

## Afterword: Some Reflections\*

Since the Second World War, the international community, mainly under the auspices of the United Nations, has dispatched over a million military personnel to conflict areas around the world to serve as peacekeepers. While the “boots on the ground” and the conflicts they seek to resolve have been well publicized and studied, the air component of peacekeeping has received much less attention.

This volume has helped remedy this deficit by examining air operations in detail and seeking to answer important questions. For example, what role has air power played? What quantity and quality of aircraft were used? How effective was air power and what problems were encountered? We learned that aircraft provided strategic and tactical airlift, enforced no-fly zones, performed surveillance missions and even conducted kinetic (combat) operations to protect UN forces and civilians. Notwithstanding the harshness of the environment and the mixed results of peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, the aircraft and their aircrews conducted themselves with professionalism and often performed wonders of improvisation.

The purpose of this book, however, was not just to chronicle these contributions and commemorate the deeds of air and ground crews, but to provide lessons for practitioners. Air power will become even more critical in the future, as UN operations by the world organization and its enforcers, especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), will rely not only on manned aircraft but also on new technological assets such as unmanned vehicles. As has been shown in this volume, there is much to learn from in the past. Today, the United Nations has Mi-35 attack helicopters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Much earlier, in the 1960s, the UN’s “Air Force” in the Congo included more: Swedish Saab J-29B fighter–bombers; Ethiopian F-86 Sabre fighters; and Indian Canberra bombers. The future might see the return of combat aircraft, particularly if the more technologically advanced nations re-engage in peacekeeping. In the near future, unmanned aerial vehicles, aerostats (tethered balloons) and parafoils (kites) guided by global positioning systems might also carry out the kinds of transport and surveillance missions that were once the sole preserve of crewed aircraft. The aerospace assets of the NATO peace operation in the former Yugoslavia after 1995 serve as an example to the United Nations of what can and should be brought to the field. Compared to NATO or advanced nations, UN air power is rudimentary – with a few exceptions, as shown in this volume. Many changes in the United Nations can be made to achieve progress. As suggested, the United Nations should reform its bidding processes to allow the contracting of more capable aircraft (for example, the S-92 helicopter rather than the Mi-8MTV). Western countries can help

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fill the air power void by offering more capable military aircraft, including advanced UAVs and fighter jets. Robust aircraft can give peace operations a much-needed peace enforcement capability. Since many Western nations remain reluctant to commit ground forces, these countries could make a meaningful, specialized contributions by providing modern transport, surveillance, and combat aircraft to UN missions.

This volume has shown that UN aircraft are deficient not only in *quality* but also in *quantity*. Today in the DRC, a country the size of Western Europe, the United Nations has only a handful of attack helicopters – too few to do the job properly. It is recognized, however, that robust air power is not a panacea. There remains the need for peacekeepers on the ground and political processes with the major actors, though these persons can be transported and better informed through air power.

Other important lessons include the need to limit the damage of air strikes in order to maintain a mission's legitimacy. It will remain a reality that these combat operations generally will be organized on short notice and requiring agile planning. Also intelligence-gathering by air or ground necessitates proper information analysis and distribution, an area ripe for major improvements in both technology and processes. Furthermore, there is much that can be done to ensure that different missions in the same region co-operate with each other, including by sharing their air capabilities.

Finally, there is a continuing need to study this issue and to make sure that the proper lessons are learned. For example, UN officials quickly forgot that the organization had conducted kinetic air operations in the Congo in the 1960s. The loss of institutional memory meant that the United Nations was slow to implement the use of armed helicopters in the 2000s. Therefore, this study is only the first step in a broader effort to better understand the role that air power has played in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. In the words of Senator Dallahire in the Foreword to this volume, such studies will “play an important role in illuminating the past to brighten the future”.