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The Command of the Air by Giulio Douhet (review)

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nario and is more capable of overcoming physical space limitations by stretching their A2/AD umbrella over Taiwan and beyond. Porter underplays the cyber threat by stating that there is a large difference between cyber criminals and strategic security cyber threats. He argues that cyber defense is stronger than is usually credited. The book does not consider the speed of development of cyber capabilities, as illustrated by attacks like the oil pipeline shutdowns and electrical grid blackouts.² The argument that cyberwar does not make globalism valid is weak, but the book still makes some good points about the strength of cyber defense in support of isolationism. When discussing the use of drones and the lack of requirements for access, Porter does not give significant space to the decision makers who choose to use drones and speaks primarily to the utility and legality of drones in nonviolent conflicts.

Porter's strongest argument has little to do with globalism. "Countries who seek to be guardians are also agents of chaos" (p. 217). Nations employing globalism through cooperation can cause as many problems as they solve. Porter's well-defined argument about American overextension used Vietnam and Iraq as effective case studies. The book would have been clearer if he maintained the separation between globalism and globalization. The theme of globalism and its failures held throughout. The well-argued book covered a variety of domains and cases studies that made for interesting reading and thorough arguments. Overall, *The Global Village Myth* is a warning against the negative strategic security impacts of overextension and not relying on the global village to meet the state's security needs.

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Endnotes

1. Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012).
2. Venkata Palleti et al., "Cascading Effects of Cyber-Attacks on Interconnected Critical Infrastructure," *Cybersecurity* 4, no. 8 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42400-021-00071-z>.

The Command of the Air. By Giulio Douhet. Translated by Dino Ferrari. 1921; reprint edition, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2019. Pp. 362. (free paperback and ebook).

Written a century ago, Italian general Giulio Douhet's book, *The Command of the Air*, expresses his thoughts about airpower after World War I. Douhet emphasizes the importance of the air domain as it started to become part of the battlefield, and he explores the nature of war as it is developed by time and technology.

Douhet stresses the need for an independent air force and airpower, for which he was an early advocate. He believes that command of the air, or as we now refer to as *air superiority*, leads to victory. Those nations that have an independent air force will emerge victorious from conflict and will have a stronger national defense due to the unique nature of the air domain where aircraft can reach behind enemy lines. While aircraft can hit sea and land targets, at the time of his writing, there were no employable naval or land defenses that could oppose air bombing raids on cities. Douhet explains that an air force cannot simply be auxiliary of the navy and army. Although aviation should still be a part of the other military branches, employed as fleet defense, and used in army operations and other missions, he argued, an independent air force holds offensive airpower as its top, essential purpose.

Air power is significant due to its rapidity of movement, reach, armament, and offensive capability against targets in multiple domains, explains Douhet, making it a required organization for this new battlefield. He defines goals and ideals for units and organizations, quantitative effects of aircraft and firepower, and strategy for post–World War I air forces. He also describes optimal characteristics, types of aircraft, and employable tactics. He advocates for quick, decisive action in conflict and is not opposed to bombing civilian infrastructure or using poisonous gases against populations. Douhet sees no distinction between military and non-military objectives after the introduction of air power. Though tragic, Douhet believes that these types of shock-and-awe tactics against civilian targets and population centers would lead to shorter and less bloody conflicts, yielding better results in war. Strategic bombing campaigns lead to decisive victories.

Douhet advises that the goal should be to prevent your enemy from flying their aircraft by attacking the “eggs” and “nests”—bases, supply centers, and planes on the ground—rather than just their “birds” in the air (p. 31). This tactic alone serves as a better defense than any other strategy in the air domain since airpower is inherently offensive. He explains how air operations are significant even during peacetime because the air industry can be used for travel, economic advancement, technology development, relationship-building and cooperation with civil aviation, research and development funding, and publicity for sustainment. Keeping airpower alive during peacetime is critical so that planes can be converted for war quickly.

Even today, air superiority is vital for military success. In addition to an independent Air Force, the United States now has an independent Space Force, allowing both air- and space-minded professionals the organization, budget, and assets needed to keep up with an ever-changing battlefield. Douhet’s idea of unified command—Joint service environment—has also come to fruition and is still relevant today. Furthermore, as Douhet also explains, keeping up with technology and understanding the nature of the conflict environment is still essential for national defense and military success.

Douhet’s book was first published a century ago in 1921. The way in which

it is organized allows readers to understand the importance of the then new air forces compared to trench warfare of World War I. At that time, the world was exhausted from four years of long, bloody, conventional war. Douhet wrote this study with the goal of explaining the possibilities of aircraft in battle—and beyond—and how this new technology was a game changer during an inevitable war.

While still an interesting and relevant study in many ways, three of Douhet's major ideas are problematic under current scrutiny. First, he states that air forces should always operate in mass. Today, special operations aircrews strive to maintain a small footprint and operate without being detected in hostile or denied territory. These missions would be unsuccessful if carried out "in mass." Today's radars and other air defense systems could easily discover a large quantity of aircraft. Furthermore, technology continues to threaten airborne assets in other ways; a large electromagnetic pulse could disable a group of aircraft traveling in mass, should it be deployed accurately.

Second, the ideas of strategic bombing campaigns are currently not employable against terrorists and other unconventional threats. Many of today's adversaries are hidden among civilian populations and cannot be targeted easily. It would be counterproductive to bomb the civilian towns where these enemies reside, making it impossible to win influence, allies, and an overall war.

Finally, I completely disagree with Douhet's willingness to attack civilian population centers. He did not consider civilians as collateral elements, instead describing them as combatants in future wars because airpower could go beyond traditional defenses. Douhet explored the potential of spreading epidemics, chemicals, and poison into adversarial territory. This type of warfare is inhumane and illegal, even if it was not considered as such 100 years ago. This type of warfare would certainly break the will and morale of the people, but it would never win hearts and minds or a positive reputation on the international stage. Douhet mentions that news travels quickly after civilian targets are bombed, which may serve to break enemy morale, but it also breaks the reputation of the civilized world. Now, news travels even faster with the evolution of the internet, cell phones, and other technology. The rest of the world would quickly discover how barbaric and criminal any nation is for employing such tactics and these actions would negatively impact the country immediately and in the future.

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The Other Face of Battle: America's Forgotten Wars and the Experience of Combat. By Wayne E. Lee, Anthony E. Carlson, David L. Preston, and David Silbey. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. 272. \$25.70 (hardcover and ebook).