

European Air Power: Challenges and Opportunities. Edited by John Andreas Olsen. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2014.

Mel Deaile
American Military University

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pp. 128-129

Recommended Citation

Deaile, Mel. "European Air Power: Challenges and Opportunities. Edited
by John Andreas Olsen. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2014.." *Journal of
Strategic Security* 7, no. 4 (2014) : 128-129.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.7.4.12>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol7/iss4/13>

***European Air Power: Challenges and Opportunities.* Edited by John Andreas Olsen. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2014. ISBN 978-1-612-34681-6. Glossary. Notes. Sources cited. Index. Pp. xxxiv, 278. \$34.95.**

John Andreas Olsen serves a colonel in the Royal Norwegian Air Force currently assigned to the Norwegian Ministry of Defense, and, according to the book jacket, is a visiting professor at the Swedish National Defense College. For over a decade, Olsen has written and published on American air power beginning with his 2003 examination of the Gulf War. His past contributions include a biography of Colonel John Warden and most recently an edited volume on some of American's most famous air commanders. In this edited work, Olsen focuses his attention on European and Nordic air power.

The rationale for Olsen's latest contribution echoes that of John Warden's, namely that "air power is, and will remain, quintessentially a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for conflict resolution" (xviii). For Olsen and his contributors, the argument is not just about technological advancements or tactics, but the level of analysis should be deeper. Olsen argues that "mastery of the air profession includes knowledge of the strategic history of air power, insight into air power's strengths and weaknesses, and the ability to think conceptually and strategically" (xxi). Although Olsen and his contributors detail the history of European air power, they stress the need for professional competence above all whether a small, medium, or large air power nation.

This work is divided up into three sections. In the first part Olson has his native contributors examine four European countries: France, Germany, Turkey, and England. The reason for the selection of these countries is the same. They are currently the four top air power nations in the region and each country plans to purchase an advanced fighter-bomber in the near future. More importantly, several of these countries participated in Operation Odyssey Dawn, which saw the European powers lead the effort to protect the Libyan people from Muammar Gaddafi's efforts to thwart the Arab Spring uprising in his country. While each section has uniqueness, a common theme runs through the narrative, which is how each nation struggles with funding new acquisitions in the face of constrained budgets.

In the second part of the book, Olsen's contributors turn their analytic eye towards the author's Nordic homeland. According to the editor, these countries were selected a different common thread. "These countries have comparable populations and resources and, as small air power nations, must all make hard choices regarding where to direct their resources in terms of air power capabilities" (xxv). In a break from the unbiased view presented in section one,

the Nordic section of the work relies on the assessment of the individual air chiefs of the respective countries. As with most countries, these small air power nations face the problem of maintaining a force in a constrained environment.

Even if European or Nordic air forces are not of interest to the reader, many will find the final section of the book an intriguing read. Olsen enlisted air power advocate Air Vice Marshall of the Royal Air Force R. A. Mason and noted historian and author Martin Van Creveld to offer their insights on the future of air power not only in these countries, but writ large. Van Creveld, echoing the argument of his book, *The Age of American Air Power*, starts the debate. His main argument is that the importance of manned aircraft peaked during World War II and has been decreasing as the reliance on unmanned aircraft has increased. Going forward, Van Creveld postulates, the need to fight counterinsurgencies will rely less on manned aircraft and more on helicopters and unmanned aerial systems. Furthermore, he opines, given the high cost of aircraft in today's fiscally constrained environment, medium to small countries like those examined in this work would be better served pursuing missiles, drones, and space architecture to support these operations.

Marshall argues nearly the exact opposite. As expected, he points out that nothing will replace the ingenuity of the human mind, which goes in line with the central premise of this work that professional competence and the mind are more important than technological advancement. In arguing his position, Mason notes that the systems needed to operate drones, namely cyber links, are vulnerable to attack, which may mean that man is the last line of defense. Finally, as expected of an air power advocate, Mason highlights that the importance of air superiority will never go away.

Whether someone has an interest in a history of European or Nordic air power, or wants a lively debate on the history of air power, that person will find all the above in John Olsen's latest air power offering. Each work in the edited volume is well-sourced, well-written, and nicely argued. Every air power historian as well as those involved in the deciding the future of air power acquisitions will gather incredible insights from the difficult decisions these medium and small air power nations have made and will need to make in the future.

Mel Deaile, *American Military University*