



### A FRESH LOOK AT AIR ATTACK

From the time that the attack from the air first appeared in the writings of air power theorists, they have been a point of contention not only amongst military strategists, but also in the larger community. The realisation of the capability from the First World War onwards only heightened the debate. They have been variously hailed as the panacea to the unnecessary loss of life that accompanies any war and reviled as immoral because of the uncontrolled collateral damage that seemed to be integral to any air attack until recent times. However, there is no doubt that regardless of the debate, air attacks have become a highly preferred way for a nation to attack its adversaries in almost all situations.

The fundamental reason for creating any warfighting organisation is to provide the nation with the ability to apply force, if necessary even lethal force, in support of national interests. The Air Force contribution to such force application is through air attacks, which are the high-end response that air power can bring to bear against security threats. Even without being used, such a capability has salutary deterrent effects that may prevent an adversary from initiating hostile activity, thereby averting potential conflict.

If armed conflict occurs, **Air Force will carry out force application through the dual functions of counter air and precision attack to attain the primary goals of the joint campaign.** Counter air missions are carried out to obtain control of the air and precision attacks are directed against the enemy's centres of gravity. All air attacks are intended to create decisive effects through kinetic and

non-kinetic, offensive and defensive means in support of the joint force.

An appropriate level of control of the air is an essential prerequisite for any military operations in which the ADF participates. It is likely that an unconventional adversary may choose not to, or may not be able to contest the control of the air. However, at other times the Air Force will be required to fight for and gain control of the air to ensure that the joint force is able to operate unhindered in the desired areas for the time required to successfully complete the mission or campaign. This will be achieved through counter air missions that are carefully crafted to optimise the employment of air power

resources. Planning to maximise the effective use of available air assets is critical in the case of small-size air forces. For such forces, the versatility inherent in air power would have to be exploited to ensure that counter air and other air campaigns can be conducted concurrently.

Counter air operations can include both offensive and defensive actions.

However, air power is inherently offensive, and achieves the best results when employed to destroy, disrupt, defeat and contain adversary air power as close to its source as possible. When utilised offensively, air power is capable of engaging hostile forces well beyond the range of surface weapons and before they can threaten friendly forces. The offensive application of air power against enemy facilities and air bases places challenging demands on the reach and penetration of Air Force's air power assets and the capacity to sustain deployed operations.



*B52 bombing*

Defensive counter air operations aim to neutralise the effectiveness of hostile air action and deny the enemy control of the air. These operations normally take place over or close to friendly territory and aim to minimise damage to friendly forces while inflicting maximum attrition on the opponent. While such actions may complicate the adversary's counter air operations, they are essentially reactive in nature and offer the initiative to the adversary, who will be able to control the tempo of operations.

The future threats to Air Force's ability to control the air dimension of the battlespace will be multifaceted and could include high-end fighter aircraft, advanced air-to-air weapons and sophisticated surface-to-air missile systems. The future force that has to fight to obtain control of the air will, therefore, need to have the capability to deal with the emergent air threat through a combination of onboard sensors that allow transparent networking, stealth, electronic warfare capability, systemic range, weaponry and professional mastery of Air Force personnel.

Air Force carries out precision attacks to shape the environment, deter possible aggressors and, when necessary, to deliver timely and decisive responses. Maintaining an adequate precision strike capability with a numerically small force requires a careful mix of effective command and control networks, support systems and weapon system technology. A capable adversary will place such extraordinary demands on air assets in terms of survivability that only highly capable systems operating near-leading edge technology will be able to carry out credible precision strikes and create the necessary effect.

There are two levels of precision attacks that an air force carries out—strategic attack and integrated air. Strategic attack will remain a defining function for air forces. Conducted independently of surface manoeuvre it aims to create strategic effects that degrade or destroy the enemy's will and warfighting capabilities. Despite its independence of action, strategic attack is an integral part of a joint military campaign and the whole-of-government approach to national security. The assessment that shapes strategic attack is complex, and will be guided by political intent and constraints.

Integrated air is the conduct of carefully planned and executed air campaigns as part of joint and coalition operations. These include counter land and counter

sea strike operations, conducted primarily to deprive the adversary of the military power needed to exploit, manoeuvre in or occupy land or sea area. Integrated air creates operational and tactical effects, but in certain circumstances can achieve strategic outcomes.

Counter land operations fall into two broad categories—air interdiction and close air support. Interdiction can contribute to campaign objectives directly or support land forces and is targeted at enemy military potential before it can be brought to bear against friendly forces. Close air support missions are air strikes conducted against hostile targets in close proximity to or in actual contact with own forces. Likewise, counter sea operations involve the integrated application of air power against enemy maritime capabilities.

Air attacks have come a long way from the indiscriminate area bombing campaigns of the Second World War. Today these operations have no resemblance to the application of air power even twenty years ago. However, the underlying strategic goals of air attacks have not fundamentally changed—control of the air and decisive effects on the surface.

- *Control of the air and precision attack are the dual functions of air force's force application*
- *Control of the air is a prerequisite for the success of any military operation*
- *Precision attack is carried out to shape the environment, deter aggressors and to deliver decisive response*

*"Because of its independence of surface limitations and its superior speed the airplane is the offensive weapon par excellence"*  
- Giulio Douhet



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