



AIRPOWER AS MANEUVER IN WARFARE

Last Updated: 22 Nov 2016

- **Airpower is the ability to project military power or influence through the control and exploitation of air, space, and cyberspace to achieve strategic, operational, or tactical objectives.**
 - ✦ Airpower exploits the third dimension of the operational environment; the electromagnetic spectrum; and time to leverage speed, range, flexibility, precision, tempo, and lethality to create effects from and within the air, space, and cyberspace domains.
- Airpower leverages military, civil, and commercial capabilities, the industrial infrastructure, and a doctrine of employment. Airpower is an indivisible, unitary construct—one that unifies Airmen, rather than portraying them as a collection of “tribes” broken into technological or organizational “stovepipes.”
- Due to speed, range, and its multidimensional perspective, **airpower operates in ways that are fundamentally different from other forms of military power; thus, the various aspects of airpower are more akin to each other than to the other forms of military power.**
- **Airpower is the product, not the sum, of air, space, and cyberspace operations. Each depends on the others to such a degree that the loss of freedom of action in one may mean loss of advantage in all other domains.**
- Airpower has the ability to conduct operations and impose effects throughout an entire theater and across the range of military operations (ROMO), unlike surface forces that typically divide up the battlefield into individual operating areas.
- Airmen view operations, including the application of force, more from a functional than a geographic perspective, and classify targets by generated effects rather than physical location.
 - ✦ The physical structure of ground maneuver forces consists of fronts, flanks, and rears. While these concepts do not apply readily to airpower, it can be useful to make an analogy in surface terms in order to convey the Air Force’s contribution to joint warfare.

- ✦ In such terms, **airpower adds flanks in other dimensions that make the vertical and virtual battle as important as the horizontal battle.** The airspace above the battlespace is like an additional flank in the third dimension, which can be exploited to achieve a relative advantage.
- ✦ As with surface flanks, commanders should seek to gain positions of advantage by turning an enemy's vertical flank, and should no sooner expose their own vertical flank(s).
- ✦ Through cross-domain effects (effects created in one or more domains through operations in another), airpower can also create virtual "flanks" or "rears" in other dimensions, such as time and cyberspace (or assist the joint force in doing so).
- ✦ Airpower can help ensure the success of friendly actions, disrupt adversary strategies, and even paralyze adversary action by using time more effectively than the adversary through disruption of his operational rhythm.
- ✦ When given the authority, Airmen can create positions of decisive advantage (maneuver) through use of computer code and manipulation of electronic infrastructure in cyberspace.
- ✦ The nature of airpower also makes it an effective instrument to achieve information superiority, potentially undermining enemy will and decision-making ability.
- **By making effective use of the third dimension, the electromagnetic spectrum, and time, airpower can seize the initiative, set the terms of battle, establish a dominant tempo of operations, better anticipate the enemy through superior observation, and take advantage of tactical, operational, and strategic opportunities.**
- **Airpower can simultaneously strike directly at the adversary's centers of gravity, vital centers, critical vulnerabilities, and strategy.** Airpower's ability to strike the enemy rapidly and unexpectedly across all of these critical points adds a significant impact to an enemy's will in addition to the physical blow. This capability allows airpower to achieve effects well beyond the tactical effects of individual actions, at a tempo that disrupts the adversary's decision cycle.
- Both joint and Air Force doctrine recognize airpower as a form of maneuver. Rapid, long-range, multidimensional maneuver and fires; kinetic and nonkinetic actions; and lethal and nonlethal effects,¹ are inherent in airpower, as is the ability to inflict both physical and psychological dislocation on an adversary.

¹ These categories include nuclear weapons, which use both kinetic and nonkinetic means to create lethal and nonlethal effects.

- In cases where airpower presents the **joint force commander** with the preponderance of counter-surface effects, it may be appropriate for the **joint force air component commander (JFACC)** to be the **supported commander** for **affecting enemy surface forces**, with friendly surface force commanders acting in a supporting role. This is often the case when the JFACC's forces perform the theater-wide air interdiction and strategic attack functions.
 - *For fundamental discussion of airpower, see Air Force Doctrine [Volume 1](#).*
 - *For more complete discussion of airpower as maneuver in warfare, [click here](#).*
-