
LESSON 11

MODERN THEORISTS (II): AIR--STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL

As a fundamental proposition Aviation is either an Independent Arm, or is an auxiliary arm of the Army and of the Navy. I do not believe that anyone claims it to be an Independent Arm, that is, claims that Aviation acting alone is able successfully to combat and to defeat an Army or a Fleet. It is able to inflict heavy damage, or to offer invaluable assistance; but it cannot alone capture and hold ground or control the sea. Therefore, it is not an Independent Army but is one of the components of an Army or of a Fleet.

-- Captain Roy S. Geiger, USMC
10 January 1920

Introduction

Purpose	This lesson introduces you to air power theories and the ideas of its most prominent theorists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Giulio Douhet• Billy Mitchell• Roy S. Geiger
Importance of Air Power Theories	Air power theories provide you with a strong theoretical and practical background for employing air power.
Relationship to Other Instruction	Air power first was used in World War I and was employed much more extensively during World War II. Therefore, an examination of the air power theories developed during this period is a natural progression in the study of warfare. This lesson provides a foundation for all the courses that follow <i>Theory and Nature of War</i> (8801) including <i>Strategic Level of War</i> (8802), <i>Operational Level of War</i> (8803), and <i>Warfighting From the Sea</i> (8804 through 8808).
Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 3 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

History and Development of Air Power Understand the history behind the development of airpower and the factors that influenced the development of air power strategy in the pursuit of national policy. [JPME Areas 3d, 5a, and 5d]

Strategic Bombing Theorists Understand the thinking of strategic bombing theorists and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments. [JPME Areas 1a, 3b, 3d, 5a, and 5d]

Nonstrategic Airpower Theorists Understand the ideas of nonstrategic air power theorists and relate their ideas to nonstrategic military operations. [JPME Areas 3b and 3d]

WWII Theories Compare the air power theories and practices of the major participants in World War II.

**JPME Areas/
Objectives/Hours
(accounting data)** 1/a/0.5
3/b/0.5
3/d/0.5
5/a/0.5
5/d/0.5

Historical Background

Early Views on Air Power

In some instances, the theory of air power has been raised to a status equal with the theory of war. In point of fact, many students of war claimed that air power could rewrite the theory of war and its actual conduct. This was based primarily on the belief that war would become obsolete with the rise of air power. Although that premise has not come to pass, theories of air power are necessary to determine the impact of this technology on modern warfare.

Interwar Years

In the years between the world wars, the differing approaches to air warfare in the various theories and among the major powers of the world were not derived from commonly accepted principles of air power. Despite the efforts of Douhet and Michell, neither proved to be a Mahan or Jomini from whom air power enthusiasts could draw the secrets of the third dimension in warfare.

"National" Theories of Air Power

- Application of air power was a product of separate choices of each major nation.
 - These choices reflected an effort to integrate the unique capabilities of aircraft in support of land and sea forces or in independent operations in a manner that was both affordable and attuned to the achievement of national objectives.
 - A secondary driving force, especially in the United States, was the effort to create an independent air arm, one that would be able to perform a unique mission that could not be achieved by any of the other services. (*Makers of Modern Strategy*, p. 635)
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Importance of Air Power Theory

The initial use of aviation assets and their subsequent modernization has influenced and continues to influence the conduct of war. As with other technological developments, the impact of air power has been reduced by the defensive measures developed to counter its use. Because air power constitutes a vital component of joint warfighting doctrine and the Marine Air-Ground Task Force, a knowledge of its origin and development is important.

World War II: Theories of Air Power

Great Britain	Bomber Command would have the priority mission--strategic bombing to destroy materiel and moral resources.
United States	<p>Priority mission and funding went to high altitude strategic bombers; large bomber formations would rely on their own firepower for defense; no fighter escort would be required.</p> <p>The intention was to conduct precision daylight bombing of key strategic (industrial) targets.</p> <p>Naval air and its attendant carriers were two of the Navy's top priorities.</p>
Japan	<p>Power projection and naval air power were top priorities; they were influenced by geography.</p> <p>With no enemy close enough for strategic bombing in either direction, there was no need for strategic bombers.</p> <p>There was limited emphasis on air defense; the key role of aviation was to destroy enemy fleet and ports.</p>
Germany	<p>Tactical air-land armored warfare was the focus. Blitzkrieg tactics with coordinated air support led the attack.</p> <p>A key interpretive issue still debated was the influence of J. F. C. Fuller and B. H. Liddell Hart on German doctrine.</p>

Required Readings

***Makers of
Modern Strategy***

MacIsaac, David. "Voices from the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists." *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1941, pp. 624 to 647. When you read MacIsaac's essay, concentrate on what he said about Mitchell's concept on air power, what he said about the airplane's application, and the implication of creating an independent air arm in the United States.

***Theory and
Nature of War
Readings***

WGeiger, Roy S. (Major), USMC. "Relation of the Army and the Navy Air Components in Joint Operations." Memorandum for the Commandant, The Army War College, 29 April 1929, pp. 122 to 126. *Theory and Nature of War Readings*, Annex E pp. E-3 to E-16. The conceptual focus is the use of air power, command relationships, joint operations, and the unity of command of U.S. air forces. A strong opponent of the need for a separate air service, Geiger proposes more intense education and training of each respective air corps is needed along with the establishment of a joint air staff school.

- Warden, John A. III, (Colonel), USAF. "The Enemy as a System." *Airpower Journal*, Spring 1995, pp. 228 to 242. *Theory and Nature of War Readings*, pp. 126 to 141. *Theory and Nature of War Readings*, Annex E pp. E-17 to E-31. As in any system, such as a cell, the human body, or the solar system, there are four basic components: central leadership/direction, organic essentials, infrastructures, and population. The author parallels those components to organizations and states and forms a basis by which to identify centers of gravity of a strategic entity and to develop campaign plans. The important point here is that in strategic warfare, whose ultimate goal is to apply pressure to the enemy's command structure, it is pointless to deal with enemy military forces if they can be bypassed by strategy or technology.
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For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed here are **not** required; they are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

- Cohen, Eliot A. "A Revolution in Warfare." *Foreign Affairs*. March-April, 1996, pp. 37 to 54.
 - Douhet, Giulio. "Air Warfare." Translated by Mrs. Dorothy Benedict with the assistance of Captain George Kenney, Air Corps Tactical School, 1933. *Theory and Nature of War Reader*, pp. 142 to 184.
 - Freeman, Lawrence. "The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists." *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Paret. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1941, pp. 735 to 779.
 - Gray, Colin S. "The Second Nuclear Age: Insecurity, Proliferation, and the Control of Arms." *Brassey's Mershon American Defense Annual, 1995-1996*, pp. 135 to 154.
 - Tilford, Earl H. *The Revolution in Military Affairs: Prospects and Cautions*. Carlisle, PA: U. S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1995, pp. 1 to 20.
 - Weigley, Russell F. "A Strategy of Air Power: Billy Mitchell." *The American Way of War*. New York: Macmillan, 1973, pp. 223 to 241.
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Issues for Consideration

Douhet and Mitchell

During the interwar period, strategic and non-strategic theorists studied the concept of bombing an enemy's materiel and moral resources. This emphasis was based on the ideas of Douhet and Mitchell. What were their basic ideas? On what assumptions did their ideas rest? What is the relevance of these ideas today?

Comparison of the Air Power Countries

Compare the air power theories and practices of the major participants in World War II while

- Those countries prepared for war
 - They fought the war
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Geiger's View of Air Power

General Geiger presented another view of air power in his research paper at the Army War College. What were his basic ideas? How did they differ from those of Douhet?

Warden's Ideas on Air Power

Colonel John Warden is considered by many to be a contemporary air theorist. His ideas on air power are partly based upon the experiences of the Gulf War. How do you assess his theories?

Influence on Strategy

In 1936, Fighter Command started developing radar, enhanced communications, and fighters into an integrated air defense system. How was Britain's strategy influenced by Douhet on bombing and by Mitchell on fighters?

How was U.S. strategy influenced by Douhet on strategic bombing and by Mitchell on the vulnerability of ships to air attack?
