

Foreword*

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The operations of the United Nations, no matter how flawed, understaffed or ill-equipped, are a vital expression of human concern, needing both national and international support. All nations should have a strong interest in using peace operations to prevent conflict, minimize human suffering, preserve human dignity, and reduce radicalization and extremism in their many forms. No nation can be completely unaffected by the war-torn parts of our interconnected world. War zones export violence and terrorism. They also affect trade – licit and illicit. For example, minerals from Africa are used in everyday products like cell phones. Blood diamonds and conflict coltan are but two of the minerals fueling conflicts in Africa, where illegally exploited natural resources are exchanged for weapons. The world must deal with the contraband that fuels wars and the wars that fuel contraband – a vicious cycle that has to be stopped, in part with international forces on the ground. Raging conflicts anywhere impact global immigration, refugee flows, and national diasporas, with relatives stuck in conflict zones. Wars also deprive children of education, and perpetuate poverty and economic dislocation, even as the young are manipulated into fighting as soldiers. Thus, there is a strong *humanitarian imperative* to support UN operations. It is ethically impossible to stand by as people are slaughtered, as war-affected children are murdered or orphaned or forced to murder. The UN's peace operations, with their twenty-first century mandates to protect civilians and support human rights, are an expression of this humanitarian imperative. Yet these peace operations remain poorly equipped to do the job. Among the many needed capabilities, air power is vital.

For peacekeepers in distant war-torn parts of the world, aircraft often serve as the lifeline for survival and sanity. In Rwanda, in 1994, as genocide was perpetrated all around the peacekeeping mission, it is hard to describe the joy and relief we felt from the sound of incoming aircraft landing with essential supplies, new personnel, and packages from home. The aircrew risked their lives to save ours. The Canadian Forces' Hercules, the only aircraft which flew regularly into the mission during the genocide, took fire from the ground and had to land on unsecured, hazardous airfields. But the courage and skill of the aircrews made our work possible so that we, in turn, could save thousands who would otherwise have perished.

Though air power was limited in Rwanda, it can potentially serve many functions. As force commander responsible for the Rwanda mission, I was deeply troubled by the lack of air support for UNAMIR ground patrols, which regularly sustained fire. Ideally, we would have

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had close air support. More basically, there was no aerial reconnaissance to regularly monitor, from above, the locations we sought to protect. I longed for the capacity to jam from the air or ground the hate broadcasts of *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*, which was urging [Hutus] to kill the *inyenzi* (literally, cockroaches), a hateful term designating [Tutsis]. Air power and so many other essential capabilities were lacking within that mission.

Fortunately, the United Nations has made progress since the mid-1990s, including building an aviation fleet and expanding its aerial capabilities. For instance, the ongoing eastern Congo mission includes attack helicopters that have helped to keep rebel groups at bay. But there is still much to do. In comparison with advanced militaries and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance, the United Nations still operates only at a basic level. Whereas NATO has spent decades dealing with ground–air interoperability, common funded aircraft (like AWACS, the Airborne Warning and Control System), compatible air training and doctrines, and technological integration, the United Nations still has not developed simple air–ground tactics, techniques, and procedures. For instance, missions are plagued with problems of simple communications between aircraft and ground troops, unless the aircraft and troops originate from the same nation. As NATO’s combat mission in Afghanistan comes to a close, there is hope that Western countries may once again reengage in UN peace operations and help furnish the necessary air power. It would be unfair to continue the West’s current abandonment of peacekeeping, leaving the important job solely to the global South, whose ground and air capabilities are limited. The North has contributions to make in all manner of air power assets. Western nations supported the NATO stabilization operations in Bosnia and Kosovo with a multitude of aircraft. There is a similar need in contemporary UN operations. Successful prevention, mitigation and resolution of conflicts all involve air power.

There is a common but mistaken view of peacekeeping as only an army activity; air forces and civilian aircrews also have a key role to play. Modern militaries rightly stress the importance of joint operations, bringing together components from land, air, and naval forces. Achieving “jointness” is also important for the United Nations. Its operations are made up of disparate nations, with soldiers and aircrews who have not trained together or worked together before. Furthermore, air assets must be managed by a mix of UN civilian and military personnel. This means that there is much room for improvement in integrating forces – air, sea, and ground, as well as military and civilian.

One thing is certain. In this era of “protection of civilian” mandates in complex multidimensional missions, where ambiguity and complexity are the norm, air power will continue to be a required part of the solution. Air power is essential to develop an “environment of security”. But it remains an underused and under-studied tool for peace operations.

The United Nations needs a conceptual base to examine joint air–ground operations. It needs to explore new ways to integrate land and air forces. It has to learn to manage the complexities of modern technological operations. The challenge remains how to achieve integration with many nations and other actors in multidimensional, multiagency, multinational environments, covering air and water as well as land.

I welcome this unique volume on air power in UN operations. It provides a close look at the ways peacekeeping and enforcement can be facilitated from the air. It provides an impressive and wide-ranging examination of air power applications from the past and points to how these

can be made more effective in the future. As peace operations gradually catch up to other military operations in technological resourcefulness, such studies will play an important role in illuminating the past to brighten the future.