



THE STRATEGIC STRIKING FORCE*

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IN THE three years that have elapsed since the end of World War II several significant facts have been brought home to the American people. First, the victorious conclusion of a war does not insure an acceptable and durable peace. Second, the United Nations is still far from maturity as an instrument for outlawing war and preserving the security of the world from aggression. Third, the United States has inherited from Great Britain the role of leader among the democratic nations of the earth.

Following a period of gradual disillusionment, during which time we began to understand these and other truths, we have come to the realization that if we are to have peace in our time it will have to be a Pax Americana. There has been further awakening to the fact that the instrument of Pax Americana must be Air Power, just as the instrument of Pax Britannica a century ago was sea power. We have come to understand that we will not be heard at the conference table, we will not be heeded in the halls of the United Nations, we will not acquire and maintain the respect of aggressor nations, and we will not be able to insure a reasonable degree of security unless we have a striking force of highly trained air units capable of immediately attacking vital targets in an enemy's homeland.

Thus, the main burden of preserving the security of the United States rests squarely on the strategic striking force of our air arm. It behooves us then to carefully study the requirements for this strategic striking force, so we may be certain that it is at all times capable of performing its mission with absolute precision and success. Its

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failure could well bring disaster and ruin. What, then, are the requirements, the fundamental necessities, which must be provided if the operations of the strategic air force are to be successful?

The First Requirement: *Complete knowledge of the economic, industrial, military, and political targets in potential enemy states, including the vital elements in their war making machinery.* General H. H. Arnold, in his “Third Report of the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces to the Secretary of War,” 12 November 1945, expressed this requirement as follows: “Through a worldwide intelligence system, maintain constantly up-to-date information regarding all phases of the national life, economy, and philosophy of potential enemy states.” And further: “Maintain an analysis, continuously being revised to meet new conditions, to show the importance of all industries and other activities of potential enemies and to evaluate the relative importance of each of the units in each activity.” In short, we must know the weaknesses and the bottlenecks in every nation’s economic system before we can hope to direct operations against those weaknesses in time of war.

In order to insure that this information will be available in the minutest detail when hostilities threaten, we must have an intelligence system second to none, a system which will keep our Air Force constantly abreast of developments in all other countries of the world. Analysis of all information must be continuous to insure that we are fully cognizant of just what the vital elements are, where the components are located, and what the physical layout of each component is.

The machinery for obtaining this information—The Central Intelligence Agency—is now in being. This agency has been established as the organization which is responsible for collection and



coordination of all intelligence information affecting the national security. It analyzes and disseminates this information to the using agencies, one of the most important of which is the United States Air Force. The Air Force in turn relays pertinent information to the Strategic Air Command and its striking units. Thus, although the intelligence organization exists, there remains the tremendous job of making it function properly. We cannot afford to wait until hostilities have begun to get this machinery operating effectively. We made that error in World War II and had we not been able to call upon the British Intelligence Service and those of other allied nations, we could not have launched the strategic air war against Germany in the summer of 1942. We would not have known what to bomb. It took several years after Pearl Harbor to assemble the necessary information on Japan. We know that such negligence in the present years of peace will be fatal in any future war.

The Second Requirement: *Strategic Air Power in being, capable of launching destructive attacks immediately upon commencement of hostilities.* In addition to knowing what and where to strike, it follows that we must have the weapons with which to strike. In the next war, blue prints alone will not deliver heavy blows. Time will not be permitted us to tool up. The United States will stand or fall on her ability to wage decisive war in the first days and weeks after the initial onslaught.

This point is stated quite emphatically by General Carl Spaatz in “Strategic Air Power: Fulfillment of a Concept,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 1946. In speaking of the lessons learned from our experience with strategic Air Power in World War II, he says:

One lesson is that the time we were given to make our preparations was an absolutely essential factor in our final success. We had warn-



ing in 1939, and by 1941 had made notable progress. Following Pearl Harbor, with the United States actually at war, we had two and a half years more to build the striking force necessary to fulfill the strategic concept. The total time allowed us to prepare for the final all-out assault was four and a half years. It is unthinkable that we should ever again be granted such grace. . . . Had our peacetime air force been maintained during the 1930's at the level it attained even as early as the date of Pearl Harbor, and had it in consequence been prepared to act in the first year of war on the level it attained in mid-1942, then the tremendous and costly effort of the next two and a half years would have been enormously lessened. We would have struck at the heart of the enemy much earlier. It is even conceivable that the fact of an American air force in being, with full potential in 1939, might have prevented the outbreak of war. In the next war, should there ever be one, four and a half years will not be allowed us in which to build up an air force, insured by the resistance of our Allies to common enemies. America will be Target Number 1; we will stand or fall with the air force available in the first crucial moment.

A corollary to this second requirement of strategic Air Power in being is the requirement of penetration. Our aircraft must be capable of penetrating to and destroying enemy targets; otherwise we do not have true Air Power in being, but only impotent numbers of men and machines. The strategic air force must employ equipment and tactics which can cope with enemy defenses and hit enemy targets, or admit defeat.

The Third Requirement: *Possession of bases from which the vital elements of our potential enemies can be attacked.* The fulfillment of this fundamental is, of course, directly related to the range of the aircraft being used. We must strive for aircraft with sufficient range to operate from the United States against targets anywhere in the world. Meanwhile, we must make every effort to obtain and maintain bases which are within striking distance of our potential enemies.



We must also remember from the bitter experience of the last war that possession of bases in time of peace is not synonymous with possession of bases in time of war. We discovered that as we helplessly watched Wake, Guam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Singapore being overrun by the Japanese early in the war. These islands, instead of being the strong points in our outer armor, became spearheads of the enemy's attack aimed at our own heart. If our bases in the far corners of the world are to serve the purpose for which they are intended, they must be garrisoned and equipped to withstand an initial siege, and airborne troops and supporting Air Power must be ready at all times to go to their rescue. Unless we are prepared for such eventualities our bases will do us more harm than good. It goes without saying that the support of distant bases will be difficult and will require a tremendous overhead of supporting troops.

The Fourth Requirement: Our fourth requirement follows logically upon the heels of the first three. If we know what to strike, have the Air Power with which to strike, and possess the bases from which to launch that Air Power, we can by no means be assured of successful operations unless we also have *sufficient resources in personnel, materiel, and productive capacity to back up our air effort for the duration of the strategic air war*. Our initial effort must be a strong one, but it must be followed by successively stronger attacks until our enemy's will to resist is completely broken. We have already stressed the requirement for an adequate initial striking force. This force may well be all that we will have a chance to use. However, we cannot discard the possibility of a delayed decision. This means that resources in personnel, materiel, and productive capacity must be maintained in a state of readiness so that they may be quickly transformed to a war status when needed.



It is vitally necessary that the timing of this transformation be geared directly to the calculated endurance of the strategic air force which is maintained in being. Since this endurance is definitely limited, our resources must be easily convertible to wartime operations.

This means, first of all, a pool of trained personnel. As a result of the tremendous training program of World War II, we now have the richest reservoir of air force talent on earth. We must not allow this talent to disintegrate through lack of interest in the military needs of the nation. This means a progressive and realistic reserve training program which will maintain the proficiency of reserve officers and men in strategic air equipment. It also means a coordinated effort with the Air Training Command to insure that strategic units will have a satisfactory number of trained replacement personnel.

Our research must be continuous and progressive. Our weapons must be the best that science and industry can provide, and we must constantly strive to better them. The using agency—the Strategic Air Command and its subordinate units—can and must be ever critical of the faults of its equipment and ever constructive in its suggestions for new and better replacements.

As our instruments of war are perfected, the heads of industry must be informed as to the estimated requirements of strategic Air Power in time of war, so that necessary plans may be laid to facilitate conversion to mass production with the least possible delay. It may be necessary to build vital plants and hold them on a stand-by status. Strategic air leaders must leave no stone unturned to insure that our productive capacity can convert to wartime operations in time to support our air offensive during the first crucial days of the struggle.



The Fifth Requirement: *Adequate logistical support*. If we have fulfilled requirement number four and are assured of the necessary resources in men, materiel, and productive capacity, we know that our strategic air force is still not operational until replacement personnel and materiel are flowing regularly to the using wings and divisions.

World War II has often been called a war of logistics. The expression “too little and too late” was a common explanation for air battles lost and territory sacrificed to the enemy. We turned the tactical tide only after we had swelled the logistical tide.

World War II furnished us with an excellent example (the B-29 force in China) of strategic Air Power rendered almost impotent by the logistical problems of operating from remote overseas bases. During some ten months of operations in India and China the Twentieth Bomber Command hit Japan proper only *six* times and ran a total of but *forty-four* operations, an average of 4.4 per month, against all targets. After this force was moved to the Marianas as the 58th Bomb Wing, it immediately became as operationally efficient and dependable as any of the wings of the Twentieth Air Force. In three and a half months it flew *thirty-four* operations for a monthly average of nearly *ten*. The principal reason for this transformation was the absence of insurmountable logistical problems which plagued our forces in China.

The lesson is clear for the future. Strategic air units cannot carry out effective operations against an enemy unless ample logistical support can be provided.

The Sixth Requirement: *Adequate communications*. The strategic air force needs the following communications services: com-



mand channels to both higher headquarters and subordinate units; air-to-ground, air-to-air, and ground-to-air operational control; and aids to navigation and bombing. These facilities existed in fairly satisfactory form at the end of World War II. All should be greatly improved before another war. It is particularly imperative that we do our utmost to improve our blind bombing equipment and our means of communication over vast distances.

The Seventh Requirement: *A sound plan of action.* The basic plan for the employment of strategic Air Power is to strike at such vital targets of the enemy's national structure as his heavy industry, his transportation, his oil, and his electric power. If we sufficiently weaken those vital elements we can force his capitulation, although in the meantime we may have to strike at his strategic air arm to prevent his attacking our own vital targets. This method of employment of strategic Air Power proved itself so decisively in World War II that we take it for granted that this same general plan of action will be used in any future war. But beyond that broad basic plan there must be detailed plans specifically designed to deal with all potential enemies. We must gather our intelligence, pick out prospective targets, and plan how we are going to destroy or neutralize those targets.

When we have mapped out the strategic plans, their actual realization becomes the responsibility of our strategic air force commanders. They must then evolve their tactical plans for carrying out the preconceived strategy.

We have an excellent example of the evolution of a sound tactical plan of action in the experience of the Twentieth Air Force. The original plan for the employment of B-29s against Japan was modeled on methods the Eighth Air Force had tested and found



successful in Europe—high altitude daylight formation bombing. After all, the B-29 was designed specifically for that tactical use. But three months of effort in applying these tactics did not bring results. Japan had only been scratched. Results indicated that a new plan of attack was urgently needed. Low altitude night bombing and incendiary attacks, supplemented by daylight bombings and aerial mining, provided the solution. The new plan was the beginning of the end of the Pacific War.

We need, then, a sound overall strategic plan directed against vital targets, plus a sound tactical plan of action which will provide the proper employment of our striking force for the accomplishment of its mission.

The Eighth Requirement: *Relentless prosecution of the plan of action.* Our final principle may seem somewhat obvious, but it is nonetheless important. It is to prosecute the plan of action relentlessly and unceasingly until the enemy's economic system has collapsed and his will to resist has been crushed. This means that strategic Air Power should not be diverted to tactical targets except in extreme cases. It must be remembered that the consequences of strategic air assaults are like the spread of cancer; the effects are not immediately apparent, but, like that fearful disease, the results are fatal.

Probably the most outstanding example of strategic air operations which failed because the plan was not pursued to a decisive conclusion was the German air battle against Britain. As early as 1938 the *Luftwaffe* had a *Studie Plan* of Great Britain, an intelligence analysis of that country which included its strategic weaknesses. Nazi Air Power was first to be aimed at RAF and aircraft industry targets in order to eliminate any threat to the *Luftwaffe* and to establish its supremacy in the skies over Britain. Then the

German Air Force was to attack shipping and harbor facilities in an effort to interdict supplies to Britain and throttle her imports of war materials. The Germans had a good plan of action, but it failed for one principal reason: Goering did not follow it. He was under pressure from Hitler to destroy English cities; the German Navy wanted mining and shipping attacks before the RAF had been neutralized and domination of the air assured; and there were other spectacular schemes which offered better advertising for the *Luftwaffe*. The end result was diversion of effort, failure to wrest control of the air from the RAF, and defeat in the now historic Battle of Britain. The Germans had a plan but did not see it through.

In direct contrast to the German effort was the Combined Bomber Offensive Plan of the Allies, which was approved in June 1943 by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and called for a round-the-clock bombing of strategic German targets. The objective of this plan was the “destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial, and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to the point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.” The ruins of Germany testify that the objective was achieved. It was achieved because the allied strategic air forces in Europe had a definite plan of action and followed that plan to its victorious conclusion.

In summary, the essential requirements for the conduct of successful strategic air operations are: a superior intelligence system, strategic Air Power in being, suitable bases and sufficient resources, adequate logistical support and communications, and a sound plan of action, plus relentless prosecution of the plan.

In the event of another war our first and perhaps only major offensive effort will be strategic air attacks. It is imperative that



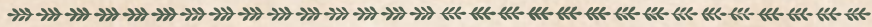
these operations be successful. These requirements, properly fulfilled, will guarantee a successful strategic air campaign which, in turn, will guarantee a successful war.



We must assume, in making our plans, that there will be a direct attack on the United States mainland in any major war in which the United States will become engaged on and after January 1, 1953. It may be that the war will not open with this direct assault. It may be that the fighting will start at some point in the world where our forces will come in contact with those of other nations. It may be that the fighting will be localized at that point, on the model of the practice war between Germany and Russia in the Spanish Civil War. But this is not likely; and certainly we must not count on it. We must assume, in making our plans, that if the enemy can do it he will make a direct air assault on the United States mainland regardless how or where the first shooting starts.

It must be assumed that there may be no warning of the attack. We must assume that the force we will bring into being by the end of 1952 will be the force which will have to handle the attack. We will get no further warning than that which we already have.

—The President’s Air Policy Commission
Survival in the Air Age (1948)



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