

2014/2/4 Abstract: Modern aerial warfare: more evolution than revolution (part 1)

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On 21st and 22nd November 2012 the Air Force Symposium 2012 of the Aviation and Air Defence School was carried out under the direction of Brigadier Günter Schiefert. This symposium focussed on aerial war operations. Never before so many books, analyses and essays have been written about political and military chances, potentials, costs and problems of aerial warfare than since Desert Storm 1991. In these works, time and again one can find suggestions concerning changes in command, organisation, tactics and use of arms, but also new terms and definitions, such as third wave-war, counter land operations, hybrid air war, or effects-based operations (EBO), as well as the problems arising from close air support (CAS), or how to have stronger effect in an air campaign. The importance of air power is emphasized, and sentences such as „We control the air, and enable the Army to win“ are typical of this. Terms such as counter air, counter land or deep strike are not new, but new terms alone do not change the principles of aerial warfare much anyway. Some authors, however, (like John Warden) believe that new terms demand new thinking. The air land battle of the 1980ies laid the foundations for an especially close cooperation of land and air forces, and it triggered off about 100 contributions in the Military Review magazine as well as a continuous modifications of the Air Force Basic Doctrine, but was really achieved by it? Although the Air Land Battle 21 was presented as a tactical variation on „shock and awe“, it disappeared again from literature around 2005. On the other hand, the Air-Sea-Concept for a possible war against China is new. In addition, in the Pentagon an Air Sea Battle Office (ASBO) was established in August 2011. Many justifications and suggestions concerning new theories always refer to historical examples. Every new publication of the Department of Defense explains operations principles and new terms with references to the Second World War, Korea, Vietnam, or the Golf War of 1991. The reason for this may be that such references make understanding complex connections easier. The evolution of turbine propulsion, precision weapons, stealth, electronics and data link as well as improved passive protection has taken almost 70 years, but it brought forth a relatively high survivability of the aeroplane which had never been achieved before in history. Whether laser weapons used for air defence will change this lead will be seen in future, as only a persistent offensive is decisive in an aerial war. Whoever is in the defensive will loose. UAVs are another technological revolution, offering options both upwards (the Global Hawk has the same dimensions as a smallish airliner) and downwards (Micro-UAVs). They have extended the potentials of land, air and sea forces. UAVs have presented possibilities for fighting against targets on the ground, without endangering a crew. They are strategic weapons for (often masked) fighting against special „leadership“ targets, and tactical weapons for fighting against hostile insurgents, troops, weapons and logistics. The USA will also have to take into account that a hostile power will fight their communication, navigation (GPS) and reconnaissance satellites, and thus UAVs are alternatives within the scope of the Passive Relay- and Multi-Platform Technology-Program on the basis of MQ-9 und RQ-4/MQ-4.

