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The Obscenity and Futility of US and Israeli Air Power



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For the past 80 years, the United States and Israeli air power have owned the global and Middle Eastern skies, respectively, but wars are typically won with ground power, not air power. World War II was won against Germany with ground power, particularly Soviet ground power, and the United States hasn't been on a winning side since, with the exception of the war with Iraq in 1991 (Desert Storm). Other U.S. wars have been fought to a standstill (Korea 1950-1953) or to something less than victory over decades of fighting in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Israel has engaged its Arab neighbors in a series of wars over the years, but currently finds itself surrounded by hostile states and borders, where it fears the deployment of ground forces that result in unacceptable losses. U.S. national security has been diminished in recent years despite U.S. dominance in air power, and the same could be said for Israeli national security in view of hostilities with Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, and Yemenis.

Nevertheless, the United States and Israel continues to count on air power to provide a measure of safety despite the absence of formidable adversaries in the air. The problem is that the heavy reliance on air power translates into disproportionate civilian losses, blandly referred to as collateral damage. Israel and the United States deceitfully claim that air power reduces the need for ground forces, but there is no indication that Israeli and U.S. air power has led to smaller and less lethal ground forces. Israeli reliance on precision-guided weapons provided by the United States has only led to enormous civilian casualties and fatalities and a whole raft of war crimes. The use of 2,000-lb bombs in congested urban areas in Gaza was particularly obscene.

Israeli airpower is responsible for a growing number of war crimes as well as charges of genocide because of the heavy bombing of crowded urban areas, hospitals, mosques, and educational institutions as the Israelis claim (often without proof) that such facilities are used to train intelligent operatives, conduct military planning, and/or serve as weapons depots. There is no doubt that the Israelis are conducting a war of collective punishment—a war crime—with no opposition within the Israeli population.

The United States and Israel have won wars in the first months of combat, but continue confrontations relying on air power. Israel, for example, defeated Hamas for all practical purposes in the first several months, but continue the heavy campaign right up to today. The Israeli war against Gaza is not a just war by any stretch of the imagination. The same could be said for the U.S. campaign against Afghanistan, which was won in the first several months, but the use of air power continued for nearly two decades.

The recent U.S. chat room on the military plan for Yemen revealed a great deal of sensitive intelligence regarding U.S. air power against adversaries such as the Houthis that lack air power and even air defense. It is more likely that U.S. of air power was designed primarily to send a message to Iran and secondarily to the Houthis. The United States currently is sending B-2 stealth bombers to Diego Garcia, the Navy's island base in the Indian Ocean, and warships to the region. The B-2 can accommodate the Pentagon's largest "bunker-buster munitions, which can penetrate Iran's underground nuclear facilities. Donald Trump has threatened that, if Iran doesn't destroy its nuclear program, Iran will face "bombing the likes of which they have never seen before." Given the unpredictability and capriciousness of Trump as well as his need for a military victory, this threat may not be mere bluster.

The example of America's "shock and awe" campaign against Iraq in 2003 could be an example of the kind of actions the United States will take against Iran. According to former secretary of defense Dick Cheney, the 43-day U.S.-led military campaign to oust Iraq from

Kuwait, Operation Desert Storm, was spearheaded by “the most successful air-campaign in the history of the world.” In some respects, this claim seems justified. The allies assembled a gigantic airborne armada that quickly and easily established air superiority over Iraqi military forces. Allied aircraft bombed wherever and whenever they wanted.

By means of the bombing campaign, the allies overwhelmed the foe to the point where — once the long-dreaded ground war got underway — it quickly became a rout and coalition forces suffered mercifully few casualties. Yet Cheney’s assertion of unequalled success went even further. President Bush and many Pentagon officials claimed that never before had such care been taken to avoid harm to the opposition’s civilian population. Further, U.S. and other allied spokespersons claimed at every turn that the effort to minimize damage to civilians had succeeded. Bush claimed that Desert Storm was a “near-perfect war,” with as little harm to civilian life and property as humanly possible. However, Iraqi civilian deaths ranged between 100,000 to 200,000. The Israelis make similarly false claims in their war against Hamas with civilian deaths numbering between 50,000 and 60,000.

The Israelis essentially achieved their political and military goals against Hamas in less than five months, but the genocidal air campaign continues.. Today, there are no political or military goals for the Israelis other than to maintain Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition and his place at the top of the government. The political and military goals of the United States against the Houthis in Yemen are similarly difficult to explain.

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