

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

A scholarly journal is the historical record of the human mind exploring novel ideas and testing the veracity of those ideas against what has already been imagined and proven or disproven. The final, honed expression of these ideas is the result of a lengthy gestation period that includes reviews by one's peers in the relevant field or fields of study, and then edits from developmental, substantive, and grammar and syntax perspectives, all intended to enhance clarity and excellence in expression.

The other components of a journal such as *Æther: A Journal of Strategic Airpower & Spacepower*—cover, masthead, table of contents, fonts, text placement, and graphics—are the patient, detailed work of expert production professionals and the artistic hand and mind of skilled illustrators. Finally, journals appear online and are promoted on social media due to innovative web designers and marketing experts.

It's a labor of love, intellect, and fine tuning on the part of the authors, but it also represents a deep investment of time and expertise by a number of other professionals. With this in mind, Team *Æther* is proud to introduce its Fall 2024 issue.

As you will read in the following pages, the military forces of the world find themselves in this third decade of the twenty-first century at the dawn of a new era in air and ground domain control, superiority, and supremacy. The war in Ukraine has been a clarion call regarding the role of small, uncrewed air systems in today's battlespace and, if possible, raising more questions than ready answers about the future of combat. As some of the authors here have noted, the US Air Force in particular is looking at the effective end of 70 years of uncontested global air superiority with the tragic death of three service members in January in a Houthi drone attack in western Syria.

In a scholarly vein, this dedicated issue of *Æther* presents a number of curated ideas regarding the future of airpower, and more specifically, what notions of air superiority, air supremacy, and air dominance mean in the near, mid-, and long terms.

The Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force General James Slife leads the issue, calling attention to the fact that the rise of small, uncrewed air vehicles requires the Air Force to examine and answer the question of how it works with sister services to accomplish the missions that lie ahead. Kelly Grieco and Max Bremer, whose 2021 *Parameters* article first coined the term *air littoral*, argue for open innovation, multiuse technology, and

perpetual vigilance, as well as learning from adversaries' development of new technology, new strategies, and the inevitable failures and weaknesses in combat execution.

Advances in technology and sufficient production require consistent and persistent funding. Jennifer Kavanagh proposes a new business model that prioritizes capabilities over programs and production at scale with a workforce equipped to perpetually upgrade systems and software. Michael Kreuzer then moves the discussion to the underlying assumptions themselves: namely, what is airpower today, and crucially, do we need airpower to win? Asked differently, does air superiority guarantee victory in a battlespace increasingly fought at the level of the air littoral? These questions beg another, raised recently by Nora Bensahel and David Barno—whither the Air Force itself?

David Giffen picks up this thread, calling for the Army to be assigned ownership of the key terrain of this horizontal and vertical liminal space—the air littoral—thus providing ground force commanders the capabilities and authority to successfully execute combat operations. Indeed, the liminality of this space is key. Branden Gulick concludes the dedicated issue with an exploration of notions of irregular warfare and complexity as methods to rethink the air littoral, which is at once a cognitive and physical space.

As always, on behalf of Team *Æther*, thank you for taking the time to read our dedicated issue. If you find the ideas presented herewith useful or you find them wanting, please feel free to submit a well-reasoned and researched response for publication consideration.

~The Editor

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