

# **« Contribution de l'Armée de l'air à la politique étrangère : éléments de comparaison avec d'autres pays de l'OTAN »**

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## Summary

The basic job of the armed forces of the democratic nations is to contribute to the foreign policy of their countries or to improve their readiness. However, they may be used for internal matters, in case of emergency, to support the action of the police forces or to help in case of natural disaster.

Most of the time, they are in charge of applying a legitimate violence against a designated enemy. But the goals of the implementation of the military power have changed. Years ago, the war was the ultimate solution, used only after the failure of all the political actions. The goal of the war was to destroy or enslave the enemy. Nowadays, the aim is to bring him to accept one's will. The choice of violence is not the last resort, but one part of a process on the way to success.

Armed forces also have a say in the way foreign policy is conducted through their participation in non-warfare actions, mainly help or cooperation. They can also contribute to the pre-eminence of the country. Air force naturally contributes to those same tasks, and are a medium amongst others allowing the statesmen to implement their political will. They are acting according to their specificities but always according to the requests of the politicians.

The actions that an air force can undertake are related either to the display of their power, or to the assistance and cooperation.

When acting on the first mode, the effects that an air force can usually carry out are sometimes similar to those achieved by other forces. It can also act differently. More

interestingly, an air force has some specific capabilities that allow it to obtain some effects that could not be reached through other means.

First of all, airpower has a great reactivity and can be brought into action very quickly. Aircrafts can also act very far away, thanks to the generalisation of air-to-air refuelling. Air forces also provide a great part of the intelligence needed by the statesmen, particularly as regards damage assessments. The air assets act with precision and are modular by nature. This allows a very accurate management of the effects. The new targeting methods also permit to disable the capabilities of the adversary, without massive destructions or losses, thus minimizing the cost of the operations. The air forces seldom meet problems with the rules of engagement. All those specificities are quite valuable when, due to the political context, the operations have to follow the "zero dead" concept.

Air power is an inescapable tool of sovereignty. It guarantees the action of a nation in its third dimension but it is also the only means able to create a protection "bubble". Lessons learned during the recent conflicts confirm that a complete control of the airspace must be obtained as soon as possible to allow a full use of all the military components. Air forces can also be used as a demonstrative tool, their simple presence depriving the adversary of its freedom of move and action. They are also in charge of the nuclear deterrence.

Apart from being the fastest means of transport and deployment, aircrafts can also be used as governmental command platforms, particularly in the case of attacks against the ground based infrastructures.

Besides air power capabilities, air forces enable to develop aid and cooperation actions. The most noticeable one are the assistance missions, humanitarian help or various rescues. But they are also part of the nation's eminence, thanks to the presentation teams, state aircrafts or presence missions abroad. Some air forces have an outstanding quality. As a consequence, they deliver a training of technicians that is particularly sought after and which entitles them to disseminate their doctrines and their know-how. Their expertise is also used to bring help, as consultants, to the less advanced. They can also exchange scant or high value capabilities with same level air forces.

They participate to the sale of weapons of their country's industry, demonstrating the equipments capabilities and training of the buyers. Those sales and the surrounding activities are also a factor of interoperability.

In peacetime, air forces contribute to the foreign policy of their countries by working for peace and stability, as well as deploying assistance and cooperation actions. Stability is often a matter of power display, deterrence, intelligence gathering, air sovereignty, or testing the defences of a potential enemy. Fighting against organised crime is also considered. Contributing to world peace also implies a multinational training. But, in peacetime the most visible actions are those linked to humanitarian aid, cooperation and eminence.

During crises, air forces shall participate to peace-keeping operations, air surveillance missions and deployments. They may even have to undertake more combat-like actions, to daunt, deter or bar some ill attempts.

When a conflict erupts, the governing bodies should exploit the specificities of air power in order to reach their goals. However, one can see that, more and more, they tend to think in terms of effects rather than in terms of "who is doing what".

The European Union's air forces participate busily to the edification of the "Europe's defence" under the frame of common projects that have been established since the Helsinki meeting. But they are also pursuing specific goals, such as the EURAC meetings, the exchange of resources, or the participation in general programs.

The Armée de l'Air is acting accordingly to the political will of France to fully exercise its role as a medium power. Since the end of World War two, it has taken part to numerous and varied operations. It has strongly promoted voluntarism in the European forces edification and holds a firm place in the new NATO structures. French Air Force has some well renowned know-how and trains numbers of foreign airmen.

The US Air Force, because its huge size, cannot be compared with other NATO air forces. However, it has developed many interesting concepts, speaking of airpower, cooperation, assistance or ascendancy.

The Royal Air Force is the only European air force to compare with the Armée de l'Air. It is widely outside bound, but is acting in a Joint framework and is working under a doctrine based on effects.

The Luftwaffe has long been confined to the role of the frontline warrior of NATO against Warsaw Pact forces. It begins to look outside its borders, but its projection capabilities remain limited. It has developed an interesting specialization in the medical evacuation role.

The Aeronautica Militare Italia, when it joined the coalition in the Gulf War, had not participated in combat missions since 1945. It relies mostly on its NATO links and depends on the USA for many things. It has some reluctance to choose European equipments.

The Ejercito del Aire, with limited assets, is actively participating to peacekeeping missions and wants to participate in the fight against terrorism.

The Koninklijke Luchtmacht is a small air force. It cooperates willingly to international actions, through its involvement in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

The Polish air force has only limited capabilities and is only able to participate in some logistics missions.

The Turkish air force relies heavily on Army decisions and US equipments and doctrine. Its projection capabilities are limited and used only under NATO's umbrella.

Outside NATO, air forces, even the most important ones, are mainly staying inside their borders. Some are showing interesting peculiarities. Israel often practises demonstration flights and makes high precision attacks against specific human targets. The Swiss Air Force is strictly limited to the defence of its airspace, and refuses any projection capabilities.

Air forces are now an important asset of their nation's foreign policy. They convey capabilities and resources that suit very well the way in which the politicians want to act. This is even truer during crises or conflicts. But the air forces are usually not very good at delivering a good communication on their actions. In most countries, except in the USA, there is a tendency to jointness and the governing bodies are mostly thinking in terms of capabilities and effects. For those reasons, although the air forces are deeply involved in the foreign policy of their countries, this is not perceived as the contribution of a specific force, but more as the contribution of the military as a whole.