



Viktoriya Fedorchak. *Understanding Contemporary Air Power.* New York: Routledge, 2020. 218 pp. \$42.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-138-39380-6.

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In just two hundred brief and accessible pages, Viktoriya Fedorchak somehow manages to provide the broadest and widest-ranging introduction to airpower I have yet seen. I only wish it had been available when I started learning about airpower. Fedorchak touches on everything from female retention in air forces to air superiority and the future of airpower.

There is no overarching argument, but that is understandable given her approach. There are several consistent themes, however. They include the increasing importance of multidomain operations, a warning not to embrace technology uncritically, and a commitment to providing as many perspectives as possible in one volume in order to understand contemporary air power in “different operating environments.” Taken together, perhaps one might identify an overarching goal of “distinguish[ing] between enduring features and situational factors” (p. 1).

Fedorchak, a military historian, has previously published *British Air Power: The Doctrinal Path to Jointery* (2019) and currently teaches at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Her book provides several introductory chapters to orient the reader, setting out essentials like the importance of connecting strategy to political objectives as well as a chapter surveying key trends in airpower thinking from its inception to today. A

subsequent chapter stresses the importance of enduring political will to the successful application of airpower, a theme that obviously has significant relevance to her focus on contemporary airpower.

She then divides the majority of her remaining chapters into three conceptual areas of airpower application: conventional airpower, airpower in counterinsurgencies, and airpower in peace-keeping operations. The counterinsurgency chapter’s examples range from the Malayan emergency to ISIS. It also includes more unexpected counterinsurgencies including the Russian employment of airpower against Chechnya. Likewise, the chapter on peace-keeping operations ventures into brief but wide-ranging case studies from Bosnia to the Congo. For peace-keeping operations to receive an entire chapter is a departure from traditional airpower histories, which tend to favor the highly kinetic and conventional above all else, but this chapter certainly merits inclusion in a work on contemporary airpower.

Fedorchak even contextualizes contemporary airpower in themes of larger civil-military relations and society as a whole, including an unexpected but intriguing—albeit brief as expected given the page count—discussion of post-heroic warfare. In addition to those topics, a strength of the work is that it is not excessively centered on the US Air Force, as can be typical. Rather, the author sur-

veys a number of air forces, including Russia's, China's, Great Britain's, France's, and Sweden's. She also includes some discussion of space power that is proportional to the other themes she covers; she even includes naval aviation, an often omitted consideration in many land-centric airpower tomes.

For the most part, there is little to critique about the book except minor elements and interpretations, but these do not distract from the work as a whole. At one point, for example, the author draws on one of her common themes—the importance of “inter-domain integration” as the “key to success” in World War II—but then immediately begins discussing the overwhelming importance of the Battle of Britain, which is notable for being largely an air-only operation (p. 69). One may also quibble, for example, with the suggestion that close air support provided a “substantial advantage” in the Gulf War (pp. 75, 77) since interdiction far outweighed close air support in employment. Again, though, these minor distractions are rare in a work that manages to provide a balanced treatment of airpower to include discussions of capabilities and limitations.

This book is recommended for a wide audience, including scholars, analysts, and students as early as beginning undergraduates, as it should be accessible to anyone with the most basic understanding of the military. Chapters conclude with helpful discussion questions and suggested reading. Even those quite familiar with airpower already may benefit from the wide-ranging mix of intellectual themes, practical coverage of air forces, and recent case studies that she interweaves into her account. Fedorchak truly has provided an impressive introduction to contemporary air power that merits reading.

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