

1993

In My View

William T. Sabata
U.S. Army

H. C. Spies
U.S. Marine Corps

T. X. Hammes
U.S. Marine Corps

Anthony Harrigan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Sabata, William T.; Spies, H. C.; Hammes, T. X.; and Harrigan, Anthony (1993) "In My View," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 46 : No. 2, Article 10.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss2/10>

This Additional Writing is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

IN MY VIEW . . .

"Giulio Douhet Vindicated: Desert Storm 1991"

Sir,

I read Lieutenant Colonel Jones's Autumn 1992 "Set and Drift" essay with great interest ("Giulio Douhet Vindicated: Desert Storm 1991"). I think he makes some interesting points about the application of Douhet's theories to the victory of Desert Storm, but I feel he overstates his case to claim that the air campaign won the war all by itself. I was present at some of the briefings by Air Force officers on how the air campaign would be fought, and during the air campaign served on the USARCENT mobile command post staff, where the results of the campaign were reviewed daily. I do not argue the results of the air campaign, and saw some of the destruction first hand in Kuwait. But Colonel Jones seems to assume that whether or not the ground campaign kicked off, the Iraqi leadership had decided by the end of February 1991 to evacuate Kuwait and concede all points of contention to the coalition forces.

It wasn't until after the ground campaign began that substantial numbers of Iraqi troops moved out of Kuwait. Some time on the night of the 25th and early the morning of the 26th, panic at being trapped in Kuwait spread through the Iraqi forces stationed there. This panic and subsequent rout were caused by the sweep of the armored divisions into the Euphrates Valley and towards Basra. It was only at that point that victory could be said to be assured. While the Air Force created those conditions that caused the rout to exist, it was the movement of land forces that ultimately led to victory.

Colonel Jones errs, I believe, because he fails to fully consider the political and morale dimensions of the Gulf War during the air campaign. From the political point of view, it appeared to the Iraqi leadership that in time world

138 Naval War College Review

opinion, former allies, or Arab nationalism could be used to gain a political advantage despite the losses caused by the coalition air forces. From the morale point of view, the air campaign failed to produce the isolation of ground forces necessary to break their will to resist. The rapid ground advance effectively eliminated the option of mobilizing world opinion since Iraqi territory was now being lost rapidly. The realization that they would be trapped and cut off was the match that ignited the panic and rout of Iraqi troops on 25–26 February.

To say that the air arm was decisive is not to say that it won the war all by itself. If Colonel Jones wishes to argue that another two weeks of air bombardment would have met all political objectives, he will have to be more persuasive. While the lessons of Desert Storm are numerous, the idea that air power alone can “win a war” is not one of them.

William T. Sabata
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army

Sir,

Lieutenant Colonel Jones provided an excellent account of the merits of air power and an abstract of Douhet’s theories of air warfare adapted to Desert Storm. However, a few misleading and perhaps erroneous conclusions exist, depending on your perspective—ground, air, or that of an air-ground task force.

First, the use of the term “air campaign,” although routinely used since Desert Storm, is too expansive. This war had a series of ground, sea, and air battles which all contributed to accomplishing the mission. The enticement to expand any of these series of battles to a campaign status is wrong.

Second, the destruction of many of the strategic targets in the first day of the war was significant and noteworthy. The idea that this destruction supports an argument that “the war had been won” ignores the subsequent air, ground, and sea assets utilized to free Kuwait.

Third, air power was powerful and decisive in Desert Storm. But it did not destroy the enemy, it simply contributed to the CinC’s objective to expel Iraq from Kuwait. Iraq’s military has been severely damaged, it has not been destroyed.

Finally, the concept that the aircraft, a machine, can win a war by itself is ludicrous. People win wars. Some people walk the earth, others ride the seas, and still others fly their aircraft, and each contributes to winning the war. Remember, you can bomb, shell, and rule the skies over your objective, but it is not secured until you or your allies can move unconstrained throughout the land. If anyone believes Kuwait could have been liberated with air power alone—talk to a Kuwaiti national.

H.C. Spies
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

Sir,

In your Autumn 1992 issue, Lieutenant Colonel J.F. Jones, USAF, wrote a short piece entitled "Giulio Douhet Vindicated: Desert Storm 1991." The central theme of his piece is the same thesis Douhet presented in 1921. He states "the airplane is the supreme offensive weapon. It is not an inherently supportive creature—it can win wars all by itself."

Lt. Col. Jones's article is simply the latest in a very long series of essays by air power proponents to elevate airpower to a war-winning, stand-alone element. Very similar articles were written by air power proponents after World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

In each, the theme remained the same. Each stated that the technological developments demonstrated in the last conflict had finally vindicated Douhet. (For a complete discussion of this phenomenon, see Barry D. Watts' *Foundations of Air Doctrine*.)

Unfortunately, just as Douhet was wrong in 1921, Lt. Col. Jones is wrong in 1992. Desert Storm, 1991, proved conclusively that, short of using nuclear weapons, air power cannot be decisive by itself.

Consider the following facts about Desert Storm:

- Coalition forces had nearly six months to build a political coalition, deploy forces, stockpile weapons, and conduct mission-specific, focused training.
- The infrastructure—in the form of ports, highways, and air bases—in Southwest Asia is superior to that of virtually any other area of comparable size on earth.
- The infrastructure and time combined to allow the coalition to build an extremely large force—much larger, in fact, than can be envisioned in any other scenario.
- In addition to significant numerical superiority, the Allied airmen held a clear technological edge in every aspect of air warfare.
- The Allied pilots held a huge advantage in training, quality, and aggressiveness over the Iraqi pilots.
- The Iraqis were essentially passive enemies who made numerous mistakes. They deployed a force mix that played directly to the strength of the Allied forces; made no major attempts to attack Allied infrastructure despite the obvious vulnerabilities of crowded ports, flight lines of aircraft parked wingtip-to-wingtip, and large munitions dumps at various locations; suffered from inflexible leadership at all levels; led a force of poorly motivated conscripts against highly motivated professionals; and allowed the Allied forces to dictate the time, place, and type of fight in virtually every instance.
- The open terrain was virtually ideal for a dominant air power to attack and destroy essentially stationary ground targets.
- After almost six months to prepare, Allied air power had thirty-nine days to conduct uninterrupted attacks with an overwhelming air force supported by a virtually ideal infrastructure against a passive enemy.

140 Naval War College Review

Yet despite this situation, a situation vastly more favorable than can be envisioned for any future war, air power *did not* win by itself. Similarly, while ground forces were required to complete the job, they did *not* win the war by themselves. It was a well planned *joint* effort that won.

Given that air power could not win under these virtually ideal conditions, how can air power proponents say it will win unassisted when either some or all of these conditions change significantly in the next fight?

The bottom line is that Douhet was wrong in 1921. WWII, Korea, and Vietnam showed clearly that Douhet's theory was fatally flawed. Yet after each conflict, air power enthusiasts insisted that if only political or technical constraints were overcome, air power would be decisive. Their arguments did not stand up to scrutiny. Neither does Lt. Col. Jones's.

Desert Storm shows Douhet is still wrong. His adherents have had their best shot. It is time air power enthusiasts move away from the view of the Air Force as a decisive force. Instead, as professionals, they must address the real issue concerning air power.

Simply put, forget which force is decisive in which war. Instead, learn how they can best integrate air power's exceptional capabilities into the joint warfighting effort to insure victory.

T.X. Hammes

Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

The Myth of Service Integration

Sir,

The 50th anniversary of the U.S. victory at Midway, the most significant naval victory since the battle of Salamis in 480 B.C., passed with only a limited amount of public notice. The unhappy fact is that Americans seem to have lost a sense of on-going national peril, despite turmoil in several global regions. They also have a tragically diminished understanding of America's role as a maritime power and the importance of sea power in the future.

Since the Midway anniversary, steps have been taken to substantially reduce Americas's naval forces by 1995. At the same time, the U.S. Navy has been subjected to massive, unfair criticism because of a single incident in which a small group of officers forgot that they were supposed to act as officers and gentlemen. The furor in the media has obscured the enormous contributions the naval service is making in the post-Cold War world. The country was quick to call on the Navy to stand by for action from the Adriatic to the Persian Gulf in the tense summer of 1992. The Navy offers the massive sea-based projection power,

that makes it unnecessary for the U.S. to deploy large ground forces or establish air bases on foreign territory. Deployment of powerful ground forces creates the possibility of heavy casualties in protracted engagements, something the American people and Congress don't want to risk.

The lack of awareness of the importance of sea power is tragic. Strategic maturity in our time means recognition of the importance of a sea-based defense strategy. Moreover, many nations are gaining new naval capabilities. Formerly Soviet naval forces are still in existence. This blue-water threat could reemerge if Russia or the former Soviet republics return to a totalitarian or authoritarian system as a result of internal disorder.

Unfortunately, in recent years the U.S. has failed to produce the naval writers who could explain the contemporary relevance of sea power. As a result, a myth has developed that the ideal defense arrangement is the integration of the services into a single service. This myth has flourished since the end of World War II. The National Security Act of 1947 stabilized the situation for decades—until passage of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation in the 1980s. Congress forgot that a major factor in the German failure in wartime was their centralized, land-oriented command structure, which prevented full exploitation of naval opportunities. So what did Congress do but adopt a rigid, centralized, Prussian-style command structure which prevents service chiefs from having direct access to the Commander in Chief. This surely will cost the American people dearly in future conflicts.

In the wake of this legislation, the media is pressing for more centralization. The current buzz word is "jointness." Certainly, naval leaders understand the requirements of joint operations. But students of naval power properly fear the blurring of service responsibilities and capabilities. "Jointness," as currently being interpreted, threatens to diminish public understanding of the unique importance of a sea-based strategy for the United States. The notion jeopardizes America's maritime superiority. The Goldwater-Nichols plan deprives the Commander in Chief of important checks and balances in defense planning. The great strategic imperative of our time is to restore by law the service chiefs' access to the Commander in Chief.

Anthony Harrigan
Washington, D.C.

