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THE AIR

POWER ROLE IN ASIA

(status, trends)

Krzysztof Załęski

Zdzisław Śliwa

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INTRODUCTION

Asia is relatively quiet continent as for now, although there are many developments and disputes ongoing, which could evolve into crisis situation in a very short period of time. As the world powers are preoccupied with emerging and ongoing crises in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Afghanistan the growing military capabilities of major Asian nations are an indicator of their concerns about future security. So, recognizing high potential for a change of the current balanced situation and carefully observing each other, the leading Asian powers, and also US, constantly present in the Pacific region, are progressively investing into military instrument of power to ensure continuity of economic development to meet their political and economy goals along with respective nations' citizens' expectations. At the same time, the military is a tool to preserve national position within political landscape of the continent. For some nations, especially India and China, but also Russia as Eurasian entity, the military build-up is also a vehicle to gain regional importance with global ambitions stretching far behind their national borders and furthermore beyond so called "near borders". The important factor in that domain is a need to develop force projection capabilities to defend respective countries, to strengthen deterrence factor and also to possess long range attack abilities to strike any opponent from a distance. In such the case special attention is focused on air force and navy and other land based long-range weapon systems, including nuclear forces as major deterrence factor. Such the developments are especially visible in allocation of resources and weapon procurement in India, China and Russia, but it is also linked with the US strategic shift from Europe into Pacific region.

Currently two major Asian nations, China and India, are continuing economic growth and their GDP are estimated to grow respectively about 7.1% and 5.5% in 2015. It is closely observed by other nations as the significant beneficent of funds are armed forces of both nations and they are supposed to play a fundamental role in solving regional problems. It is causing concerns of many smaller countries being afraid of unilateral regional domination in the future. Especially as the nations are proud of the economic development increasingly presenting ability and will to influence the outside world. Their comprehensive approach to force build-up has an important impact on other entities in the region. One of consequences is arms race and investment in modern technologies to enhance deterrence effect against

possible future ambitions of opponents to engage them. Such the military developments and growing assertiveness in the region is influencing smaller nations' foreign policy as they need to decide what policy to select: to balance or bandwagon when facing a threat. One of effects is the will to enter or enlarge further coalition with other players as it is the case of Japan, Australia, and South Korea and lately Philippines as their main ally is USA. Also other nations are trying to enhance security using such the approach.

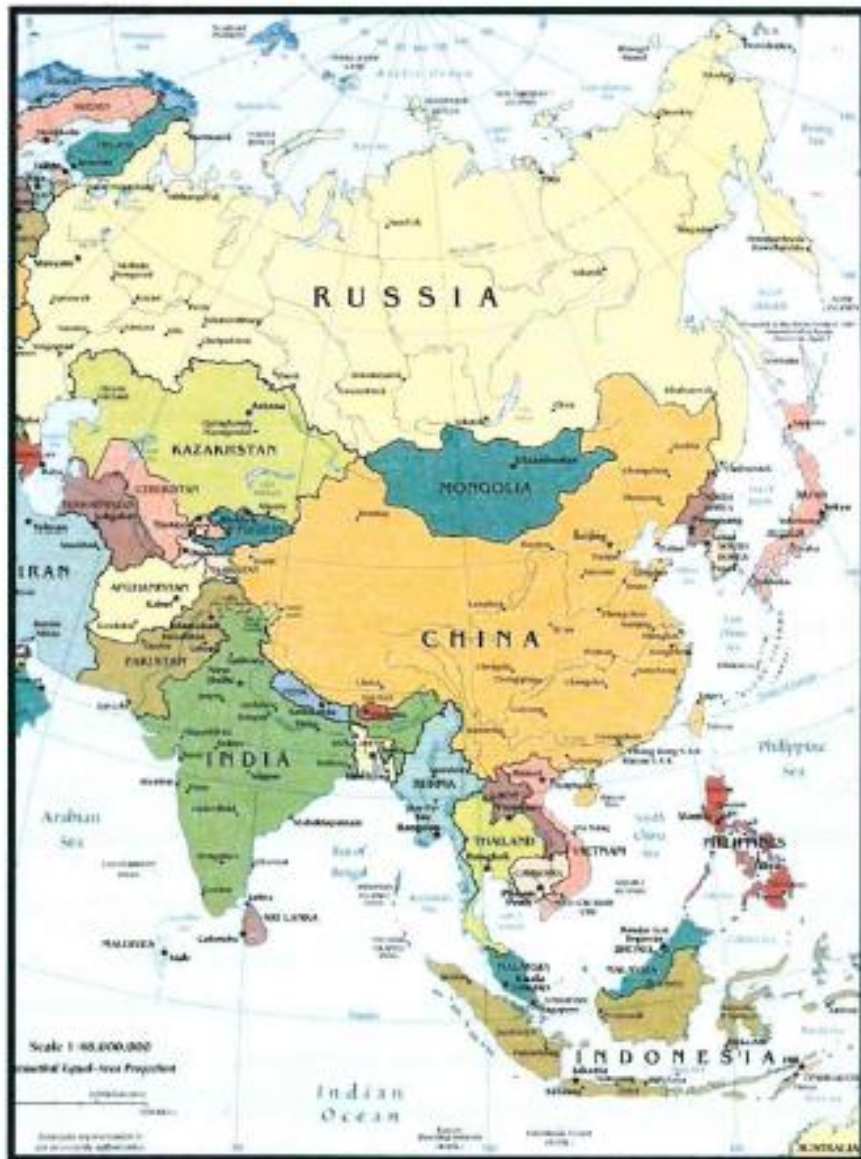


Fig. 1. Asia - political map

Source: *Asia, the political map 2008* used with courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/txu-oclc-247232986-asia_pol_2008.jpg [accessed: 16 October 2014].

Taking into account geostrategy of Asian continent it is observable that among services of respective armed forces especially navy and air force as strategic components are subject of modernization, as they are providing more and more needed force projection capabilities. They are providing necessary tools for coastal nations to build anti-access and area denial capabilities. It is directly linked with the importance of oceans and seas for the continent along with vast land territories and difficult and differing landscape.

The special attention in the book has been dedicated to air force as that service has been key player during last conflicts (Iraq, Libya, support to fight Islamic State) being major facilitator of follow-on success of land operations. In Iraq, the air component was key component of any joint force to degrade opposing forces combat power, to destroy command and control structures, to devastate military infrastructure to the level, which was enabling blitz victories with minimum casualties. In Libya and also when fighting the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria it was major contributor and the most effective instrument to support Kurdish fighters and friendly armed forces. For political reasons and because of the limited willingness to risk deployment of ground forces it was also only solution during the initial phase of supporting the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, the Iraqi government and Shia allied militias. Similar situation happened in Libya when NATO's airpower, by imposing a no-fly zone and targeting regime forces by air strikes, was key enabler of success of an uprising against the dictatorship there. Moreover, air force role was important factor to effectively support the Northern Alliance offensive against Taliban forces leading to victory and later to support US and NATO operations there; in follow on operations the support for ISAF¹ was the major enabler ensuring overwhelming advantage over opponent.

Nevertheless, the military art is evolving also in relation to air forces and that service must adapt to new warfare requirements in the sharply changing operational environment in which operational factors: time, space, force, are asking for open minded approach. Such the mind-set is supported by technological improvements asking for closer research of changes to use all available assets as effectively as possible. The cases mentioned before are proving the value of Air Power

¹ ISAF - the International Security Assistance Force is the NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan. It was established by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 (2001).

as integral component of any combined joint force, but it must be done carefully as some lessons learned from local conflicts should cause air force's enthusiasts to be vigilant. For example, after the second war in Lebanon in 2006, former head of the Israeli Defence Force Northern Command Maj. Gen., (ret.) Levin said "the notion that wars could be won solely by long-distance firepower particular air power, had led to another misguided notion; that there was no longer any need for a large well-trained reserve army."² Similarly, Avi Korber, from Bar-Ilan University's Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, was claiming that "over the past few years the thinking has been that air power along with special forces, could do everything in both high- and low-intensity conflict. The illusion that battlefield victory could be achieved by air power alone crept on."³ Those experiences, among other factors, are requiring realistic research about the role and capabilities in the relation to air forces to prepare it for the future conflicts. The last conflicts have been carefully observed and analysed in depth by military leadership of all Asian armed forces. They have recognized the importance of the air power as critical constituent of any modern armed forces when engaging both conventional and unconventional enemy. In the case of Asia such the conventional and asymmetric threats are equally important as the internal security and external stabilization in all the nations are still fragile. It has caused the dynamic development of air forces of regional armed forces as integral component of joint forces providing required advantages to strike deep and to project power.

The purpose of the book is to present the current status and the main directions of the development of air forces of selected Asian nations in the context of regional security. This is since air force proved to be critical component of contemporary operations to face any type of opposing force; although it was noticeable that end state of any of them was the effect of conducting joint operations, often as combined effort of a few nations. The initial research is supporting the thesis that air force is and will be such the essential component in the future warfare and it is related also to Asian countries. The observation is that those nations' air forces are rather old-fashion service suffering from shortage of modern weapon systems

² L. Susser, *Closing Ranks: Series of critical reports to the Israeli Defence Forces' failure in the second war in Lebanon, citing poor professional training, mistaken military philosophy and misguided values and principles*, The Jerusalem Report 08 January 2007, p. 11. The underline provided by the Authors.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and only few of them are developing that service to face the future threats and challenges. Land and maritime disputes among them in vast territories of Asia are asking for possession of reliable forces projection capabilities and it is not fully met as for now. However, the nations are dedicated to close that capability gap within available resources based on lessons learned from last military conflicts. At the same time, the unequal progress among nations in that domain is urging creation of alliances based on evolving threat of renewed hostilities.

The publication consists of 9 chapters. The first chapter is focusing on portraying overall politic – military in Asia with the focus on security challenges, which are involving major regional powers, namely China, India, Japan and Russia. Additionally, US position toward regional matters is provided as the nation is playing significant role there as an ally or potential opponent for many countries. The next chapter is broadly examining lessons learned related to last military conflicts with special focus on the role and capabilities of air forces within combined joint framework. The next six chapters are discussing air forces of selected nations, namely those of China, India, Japan, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Taiwan and also Russian Federation and the United States of America. The focus is on presenting the current status of 2014 and the main trends of their modernization. Each chapter is summarized to recognize regional implications of such the endeavours. Chapter nine is giving an overview and comparison of air forces in respective Asian nations including capabilities of combat and special mission platforms. Finally, conclusions and implications are providing final remarks based on the research done in the context of the intent of the book. The text and major observations are supplemented by selected figures and tables as visualization and source to make comparisons. Moreover, annexes are linked with presenting selected aircraft and locations related to air forces. The bibliography is based on books, reports, research reports but also on air force related magazines and Internet sites to make the study as current and reliable as possible. It is worth of notice that quite often the data in recognized opinion making sources differ complicating drawing the clear and unequivocal picture.

Information about the Authors

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Maj. Gen. Ret. navigator Ph. D. Krzysztof Załęski – Graduate of Polish Air Force Academy in Dęblin of year 1980. He is also graduate of Polish General Staff Academy and Air War College in Maxwell, USA. In the year 1997 he has defended his doctoral dissertation at Polish National Defense Academy in the field of aviation tactics. His military duty was mostly dedicated to air force, where he worked on problems of reconnaissance and use of the air force in military operations.

He was responsible, being the head of the Planning Centre in the Armed Forces Operational Command, for planning and organizing of Polish Military Contingents. He was also responsible for organizing the Armed Forces training system as a deputy chief of Training Command in General Staff. Since 2007 he was the Chief of Staff – Deputy Commander of the Polish Air Forces.

He is the author of numerous papers and articles in the field of defense strategy, national security and operational use of air force. He has extensive professional experience resulting from serving on many positions in air force and other military institutions. Since the year 2010, after the military service, he works as a professor at Polish Air Force Academy. In 2015 he was appointed to the position of vice-rector for development and international cooperation.

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