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# Strategic Bombing in World War II: The Story of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey

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While the stated objectives may appear applicable only to the statesman, they are significantly important to the apolitical majority. This is a study which should be read and used by officers in our armed forces, civilian decisionmakers, and any citizen who seeks a reconciliation of fact and fiction regarding "ours" and "theirs"

Part I provides a statistical base documenting the quantitative balance of forces which has noticeably shifted to the Soviet Union over the past decade. Additionally, a qualitative assessment is made and technological superiority lists offered to stimulate the reader.

Part II examines the statistical imbalances, traces their origins and analyzes the notions and ideas which have formulated our present defense policy in contrast with that of the U.S.S.R. Of significant interest is a tabular presentation of U.S. aims followed by the "key shortcomings" entailed by those aims. The disparity between "ends and means" is objectively assessed and the shortcomings factually supported. While comparisons continue throughout, the major focus is on the U.S. problems and U.S. solutions.

Part III suggests options and alternatives to match realistic ends with limited means and bring U.S. policy in consonance with our aims and means to achieve them. The primary strength of this appeal is that it is nonbudgetary; it is keyed to the essential issues, and suggests answers to the questions which face our Congress as defense decisionmakers. Prevailing U.S. policy creates asymmetries, makes the balance a more illusive goal, is inherently inefficient in matching ends with means, and its nature is often reactive, not active. The solution:

Step One is to ascertain real requirements, predicated on imperative U.S. interests, objectives, and commitments.

Step Two is to reshape U.S. force structure, defense policies and

fund allocations so they correspond.

Steps One and Two are premised on the fact that adjusting the budget is the last option, not the first.

This Committee Print serves as a singularly valuable reference tool for anyone confused, or frightened by, or ignorant of the current U.S./Soviet military balance. Bolstered by a thorough index, supporting appendices, and a complete glossary, it is an objective, well-organized, genuinely interesting work which is unquestionably helpful in understanding the often asked and usually unanswered U.S./Soviet military balance question, "Who's ahead?"

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Lieutenant, U.S. Navy

MacIsaac, David. *Strategic Bombing in World War II: The Story of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976. 231pp.

David MacIsaac prefaces this informative study of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey with a quotation from von Ranke: "Let no one pity a man who devotes himself to studies apparently so dry . . . It is true that the companions of his solitary hours are but lifeless paper, but they are the remnants of the life of ages past." In this case Lieutenant Colonel MacIsaac need not have been so modest in his claims for the vitality of his subject matter. The issues of strategic bombing to which the Survey members addressed themselves over 30 years ago are very live ones indeed, as witness the controversy about the bombing of North Vietnam and, even more recently, the debate about flexible options. His book describing the first major attempt to get at the difficult questions of fact and logic involved in the use of strategic airpower, is not simply about the remnants of the life of ages past, but is part of the baby book of the U.S. Air Force.

*Strategic Bombing in World War II* is a welcome work on an important and

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pertinent subject. The Strategic Bombing Survey compiled the standard reference work on the effects of bombing in World War II. Since it was a commentary on conventional weapons with only a brief report on the atomic attacks, the Survey seemed to become obsolete almost immediately with the advent of nuclear weapons. This impression has proved to be wrong. Scholars and policymakers still refer to the Survey for evidence to support their various and often conflicting views about conventional and nuclear weapons. Such use of the Survey raises the questions which are the focus of MacIsaac's book: What are the origins, nature, methods, and limits of the inquiry begun in the middle of the oil transportation debate in 1944 and completed amidst the "great Anderson-Navy war" in 1947? The book provides a wealth of information to answer these questions.

That the Survey began and ended in disputes about the decisiveness of airpower should not be surprising. It was intended to be a searching critique of "the whole bomber offensive, essentially on the basis of the postwar necessity for an authoritative and unbiased answer to the inevitable question, 'Who won the war?'" For the Army Air Forces to propose to answer a question phrased in such terms reflects the faith that an unbiased answer exists, accessible to men of goodwill, and favorable to the strategic bombing effort. This faith was present in large quantities in the AAF in the spring of 1944, when for a while, it seemed that strategic bombing might turn OVERLORD into a mopping up of German forces rather than a forced landing on a hostile shore. Significantly for the Survey, this faith both provided the impetus for an investigation of strategic bombing and accounted for much of the bitterness of the oil transportation debate that spring, in which the AAF's plans for use of the strategic air forces were

overruled by Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force.

The question of decisiveness, phrased as "who won the war?" casts the attempt to answer it, no matter how unbiased, into the intellectual meat grinder of interservice rivalry. Even an effort by civilians is not exempt, because the question demands a partisan answer. Any criticism of the bomber offensive seems invidious, reflecting badly on the service whose mission it is, and implying that men have died in vain.

The chief members of the Survey saw this problem. They attempted to guard the integrity of the investigation against charges of partisanship and the dangers of bias, first, by exhortation. Director Franklin D'Olier, told the staff on 22 December 1944:

We shall proceed in an *open-minded* manner, without prejudice, without any pre-conceived theories, to gather the facts. We are simply to seek the truth. And when *all* the facts are gathered, then the Directors will draw up the report as impartially as it is humanly possible for us to do. We have no intention . . . of commending or criticizing any individual, group, or organization in any way except as *final* facts and the real truth might so require.

Second, they focused the Survey firmly on the effects of bombing rather than on the policy of the conduct of operations. In MacIsaac's words,

What would be served by producing a contentious or critical report, one that singled out errors and named names? Arnold, Spaatz, Eaker, Doolittle, and all the others—men . . . to admire for their courage and their willingness to shoulder enormous responsibility—these men had led the way; thousands of others had given their lives . . . it was . . . clear by April 1945 that fact-finding was the order of the day.

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Despite these efforts, as the investigation revealed apparent shortcomings in the strategic bombing campaigns, the Directors tried to balance criticism with advocacy. The "idea of having on board a 'resident apologist' could only have appealed to their sense of fairness." They therefore took on as Director of the Military Analysis Division the former Deputy Commander for Operations, Eighth Air Force, Gen. Orvil A. Anderson. He was a man "justly proud of his persuasive skills" and subsequently the eponymous combatant of the "great Anderson-Navy war." This war and the reports associated with it were virtually inevitable consequences of asking the question, "who won the war?" MacIsaac does an admirable job in showing how, even with the best of intentions, the directors of the Military and Naval Analysis Division fell to fighting over the decisiveness of bombing in the Pacific. It is interesting to speculate on the probability of similar battles about the European experience, had the British not been successfully excluded from the inquiry.

The Survey's great achievement is that, given the political and intellectual problems attendant on the issue of decisiveness in war, to say nothing of those that accompany an attempt at substantive analysis by a committee, it did produce the "Domesday Book of the strategic bombing campaigns of World War II." MacIsaac's phrase is doubly apt, since the Survey is not only a standard reference for those interested in the history of airpower, but is also itself part of that history. His book properly presents the story of the Strategic Bombing Survey in that perspective by tracing the course of the bombing campaigns and of the interservice rivalry centering around them.

Inevitably, the book faces many of the same problems as the Survey. As MacIsaac notes, an account of the first major attempt to come to grips with the issues of strategic bombing must deal

with those issues. And to the extent that they are live issues, MacIsaac then confronts the same problems as the Survey. Even as a simple account of what actually happened, the book's merit depends on his understanding of the issues and on his ability to deal with possible charges of bias. How does MacIsaac meet these tests? Because he is so careful to avoid criticizing the bomber offensive from the vantage of hindsight, his presentation of the issues themselves sometimes suffers. There is a minor misstatement of the issues in the oil transportation debate; more important are his apparent confusion about the Survey's intellectual task of evaluation and the disingenuousness with which he treats the link between the Strategic Bombing Survey and the AAF's campaign for postwar autonomy.

On the first point, the issues of the oil transportation debate, MacIsaac is correct when he states that the primary question was "how best to provide air support for OVERLORD," but wrong when he asserts that advocates of the rail plan insisted the best way to achieve "air supremacy over the beachhead on D-Day . . . would be for the air forces . . . progressively to destroy the railway network of Northern France and the Low Countries." Perhaps this is a case of poor editing, for he immediately goes on to state the real reason advocates of the rail plan favored it: it was to "prevent the enemy from moving his reserves into the assault area and generally from shifting troops and supplies behind his own lines." The effect of this mistake is to blur the issues of a complicated disagreement about strategic airpower.

On the second point, the intellectual problems of evaluating strategic bombing's effectiveness, MacIsaac's statements do not follow logically. His argument is that the Survey came to concentrate on effects, rather than effectiveness, not merely because of the difficulty of getting facts, but also

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because of the intellectual impossibility of evaluation. That is "the measuring of effectiveness changes relative to the level at which it is applied in . . . decision making." Fair enough, but after a clear illustration of the different standards for evaluating the tactical and strategic success of attacks on ball bearing factories that rightly culminates in the question of alternative use of sorties to achieve strategic success, he concludes, ". . . to measure effectiveness, as opposed to effects, becomes a problem of such magnitude as to be impractical, requiring as it does the evaluation of an almost limitless number of decisions leading up to the attack order."

This does not follow. To assess effectiveness, one does not evaluate a series of decisions leading up to an attack order; one measures the effects of the attack or campaign against the criteria for tactical or strategic success, and then weighs that effectiveness against the effectiveness of possible alternatives. There are certainly intellectual problems with the criteria for strategic success, and the problems of alternatives are indeed thorny. They lead not only to questions of alternative targets for strategic bombers but to the ultimate questions of alternative use of those bombers' men and metal. The Survey considered questions of targeting, but begged off these other issues, as does MacIsaac, when it refused even to define what strategic bombing was. The problem is not an infinity of decisions along the chain of command, but the belief that airpower is the supreme weapon for strategic success.

The primary issue of strategic bombing, on which practically all others hinge, is its decisiveness, or "effectiveness . . . as an instrument of final victory" (emphasis in original). Champions of airpower have always claimed decisiveness for it, together with the military organization implied by decisiveness: an air force with recognized

superiority over the other elements of force. The Survey's original task, which they declined in the event, thus had clear implications for the AAF's post-war goal of autonomy. This was not lost on officers in the AAF at the time. Whatever other purposes the Survey was to serve, it was also an attempt to discharge the burden of proof resting on these men as challengers of the status quo. They were not cynical men; on the contrary, as indicated above, they firmly believed an impartial investigation would prove their point that airpower was decisive. MacIsaac omits this intention from his list of the Survey's origins. It appears in his account of the Survey's history obliquely, as "the war of words over the inevitable question of who—which service or branch thereof won the war." He notes General Anderson's "aggressive determination to squeeze out every possible advantage for the future Air Force" from the Survey as though it were Anderson's idiosyncrasy to do so, rather than his job.

Such restraint seems to be his method of ensuring the objectivity of the account. It is not entirely successful, and it means that he is not completely straight with his readers. He does not spell out, for example, the "politically explosive" questions members of the Survey might have asked but did not when investigating the bomber offensive in Europe. These questions seem to be about the change to area bombing, but the reader does not know precisely what questions MacIsaac or the Survey might have had in mind, or why they would have been political dynamite. Furthermore, autonomy is not the only issue dealt with elliptically. In correcting the bibliographical record on one of the products of the Anderson-Navy war, the notorious Pacific Report No. 71a, *Air Campaigns of the Pacific War*, MacIsaac concludes: "Presumably there's a moral in all this. If so, the reader is left to draw it on his own . . ." And again,<sup>4</sup>

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after a discussion of the constraints on the committees' reports, he states that "the degree to which any such considerations apply to the Strategic Bombing Survey I leave to the reader to decide on the basis of the foregoing account . . ." The refusal to draw conclusions is no guarantee of objectivity. That problem lies deeper, as a student of the Survey like MacIsaac knows.

At the beginning of Chapter Three, MacIsaac quotes Bliss Carman: "A fact merely marks the point where we have agreed to let the investigation cease." In studying the Survey MacIsaac has inherited some of its faults as well as some of its virtues. The marshalling of evidence is fair and balanced; MacIsaac has no axe to grind. On the other hand, there are questions he will not pursue and facts that he will not investigate further. The book is interesting and worthwhile. Lieutenant Colonel MacIsaac need not have been so careful to save appearances.

MARILYN Z. WELLONS

Marder, Arthur. *Operation Menace*. London: Oxford University Press, 1976. 289pp.

When France concluded an armistice with Germany in June 1940, Britain alone faced a hostile European continent which Hitler had occupied from the North Cape to the Spanish frontier. The French Navy was at best neutral and there was a real question as to whether the extensive French empire in northern and western Africa would remain neutral or would be open to German penetration.

If Dakar on the west coast of Africa were to come under German control, the vital sealanes around Africa would be threatened and the British strategic position, already desperate, would become even more perilous. While the French colonies in north and west Africa remained loyal to Vichy, some in equatorial Africa had already rallied to

General de Gaulle who continued the battle against Hitler.

Churchill felt it necessary to proceed on short notice in August and September 1940 with the attempt to capture Dakar, because he assumed German attempts at infiltration. De Gaulle assumed that the civil and military population of Dakar would support a Gaullist attempt to wrest the city from Vichy control. Both assumptions were false.

Arthur Marder chronicles and then analyzes how this operation based on false assumptions was plagued from the start by imprudent haste, inadequate planning, poor coordination, false intelligence and just plain bad luck. He has examined the relevant documents and he has corresponded with surviving participants to present a classic case of military and naval failure, even though the men on the scene were by and large intelligent, competent and perceptive. Fortunately for the ultimate success of Allied arms in World War II, the mistakes made at Dakar were not repeated.

A contributing factor to the failure of the Dakar expedition was the unexpected movement of elements of the French fleet from Toulon to Dakar. Adm. Sir Dudley North, based on Gibraltar, did not prevent the passage of the French ships through the straits, partly because of his interpretation of ambiguous standing orders and partly because of confusion and lack of direction from London. North was relieved because the Admiralty had lost confidence in him, fair enough grounds under any circumstances. However, in relieving him the Admiralty implied in writing that he was derelict in the performance of his duty.

Marder examines in some detail North's attempt to remove what he considered to be a blemish on his honor either by retraction or by a formal inquiry. The matter simmered for nearly 17 years and was not resolved until after a formal debate in the House of Lords and a statement by Prime Minister