

Twenty-One Years of Conflict: What's Next?

After twenty-one years of conflict in the Middle East and other battlegrounds, the United States Air Force stands as the premier air power around the globe. While America has defended its interests and troops for many years, America must not be complacent when it comes to its defense capabilities. American air strength will continue to be tested by powerful adversaries in the future who hope to topple America's number one spot in the skies. China and growing insurgent groups in the Middle East represent a major foe of the Air Force. To be able to combat them, the Air Force must develop new tactics and technologies. Satellite reconnaissance and air superiority should be pursued to maintain dominance in the air, and the technology of the growing robotics industry must be harnessed to provide more efficient and lethal air power.

America has many different enemies on many different continents. With China becoming one of the greatest adversaries of the United States with the modernization of their army and nearly unlimited manpower, the Air Force will need to battle the Chinese for control of the skies. Air superiority is one of the keys to victory as it provides the military information on enemy positions and equipment, allowing the Air Force to strike at a target quickly in order to protect the other branches on the ground. During the First Gulf War, Iraq had the fourth largest military in the world, but American air superiority annihilated what was considered a powerful military very early on in the war. To maintain such success, SAM (Surface-to-Air Missile) sites and other anti-air weapons must be countered by growing stealth technology. Aircraft developments featuring Lockheed Martin's F-22 Raptor and F-35 Lightning II represent a significant increase in air power with the built-in stealth design assisting in destroying the SAM sites and other aircraft that seek to take control of the skies. With these new stealth weapons and an emphasis on maintaining control of the air, America can decide the course of the war. If Russia or China ever

takes control of the air, American military and civilian centers will be bombed as a result, and information gathering will be nearly impossible. In order to protect civilians at home and our allies abroad, stealth and air superiority is the key to American security.

Another possible breakthrough in achieving total mastery of air power is represented by the growing robotics industry. During the wars in the Middle East, UAV's (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), such as drones, were effective in taking out major targets behind enemy lines and gathering crucial information in the field. While many lives and precious financial assets were destroyed in the line of duty, these UAV's could eliminate manned flights and reduce the casualties of a prolonged conflict with America's adversaries. With the growing industry of self-driving cars and trucks, the future of autonomous fighter jets and planes will help to secure America's service members' lives and improve lethal air strike capabilities. In 2019, Boeing unveiled a new autonomous passenger air vehicle prototype that recently conducted its first test flight, demonstrating the emerging field of unmanned flight and its promise. Already major defense contractors are investing in the possibility of UAV fighter jets that can safely be used with less human cost. Focusing on the possibility of UAV fighters could lead to fewer pilot fatalities and more accurate strikes on enemy positions, therefore increasing lethality and the chance of a shorter war. To maintain American air dominance and effectiveness, investing in UAV technology will need to be prioritized. A robotic war may lie in America's future, and in one where manpower is short against the unlimited manpower of China, robotic aircraft will soar in to fight.

These focuses on stealth aircraft and UAV's will help to maintain American air dominance for years to come. After twenty-one years of war, America has competently flexed its muscles, but only through new technology can the nation continue to win against its adversaries.