the enemy, show of force or inputs to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. However, the most important capability of military aviation in intervention operations may be the ability for coercion, which allows politicians to put pressure on adversaries.

There is no doubt that military aviation also possesses limitations which may reduce its capabilities during intervention operations. The most known of these are: impermanence, limited payload and vulnerability. Sometimes, these would also be political challenges connected with witnessing a given operation by individual countries or the international community. In a specific situation, they may limit or prevent conducting air operations in the area of operations.

Keywords: military aviation, intervention operations, capabilities, limitations, coercion, no-fly zones
Introduction

There has been a visible increase in threats over the last decade directly affecting the shape of the international security environment. These are mostly conflicts or crises of local significance, but with regional or international repercussions. They require the considerable attention of international actors and the involvement of military forces in order to solve them. The humanitarian intervention of NATO in Libya provides an example, along with the engagement of an international coalition fighting against so-called Islamic State and the conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine. These situations require the participation of military forces and, in all cases, the main component of the task force is the air force. What are the reasons for the use of military aviation in resolving such conflicts?

The air force, where aviation remains an essential element, has many unique attributes that predispose it to participate in the resolution of conflicts; therefore, in many cases, it is a military tool of first choice. A separate analysis of attributes seems difficult, because the sum of its components results in the unique capabilities of the air force. With this in mind, it is reasonable to analyse the key advantages in which military aviation is superior to other military options, and those that may be successfully used in solving the crisis. As Cohen rightly observes, generally speaking, the political attractiveness of the air force is what most determines its use as a military option, in particular, the ability to provide quick and decisive results without the need for the engagement of ground forces, thus avoiding lengthy and politically harmful exposures, which governments fear most.

It must be assumed that the doctrinal attributes of military aviation included in doctrines are only basics for its more sophisticated employment during intervention operations. This indicates the willingness of politicians to choose military aviation as a tool guaranteeing the achievement of a political and military endstate of intervention. However, in many cases, politicians do not realise the limitations of military aviation in such operations. Hence, it is reasonable to identify and describe military aviation capabilities and limitations in intervention operations.

Military aviation capabilities in intervention operations

The ability to react quickly is one of the key attributes of military aviation. Despite the use of non-military tools of coercion, among which economic sanctions are still the most preferred political instrument, it should be noted that most of these options take a relatively long time before their results become visible. In a situation where

there is a need for a strong response against threats such as genocide, the speed of reaction of the international community is crucial. The ability to quickly employ the air force resources gives any government immediate options for responding to emerging global crises. For example, in Libya in 2011, in the framework of humanitarian intervention, aircraft and personnel were immediately mobilised in response to UN Security Council Resolution 1973 of 17 March, authorising “all necessary measures” to protect civilians. Then, the first air strikes on Libyan targets carried out by the French air force were made as early as within 48 hours of the adoption of the resolution. Therefore, military aviation in the hands of policy makers enables a much faster response compared to land or sea forces and allows the projection of strength, ability, firmness and intentions of entities intended to solve the crisis.

Another argument in favour of the participation of military aviation in resolving such conflicts is that the involvement of ground forces (no boots on the ground) is not required. States are reluctant to engage in conflicts that include use of land forces, both in the international and regional dimension. Participation of ground troops during the conflict may be associated with: significant costs, both in terms of their distribution, and subsequently sustaining the operation; challenges connected with entrance and withdrawal from the conflict, and, most importantly, with a potentially higher rate of losses which may generate negative political consequences. The population of a country is generally opposed to the contribution of their forces inside a conflict, which is not considered as a vital national interest. This fits in with the observations of the commander of the Australian Air Force – Air Marshal Geoff Brown, who said that “the spectre of incurring significant casualties on the battlefield, leading the war with limited consequences or limited strategic importance to their own country, is daunting for any government”. The preference for the use of military aviation instead of land forces is associated with the reduced risk of suffering victims, a risk which can be further reduced by the usage of unmanned aircraft systems. Having no soldiers on the territory also has the additional advantage of preventing the possibility of carrying out counter-enforcement tactics involving hostage-taking, as was the case in humanitarian intervention in 1995, when Bosnian Serbs used those tactics against United Nations forces. Moreover, the involvement of foreign troops against the will of a sovereign state will likely be viewed as illegal “occupation” or “invasion” and would probably not get UN approval, unless authorised on the

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basis of one of four humanitarian reasons: ethnic cleansing, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity\(^\text{6}\). Also, in the above-mentioned cases, the extreme reluctance of many countries to intervene is clear, which they perceive as the internal problems of another sovereign state. In the same way, it is naive to assume that the local population will have a unanimously ecstatic vision of foreign military forces in their country. Evidence of the varied reactions of civilians were seen in this context during this decade in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is clear that use of military aviation does not eliminate the component of “intervention”, nor will it avoid the claims of unlawful interference. However, the air force has the ability to conduct operations from bases outside the conflict, thus removing the need for invading the sovereign territory of another country. The growing global reach of the air force allows, in certain circumstances, aircraft to take off from their home bases, only if they are supported by air tankers. Coalition forces broadly benefited from such opportunities in Libya, when aircraft of the United States (B-2 bombers) took off and returned directly to their bases on the American continent. Each bomber needed four refueling stops one way to do the job – without the need for intermediate stops\(^7\). Greater political acceptance of the air force became clear during the debate of the Security Council on Resolution 1973, when many countries had expressed willingness to support the No-Fly Zone (NFZ) and arms embargo and approved “all necessary measures” to protect civilians, but firmly opposed the use of ground forces\(^8\).

Contrary to popular belief regarding the contribution of aviation to generating collateral damages, it also has the ability to distinguish targets. Aviation is often considered to be the main element of the intervention task force, which contributes to collateral damage, mainly due to the fact that the damage caused by aviation is very visible and usually widely discussed in the media. However, statistically, the air forces are not responsible for a large percentage of civilian casualties in the war. For example, among 40 million civilian casualties during World War II, less than 5 percent were caused by attacks from the air; however, aviation is still seen as a tool of main collateral damage. Contemporary aircraft possess great ability to distinguish targets. Based on data from Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) sensors, implemented by almost all aircraft, and exchanging information between air platforms, the amount of collateral damages is now minimal and mainly results from human mistakes, rather than from combat capabilities of military aviation. Clearly, it must be noted that the ability to distinguish between targets (objects) may be crucial in solving conflicts.

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\(^8\) Resolution 1973 (2011)…, op. cit.
The experiences of air force participation in conflicts over the past two decades clearly highlights the progress in the increasing precision of weapons used by military aviation. During the first Gulf War in 1991, only 9 percent of the munitions used by the US was precisely guided. However, during operation “Deliberate Force” in the Balkans in 1995, the amount of precision munition used by the coalition increased to 69 percent, while in Libya in 2011, all weapons used by the interventionists were precision guided – ensuring that only selected targets would be attacked. Precision air strikes have reduced scale and the probability of collateral damage. This is an important factor to be taken into consideration when we choose the military options in the context of crisis response operations, where the safety of the civilian population is foremost. It is true that the risk of civilian casualties will never be eliminated, but the precision guided munition may reduce these as much as possible.

If a decision is made to use military force as a response to a crisis situation, it is necessary to employ a proportional rate of response. Too small a force or too few threats to use it, or the lack of adequate measures for development of the situation, will reduce the credibility of the intervening coalition. On the other hand, a disproportionate use of force may cause crucial reservations on the part of other countries and increase the risk of lack of acceptance by the local population. In each of these cases, there is a high risk of failure. Aviation has the ability to project the appropriate amount of force to demonstrate its capability and firmness, for example, by surgical air strikes on military targets, without causing undue damage. In addition, use of military aviation allows gradual use of force appropriate to the situation in the region.

Military aviation is a tool which most military forces absorb modern technology, making use of its technological superiority in the form of asymmetric dominance. One key asymmetry in relation to the other types of forces is stealth technology. Its use in the latest generation of aircraft provides a significant advantage over the opponent. The use of modern technology has facilitated the increase of air force capabilities including, among other things: the development of intelligence capabilities; improved communication between platforms, air and ground components (especially in terms of command); broad reconnaissance and surveillance; precision weapon systems; new capabilities of electronic warfare, and to increase the capacity of transport aircraft. All of these capabilities are optimised in such a way as to improve efficiency and reduce the amount of required forces.

Unfortunately, opponents have learned to balance the technological superiority of military aviation using their own asymmetric techniques. Less powerful adversaries, who are fighting with countries equipped with an advanced air force, expect to use aviation and appropriately adjust tactics to neutralise the advantage of aviation.

The tactics of an opponent if aviation is used in crisis situations may include: not using his distinguishing marks assigned to the combatants (mixed together with the civilian population); the use of civilians as human shields or blurring visual differences between them, and using the same vehicles as civilians. Another tactic used is utilisation of residential buildings as command centres – a practice that creates a moral and ethical dilemma for those responsible for selecting targets. It must be remembered that in such situations, even technological advantages on the side of aviation do not always allow the use of force, for fear of possible collateral damage.

Military aviation also has the ability to quickly re-task its current mission, which is a key attribute when the situation on the ground is dynamic and demands a changing of priorities. This capability is referred to as the versatility of the utilisation of military aviation. Aircraft can be used for many tasks. For instance, airlifters are primarily intended for transport of personnel and cargo, but some of them can also play a role as air tankers or armed versions to provide close air support for ground troops. Unmanned aircraft can perform both non-kinetic (e.g. collection of data about the enemy) and kinetic (performing precision airstrikes) missions. In a similar manner, typical combat aircraft can also play the role of aircraft (helicopters) designed to perform missions of reconnaissance and observation. The versatility of the air force provides multiple benefits. A single air platform is able to carry different types of weapons, increasing efficiency by destruction of different targets in a single mission.\(^{11}\)

In the context of conflict resolution, perhaps the greatest advantage of the air force over other forms of military forces is its ability to psychologically influence the enemy, even without the use of force or with its minimal employment. The psychological impact of air operations on the enemy have been reported in recent years in the course of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen. Lately, unmanned aircraft systems have played an especially important role in the psychological aspect. In areas where they are used, potential adversaries dread that armed drones may be at any time at a distance that allows execution of airstrikes. Despite the fact that real, kinetic effects of air operations have the greatest impact on your opponent, it has been proven that even the mere threat of its use has a visible psychological effect on the enemy forces. During the first Gulf War, coalition forces deliberately exploited that dread and dropped leaflets from the air to warn Iraqis about upcoming air attacks. Awareness itself about coalition bombing resulted in a high level of desertions of enemy troops. Lambert writes that “the impact of the combined air campaign and the psychological campaign was amazing. For each Iraqi killed during air or land campaigns, more than 20 other capitulated, most without a fight”\(^{12}\). These examples

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show that psychological effect has a huge impact on the enforcement of appropriate action on the enemy. Military aviation has significant capabilities in the context of having negative psychological effects, making changes in the cognitive domain of the opponent, which is a necessary prelude to changing his behaviour.

So far, the advantages of military aviation have contributed to the key benefits arising from its use as an instrument of crisis management – scalability. Aviation can provide activities adequate to the situation that can be quickly cancelled if the opponent decides to change their behaviour and adapt to the expectations (demands) of the coercing entity or appropriate action can be rapidly taken as a reaction to provide more pressure when it is necessary. At any time before the escalation, the opponent may decide to stop their activities thus avoiding punishment and making sure that any further coercion will be taken against him. Mueller describes it as a choice of “surrender now or give up later”, underlining that the opponent’s earlier selection of capitulation is a “better choice”\(^{13}\). If an opponent does not choose to adapt to the expectations of the coercion entity, it accepts the risk that the air force will be used on a larger scale until military victory is achieved. Beyond scalability, another key feature of the air force is the ability to limit escalation of an opponent’s options\(^ {14}\) by denying him use of his own forces or disrupting his command chain and ability to command resources, thus affecting enemy leaders communicating with their own forces.

Military aviation capabilities also play a crucial role in deterrence. Basically, it can be concluded that the deterrent status of aviation includes its resources and historical experiences. Governments often wind up where they have to defend very expensive purchases for aviation, but on the other hand, many capacities and capabilities of military aviation can be used as an element of deterrence against a potential opponent. If an aircraft provides the dominant capabilities, it will be less likely that an opponent will take the risk of serious failure. It is difficult to categorically prove the effectiveness of deterrence, because no attacks against the given state can be attributed to other factors, for example, it may simply indicate a lack of hostile intent. With this, as military aviation capabilities become more powerful, it increases their value as a deterrent, and the probability that they will need to be used decreases. In this way, it is not only the status but it can also be seen as the result, which is the result of a well-organised and powerful military force.

Beyond deterrence, the air force may also fulfil a more active role in putting pressure on the opponent. The following capabilities are highlighted below in order, from the lowest end of the military spectrum of coercion, and do not necessarily include kinetic activities.


Activities of military aviation in the context of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance are defined as a “group of actions involving the acquisition, collection, processing and dissemination of information about the enemy and the area of operation necessary for the preparation and conduct of combat or other activities”\(^{15}\). In other words, it is a process that enables the observation of enemy actions and other entities, and interpretation of data gathered in the context of its use to gain an advantage\(^{16}\). ISR plays a leading role and it is a key means for precise and efficient employment of modern military aviation. The surveillance area, or “systematic, usually passive monitoring (by observing) airspace, area of land and sea activities, persons or things conducting by using technical or personal means of identification”\(^{17}\) allows you to control the situation and make appropriate responses to its possibly negative growth. It is one of the most important tasks performed by the air force during crisis response operations. The obtained data related to the area of operations and the enemy may facilitate a decision about potential intervention and, during the operation, provide the necessary information improving the decision-making advantage over the opponent. These tasks are usually performed by specialised aerial platforms. In Libya, in 2011, the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) was committed before the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions in February and March. The purpose of these actions was to obtain reliable information about the activities of the loyalist forces and increase pressure on the Libyan government by showing that their actions could be seen by the international community. The data obtained contributed to the decision about humanitarian intervention in Libya.

One of the ISR goals is to provide information superiority, which, in turn, facilitates the process of making the right decisions. The data collected by aircraft allows better planning of utilisation of forces and better prediction of the future enemy’s intentions.

Another evident and clear manifestation of coercion entity intent is achieved through visible preparation of the armed forces – the last step before the real action. In the context of military aviation, it may be conducted by moving aircraft and personnel to forward operating bases. Although these resources are not yet used in offensive operations, their readiness and location indicates the ability to take such action. An example of the application of such techniques was to move No. 3 and No. 77 squadrons to Borneo in 1965-66 as part of the Malaysian-Indonesian confrontation\(^{18}\).

15 *DD-3.3(B) Połączone Operacje Powietrzne*, Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, Centrum Doktryny i Szkolenia Sił Zbrojnych, Bydgoszcz 2014, p. 79.
16 Ibidem, p. 80.
If the relocation of military aviation does not result in expected reaction by the coercion entity towards the enemy (change its behaviour), aviation may be used for a show of force (passive mission). These missions may take the form of non-kinetic actions, for example, air patrols; however, when aircraft carry out tasks with weapon systems they show their ability to conduct air strikes. At this stage, it is also possible to carry out psychological or information operations from the air. As mentioned earlier, the mere presence of an aircraft (manned or unmanned) capable of hitting targets may bring the desired effect. Other passive missions, which indicate firm intentions include, among others, national Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) when the civilian population is deliberately evacuated from the area, which will then be the aim of offensive operations or where safety is getting worse. NEO operations are usually a harbinger of upcoming offensive actions. It should be emphasised that the passive missions, including the NEO, are very common missions conducted by military aviation during crisis response operations.

Activities leading to achieving the desired degree of air control may be passive or active, depending on the capabilities of an opponent. In some cases, the enemy’s aviation does not have adequate capabilities to counter the intervening air component coalition, as was the case with Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011, when the coalition forces did not encounter virtually any resistance from the enemy air forces. The type of operations associated with gaining and maintaining control of the airspace is also determined by enemy air defence capabilities. However, in most cases, enforcement of a No-Fly Zone or achieving an adequate degree of control of the airspace over the area of conducting operations requires the involvement of both offensive and defensive aviation activities. Ensuring the “protective umbrella” in the area of operation guarantees the safe execution of tasks by all actors conducting mission. For this to happen, the enemy’s aircraft and air defence systems must be eliminated, usually by air power of coalition forces.

Nowadays, No-Fly Zones are usually the most common military option (sanction) used in the context of crisis management. The aim of creating NFZ is to prevent enemy aircraft operations in the given airspace area which could carry out offensive actions against the civilian population. Another task for NFZ may be blockade of support from the air by the enemy and ensuring that aircraft of the intervening coalition or humanitarian flight will be conducted without the enemy’s hostile actions. Alan Stephens described the NFZ as “probably the most cost-effective military option of Western countries”¹⁹. NFZ also includes the possibility of creating No-Drive Zones enforced by the air force, with the aim of reducing the enemy’s ability to carry out ground offensive operations and hinder mobilisation²⁰. Establishing NFZ may, but does not have to, require strike missions aimed at eliminating enemy air defence – it depends on the capabilities and intentions of the adversary.

In order to create an NFZ as a reliable instrument of enforcement, airspace must be patrolled by aircraft capable of taking immediate offensive action (despite the defensive nature of NFZ), and units responsible for enforcing NFZ have political authorisation for conducting offensive actions when needed. As with other aspects of diplomacy of coercion, the effectiveness of this strategy will be significantly undermined if the appropriate entities lack the will or capabilities to enforce it, as was the case in Bosnia in 1993-94\(^ {21}\). NFZs established in northern and southern Iraq after the Gulf War were more effective in preventing air attacks on Iraqi Kurds and Shiites. The establishment and enforcement of NFZ allows a desired degree of airspace control to be maintained, which enables effective airstrikes on key targets and facilitates the intervention by coalition forces\(^ {22}\).

An important capability of modern military aviation is also the employment of electromagnetic warfare. Elements of electronic warfare are used to control the electromagnetic spectrum, allowing the enemy chain of command and control to be interfered with; disturbing radars or communications; capturing signals and actively impacting the enemy’s electronic systems. Effective use of electronic warfare may successfully create a “zone of complete silence”, which can be used to gain a significant advantage by operational military forces\(^ {23}\). Electronic warfare is particularly effective in interfering against radars and surface-to-air and missiles, which pose a great threat to aircraft of the intervening coalition. During Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Iraqi KARI radar systems were infected with a virus controlled by the Pentagon, which was activated when the first bombers flew toward Baghdad “making the army of Saddam Hussein’s temporarily blind”\(^ {24}\). Twenty years later, E/A-18G Growler – aircraft equipped with means of electronic attack debuted in the humanitarian intervention in Libya in 2011, playing a significant role in the disposal of most anti-aircraft systems, thus ensuring coalition forces the freedom to operate in the air, as well as effectively disrupting the electronics of Libyan tanks\(^ {25}\). One of the biggest advantages of electronic warfare is that it can have a significant impact on the operation conducted without a high risk of incurring losses\(^ {26}\). Electronic warfare may provide an important demonstration of the capabilities and intentions of the coercion entity, it may prevent the enemy from using its military resources, or simply cause enough confusion to prevent the proper coordination of actions by the enemy, which will lead the enemy to understand that further actions do not make sense in connection with the coercion entity. As a weapon that does not cause fatalities,

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\(^{21}\) Despite 5300 documented violations of No-Fly Zone during the operation “Deny Flight”, only four aircraft violating the zone were shot down.

\(^{22}\) A. Stephens, *The No-Fly Zone…*, op. cit.


electronic warfare is also an important political tool to dispel concerns about use of deadly force against another state; hence it can be successfully used by the air force during intervention.

At the end of the spectrum of coercion policy, there are strike missions and, thanks to these kinds of tasks, military aviation is able to generate the most destructive effects. As pointed out earlier, there is a fine line between military force used for coercion and that used for destruction. In fact, if you have already made the first attack against an enemy that continued to use military force, it would suggest that coercion had failed. The last option in a wide range of utilisation of military aviation in resolving crisis situations is not always taken into account, but it is a very important element of this type of operation. When combat operations are already completed and the political end state of operation is achieved, it is important to remember that aviation can still play an important role – usually in the form of surveillance – in order to ensure compliance with agreements. Despite the enemy changing its behaviour, it does not necessarily mean that the beliefs that motivated it to earlier actions have also changed, so that the established conditions must be monitored to ensure that the behaviour of the enemy does not repeat itself. The aggressive intentions of Saddam Hussein in relation to minorities in Iraq after the Gulf War in 1991, which resulted in a continuation of the enforcement of NFZ in both the northern and the southern part of the country provide a good example. Apart from NFZ, monitoring can be employed based on reconnaissance and observation missions carried out by aircraft.

Military aviation limitations in intervention operations

There is no doubt that military aviation capabilities in the context of crisis response operations play a key role during this type of operation. On the other hand, it must be stressed that the air force has limitations that may mitigate the benefits of its use, or in some cases totally prevent its use. As highlighted earlier, military aviation has a distinct advantage over other forms of military forces in many situations, but one should also articulate its limitations. In certain situations, navy or land forces are much better suited for the job, and in some cases military aviation in general cannot be used.

One of the most important weaknesses of modern military aviation is the impermanence of its activities. For the reasons described earlier, a lack of ground troops in the area of intervention operation is preferred; however, in some cases, this may reduce the effectiveness of actions taken by intervening. General Rupert Smith, who was the commander of UN forces in Bosnia in 1995, describes how the conditions on the ground made the land forces a better solution than aircraft, he believed they could “as accurately shoot, keep the fire for a long time and were not dependent
on the weather conditions”\(^{27}\). Operation Allied Force is a good example here. It is generally considered as a successful strategy of coercion with the assistance of the air force, because it brought the desired effect of forcing Milosevic to negotiate, and the withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo. However, while the air campaign and simultaneous diplomatic initiatives would give results, the Bosnian Serbs continued ethnic cleansing in the enclave, and NATO was not able to prevent such cases with only the potential of the air force. On the other hand, in 1994, President Clinton defended the US decision not to get involved in Rwanda in the following way: “Whom we should have struck?”\(^{28}\). In this case, if the land forces were authorised to intervene you would have saved many lives. It should be noted, however, that the precise targeting and increased use of unmanned aircraft during the last decade has significantly improved the ability of military aviation to locate and destroy specific targets.

A significant limitation connected with the engagement of military aviation in intervention operations is the need to access reliable and accurate information obtained from intelligence and reconnaissance sensors. Precise and relatively swiftly obtained data is essential for effective operations conducted by aviation. In turn, incorrect information accessible from sensors may lead to improper selection of targets, which could potentially result in collapse of the coalition and condemnation from the international community\(^{29}\).

Undoubtedly, another limitation associated with the involvement of military aviation in crisis management are the costs. On the one hand, the costs of operating the air force away from the area of operations are generally lower than in the case of ground forces deployed in the area of operation. However, you should take into account two other factors related to costs. One of them is the fact that military aviation also needs broad support in the context of air bases, maintenance and logistics. The second factor is that the same cost of acquisition and exploitation of aircraft may mean that the state will be reluctant to use military aviation for fear of losing it in combat missions. In 2010, the Senate committee for the US Military Affairs estimated that the unit cost of the F-35A JSF is approximately $112 million\(^{30}\). With such a high price, it is reasonable to question whether governments are ready to risk such a valuable resource in the fight, especially when the conflict is classified as a “war of choice”.


\(^{29}\) A classic example of this kind of limitation is the accidental bombing of the Chinese Embassy by NATO aircraft, which possessed erroneous data from the intelligence. As a result of the raid, three Chinese citizens were killed and 27 were injured. The incident caused tension in diplomatic relations between China and the United States.

Another limitation of military aviation involved in intervention operations might be political challenges. With the increasing global reach of aviation, inter alia, through air tankers, aircraft do not always have to be located in the area of operation, to carry out air operations. However, governments of intervening states should not assume that there will be air bases available in a convenient location whenever required. There is no doubt that NATO was lucky with Italy, which was involved in the Libyan air campaign in 2011, and it was ready and able to accept international forces on its territory, giving access to many air bases. Please note that such opportunities are not always available. Moving air forces of individual intervening states in a given situation requires many diplomatic approvals in order to displace aircraft in an area, including flights in the airspace of many countries. Sometimes, particular interests of individual countries may hinder movement and activities of military aviation in area of operation. In each of these cases, the country will primarily be guided by its national interests. If sharing air bases with foreign military forces will cause tensions with neighbours, access to air bases will probably be difficult or even impossible.

The above-mentioned limitations do not cover all possible options. For instance, limitations associated with the direct use of aviation have been omitted, such as weather conditions, which, in a given situation, may completely prevent the use of the military aviation.

Summary

Analysis of capabilities and limitations of military aviation involved in intervention operations leads to the conclusion that it is not able itself to reach a political solution. The value of military aviation lies in its ability to create the conditions that make possible a satisfactory political endstate. The goal is not to “win the war”, but the positive results of a strategic outcome, as exemplified by the conflict in Bosnia in 1995, Kosovo in 1999 and in Libya in 2011.

Effective use of military aviation requires awareness from politicians of its capabilities and limitations. It is common to evaluate the activities of military aviation as a failure if it does not result in achieving the desired political endstate. However, behind this type of “failure” there is usually unwillingness or inability to establish and maintain achievable objectives at the political level. It is equally important that the military aviation should be used adequately for the politico-military situation and should not be used in inadequate conditions, which usually leads to inefficiency and harms its potential as a credible tool of coercion in the future. Operation Rolling Thunder in Vietnam is often cited as a case in which the air component was completely ineffective, but, according to Lambeth’s opinion, “aviation will never

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be more effective than a strategy it serves”. In the case of the operation Rolling Thunder, responsibility for its failure goes to political leaders of the US, who used military aviation in an indecisive manner and attributed to it goals that have made the success of the operation very unlikely.

It should be noted that air operations are hardly ever terminated as early as political leaders promise, and concerns in the media and society are very clear, if success does not come quickly enough. Air missions during Desert Storm, Deliberate Force and Allied Force operations lasted a relatively short time, that is, respectively, 40 days, 22 days and 78 days, and a similar time for air operations was expected in the case of the Libyan intervention. However, according to Ramesh Thakur: “six months to overthrow a firmly rooted and determined dictator is not a long period of time”. Despite the long-term interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which took place this decade, Western public opinion still expects swift and decisive results, minimal casualties and a successful political and military endstate. This type of expectation means that continuous public support for prolonged military operations is never guaranteed.

To sum up, the politicians who want to avoid lengthy and costly military interventions will be tempted by the vision of employment of military forces “without victims” with engagement of military aviation. It is true that military aviation possesses unique capabilities: range of engagement, speed of reaction, precision of utilisation with kinetic and non-kinetic options and, due to its attributes, it is visible as a first option for a political decision about intervention. On the other hand, it must be emphasised that the best choice in intervention operation is cooperation between ground and air elements participating in operations. A mix of attributes belonging to military aviation and land forces will guarantee the military success of the intervention and will allow military aviation limitations to be reduced. As a consequence, there will be less collateral damage.

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*DD-3.3(B) Połączone Operacje Powietrzne*, Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, Centrum Doktryn i Szkolenia Sił Zbrojnych, Bydgoszcz 2014.


MOŻLIWOŚCI I OGRANICZENIA LOTNICTWA WOJSKOWEGO W OPERACJACH INTERWENCYJNYCH

Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja i opis zdolności oraz ograniczeń lotnictwa wojskowego w operacjach interwencyjnych. W ciągu ostatnich dwóch dekad lotnictwo wojskowe było traktowane przez decydentów politycznych jako remedium w rozwiązywaniu międzynarodowych kryzysów i konfliktów. Działania interwencyjne z udziałem lotnictwa wojskowego obejmowały: interwencje humanitarne, operacje reagowania kryzysowego czy konflikty etniczne w wielu obszarach całego świata. Krótka analiza tego rodzaju operacji pokazuje, że lotnictwo wojskowe posiada atrybuty (zdolności) wyróżniające je spośród innych rodzajów wojsk. Doktrynalne atrybuty opisujące lotnictwo wojskowe, tj. szybkość działania, zasięg, wysokość, wszechobecność oraz elastyczność użycia i zdolność do koncentracji dają koalicji interwentów przewagę nad przeciwnikiem od początku trwania operacji. Jednakże doktrynalne atrybuty lotnictwa wojskowego w wielu przypadkach okazują się niewystarczające do realizacji operacji powietrznych. Należy zauważyć, że lotnictwo wojskowe posiada bardzo istotne zdolności w kontekście politycznego i militarnego celu operacji. Mogą to być: zdolność do wymuszania stref zakazu lotów, zdolność do militarnego odstraszania, zdolność do tworzenia efektów psychologicznych, demonstracja siły czy wkład w system rozpoznania i obserwacji. Jednakże prawdopodobnie najważniejszą zdolnością lotnictwa wojskowego w operacjach interwencyjnych może być zdolność do wymuszania oraz wywieranie presji na przeciwnikach.

Nie ulega wątpliwości, że lotnictwo wojskowe posiada również swoje ograniczenia, które mogą zmniejszać jego zdolności w działaniach interwencyjnych. Za kluczowe należy uznać: nietrwałość podejmowanych działań, ograniczony udźwig statków powietrznych czy ograniczoną żywotność. Również polityczne wyzwania związane z postrzeganiem danej operacji przez poszczególne państwa i społeczność międzynarodową mogą wpływać pośrednio na zdolności lotnictwa wojskowego. W specyficznej sytuacji mogą one ograniczać lub uniemożliwiać wykonywanie misji lotniczych w rejonie operacji.

Słowa kluczowe: lotnictwo wojskowe, operacje interwencyjne, zdolności, ograniczenia, wymuszanie, strefy zakazu lotów