

By John A. Tirpak, Senior Editor

## The Leverage of Airpower

**Ryan emphasizes the role of the Air Force in the “enabling” of joint operations.**

**G**EN. Michael E. Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff, doesn't count himself an apostle of the “religion” of aerospace power as potentially the sole engine of US victory in future wars. While he firmly believes in the utter necessity of aerospace dominance by the US, as well as in concepts such as Rapid Halt, he does not agree with the notion that aerospace power may be the only force needed to corral the bad actors of the world.

Discussing with *Air Force Magazine* the concept of Strategic Control, which suggests that conventional aerospace power exclusively may be able to completely subdue an enemy or deter adventurism [see “Strategic Control,” February, p. 20], the Chief of Staff said he does not see the construct as a blueprint for a reorganized US military.

“I'm a ‘joint’ kind of person,” Ryan said. “There's application, I think, for all our forces, and a good rationale for [those] we have on the books today.” If there wasn't, he believes, those without a legitimate mission would have been eliminated during the long defense drawdown since 1985.

“Not that I don't believe that airpower doesn't have huge effects—huge—and not that airpower alone, in some very particular instances, can't bring about Strategic Control,” he added.

However, he's reluctant to argue that airpower can do the job alone, in all circumstances, universally. For him, it's not “a religious tenet. I've been on too many of these operations to ... become a monk, I guess.”

Ryan also discussed the idea of a new “Space Force” that could be split off from USAF to put greater focus on the space mission, as well as the effects on the Air Force's budget if the decline in defense

spending had not been slowed with the Fiscal 2000 budget.

### Huge Clashes No More

“I'm on record,” Ryan asserted, “saying that I think the days of great armies clashing with great armies in huge land battles is over.” If US ground troops are to engage an enemy, it likely will be an enemy that has been “demoralized, defeated, and denuded” by air forces first, he said. If aerospace power doesn't achieve Strategic Control by itself, “it certainly leverages, hugely, the use of other forces.”

The Air Force, he said, contributes to Strategic Control “through our Core Competencies,” which he summarizes as providing freedom from attack, freedom to maneuver, and freedom to attack—to carry the fight directly to the enemy.

This is a crucial enabling mission, and “airpower,” Ryan said, “brings a lot to this Strategic Control.” However, he added, “It doesn't bring everything.”

The Air Force's 1999 Posture Statement—which carries the byline of Ryan and acting Secretary of the Air Force F. Whitten Peters—takes up the enabling theme in almost every section. According to the statement, “From beginning to end, aerospace power enables joint operations.” It begins by providing reconnaissance and intelligence, then moves equipment into position, protects US forces from attack, conducts precision strikes against key targets, and prepares the battlespace for surface forces.

The posture statement refrains from mention of Strategic Control but does stick up for USAF in describing the Halt Phase.

The national strategy, it says, calls for “fast-responding US capabilities to defeat aggression in distant theaters, quickly and decisively. This strategy allows warfighting commanders to seize the initiative, minimize territory that must be won back, and maintain coalition integrity.”

Ryan said that aerospace power offers speed, range, flexibility as well

as “global reach and perspective,” combined with stealth and precision, which make “aerospace power the force of choice to execute the halt.” It does not discuss USAF's potential role in going beyond the halt on its own.

For Ryan, having a credible land force is a constant in the deterrence equation. And even if that land force is not used, its intimidating existence has a significant role to play in Strategic Control, he asserted.

“I believe we need all the forces that we have in our military ... because I think you need the threat of all the forces that we have to bring about a solution—a strategic solution. ... In some cases, you need to bring all the forces to bear. In some cases, in order not to use force, you have to threaten its use.”

And, while Strategic Control represents for him “an interesting concept” that can illuminate the development of future joint strategy, “you have to overlay it with the realities of a particular scenario.”

Ryan spoke before Operation Allied Force had been set in motion. He allowed, though, that in the previous two large-scale military operations in which the US was the key player—Desert Storm in Iraq and Deliberate Force in Bosnia—airpower did indeed afford a measure of Strategic Control.

“In Desert Storm, we had ... over six months of freedom from attack. We had about five months of freedom to maneuver, ... to move forces around the Gulf as we wanted to, move forces around the continent, ... position them in the right place, and, in effect, use ... airpower to set the conditions for a relatively easy victory,” Ryan said. In Deliberate Force—which Ryan himself ran as the commander of NATO's Allied Air Forces Southern Europe—judicious application of airpower brought the Serbs back to the bargaining table and set the stage for the Dayton Accords.

He also acknowledged that a humanitarian operation—such as airlifting relief to victims of Hurricane

Mitch—is a measure of Strategic Control, which was “wrested back ... from the fury of Mother Nature.”

Ryan is uncomfortable with the idea of any of the services promoting itself as the single indispensable force in guaranteeing national security and is even more opposed to the idea of promoting USAF as that one force.

On the one hand, “I don’t think any of the other services would claim” single-handed ability to win wars, Ryan said. On the other, he added, USAF is “not bashful about telling” the national leadership what airpower “is good for.”

The Posture Statement, in fact, concludes by asserting that “aerospace power has become the pre-eminent tool of the National Command Authority.”

He dismisses the notion that the Air Force’s contribution to the nation’s ability to win wars gets short shrift in the Joint Staff organization, despite the glacial pace at which Pentagon modeling and simulation programs are being upgraded to accurately reflect the true contributions of airpower.

No outsider should feel compelled to step in and make the Air Force’s case, because “I don’t see any under-appreciation for the capabilities of

aerospace power” within the Joint Staff, he asserted. He feels impatient with enthusiasts who “want to get these [interservice] fights going. ... I just don’t get into that.”

Having served in key positions in the Joint Staff, as well as a component commander in the field, Ryan said that, while he has seen some “wild ideas” brought into the debate, “I’ve never seen a truly innovative solution that had acceptable risk ... turned down” for consideration either by the Joint Staff or regional commanders in chief, who are the ultimate developers of war plans.

“I don’t see where ... initiative is stifled at all,” he asserted.

“When it comes down to the business we do, and when it’s on the line to actually execute, reasonable men come together with the best solutions,” he asserted.

### **Controversy in Space**

Ryan admits to frustration, though, with partisans who believe space capabilities are not being developed aggressively enough and who see USAF as dragging its feet in exploiting the medium.

“We indeed have been and will be good stewards of space,” Ryan asserted. To either spin off a wholly

new space service or to assign responsibility for space to another branch of the military—as has been suggested by Sen. Bob Smith (R-N.H.), among others—would be, in Ryan’s opinion, a mistake.

Ryan pointed out the multitude of missions performed by satellites—weather, communications, navigation, intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance—and asserted, “I don’t know how you could separate air forces from space forces.”

Air and space integration is “conceptually” a reality and is becoming a practical reality more and more each day, he said.

He noted that the Air Force is pursuing a Moving Target Indicator capability in space—the Discoverer II program—to expand the capabilities now chiefly resident within the fleet of E-8 Joint STARS aircraft.

“It’s not a question of where you do this,” he said. “You want to know whether there are moving targets out there,” and it doesn’t matter whether the information is obtained from space or an airborne platform.

When the space MTI system is in place, it will work together with the airborne systems, he explained.

“When you start separating those things from each other, you have a

hard time integrating them." In addition, "you have advocates that may not be advocating across the spectrum for aerospace superiority."

It takes careful analysis to determine what mix of space and air systems are best to accomplish a mission, Ryan asserted, and he dismissed the "criticism without analysis" that argues for a space-based vs. an air-based system in any given role.

The Air Force carefully "makes the trade-offs" about which functions are best carried out in space or air, "from a fiscal standpoint and a physical standpoint," he said. It then makes "the best investment for the defense of the nation, not the best investment for the medium. And I think we do that very well," Ryan claimed.

Criticisms of USAF's handling of space accounts come from "a very few who are not charged with the day-to-day, life-and-death situations that we are," he said.

He further noted that, despite the defensewide drawdown since 1985, "the only constant, growing aspect of the United States Air Force budget during all those drawdown years was investments in space." As a result, he said, "I dismiss the person who says we don't care" enough about the space mission.

There are always choices to be made with regard to the budget, Ryan said, and, naturally, USAF's desire is always to do more.

"If the argument is, we don't have enough money to do all the things we'd like to do in space, in the Air Force and other places, I absolutely agree," Ryan said. "I wish we could do it all."

To spin off a Space Force, creating a separate bureaucracy and all that goes with it "sucks up dollars, time, and energy" and would only exacerbate the space research and infrastructure funding situation, not improve it, he said.

"If there's more money" for a separate service, Ryan said, "give it to us and we will invest it where we think it's most wise. ... I don't see where creating a whole new bureaucracy gets you any more money for investment in space."

Ryan emphasized that USAF does not pursue space systems for exploration or science, and he asserted that it is the wrong apparatus to conduct such missions.

Rather, USAF pursues space systems, he said, "for the defense of this nation, and we do the trade-offs within [that] context ... not new tech-

nologies for new technologies' sake, nor space for space's sake."

Space, Ryan said, is a medium that "gets the recognition it deserves. ... You cannot do space in isolation of the other things you must do. And to isolate it, I think would be militarily ... incorrect."

### Tyranny of the Thirds

Still, USAF must juggle airpower necessities—like the F-22 and replacements for the F-16 fleet—with

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space requirements that it must underwrite for the benefit of all services, and sometimes for the world, such as the Global Positioning System. Given that, Ryan allows that defense spending priorities perhaps should not be "one-third, one-third, one-third" for the Army, Navy/Marines, and Air Force.

The defense budget now before Congress, Ryan thinks, is a watershed event: a recognition that more than a decade of decline has imperiled the capability of the services to carry out their missions and that a reconstruction period is in order.

The Air Force was allowed to keep the windfall savings from record low fuel prices and lower-than-expected inflation. Those, plus topline additions, led to an Air Force budget in Fiscal 2000 that is \$2.5 billion larger than originally planned. Normally such savings go back to the Treasury. If that had happened this year, said Ryan, there would have been drastic and painful additional cuts to USAF.

"If we had not got the \$2.5 billion, ... we would have had to take down some force structure, delay modernization, and we would not have stopped the readiness decline," he explained.

Readiness, which has fallen steeply, mostly in stateside units, is only

arrested at low levels, and it would take further infusions of money to even start working it back up to the levels seen during the Gulf War and shortly thereafter.

In a letter to the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Floyd D. Spence (R-S.C.), Ryan noted that the \$2.5 billion in funding was exactly half the amount he testified last fall would be needed over and above planned spending to meet all USAF priorities.

"Even with the \$2.5 billion, we haven't done all the readiness, modernization, and people things we wanted," Ryan added.

### Postscript: Allied Force

In March 18 testimony on Capitol Hill, a few days before bombs began to fall, Ryan made clear his view that the incipient NATO air attacks on Yugoslavia would prove to be difficult and dangerous work.

The Air Force Chief told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee that Belgrade's extensive network of Soviet-made air defense radars and mobile surface-to-air missile launchers posed risks to aircraft carrying out Operation Allied Force, which began on March 24.

Ryan, who in 1995 commanded Operation Deliberate Force against Serbian targets in Bosnia, said Yugoslavia was a much tougher nut to crack.

Its air defenses, said Ryan, shaped up as "two to three times" more muscular than those in Bosnia.

"This is a very substantive air defense capability," reported Ryan, "not just within Kosovo but within the whole Yugoslav land mass. It is an integrated, redundant system consisting of SA-2s, SA-3s, SA-6s, many radar-guided capable surface-to-air missiles. It is also heavily defended with [anti-aircraft artillery] in strategic locations. ...

"It is deep and redundant. And the VJ, the Yugoslav army, is a very professional army and air defense corps. ... They [the Bosnian Serbs] were good, but these guys are very good. So taking on these defenses with airpower, which was one of your initial questions, will not be easy. It will take a very serious campaign against those systems."

Ryan added, "There's no assurance that we won't lose aircraft in trying to take on those air defenses. ... There is a distinct possibility we will lose aircraft in trying to penetrate those defenses." ■