

THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE
STRATEGIC AIR OFFENSIVE AGAINST GERMANY FROM INCEPTION TO 1945

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the strategic leadership, and the high level direction, of the Royal Air Force's contribution to the strategic air offensive against Germany. It takes the conceptual thinking, the organisational aspects and the leadership required to bring it into being, from its inception in the First World War through to 1945. The thesis uses modern understanding of strategic (or senior) leadership as an analytical tool. The realm of strategic leadership is complex, and ambiguous, and the senior leaders required high levels of intellectual capacity to cope with the survival of the force and its subsequent rapid to meet the rising threat from Germany. The senior leaders, political and military, acknowledged that their methods of warfare must be just, and the thesis examines the legality and morality of the planning and conduct of the offensive. A key facet of strategic leadership is the setting of the vision and purpose of the enterprise and the thesis examines the challenges that arose from the competing views on how the offensive should be waged. Genuine strategic leadership requires dexterity in working at the interfaces with other organisations, or Allies, and the thesis examines the complexities of the Combined Bomber Offensive and Overlord.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of all of the men and women who served in Bomber Command from 1936 to 1945.

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CODEWORDS

<i>Arcadia</i>	First Washington Conference
<i>Bodyline</i>	Attack on the production of V weapons
<i>Bolero</i>	Build up of US ground forces in Britain
<i>Crossbow</i>	Attack on V weapon launching sites
<i>Eureka</i>	Ground Radio transmitter for guiding aircraft to targets
<i>Gee</i>	Radio Navigational aid
<i>Gymnast</i>	Takeover of French North West Africa which became Torch
<i>Haddock</i>	Bombing Operations against Italy in 1940
<i>Oboe</i>	Blind bombing radar device
<i>Octagon</i>	Second Quebec Conference, September 1944
<i>Overlord</i>	Invasion of North Western Europe
<i>Pointblank</i>	Directive for the Combined Bomber Offensive, June 1942
<i>Quadrant</i>	First Quebec Conference, August 1943
<i>Sickle</i>	Build up of American Bomber Force
<i>Sextant</i>	Cairo Conference November-December 1943
<i>Sledgehammer</i>	Early plans for a bridgehead in France
<i>Symbol</i>	Casablanca Conference
<i>Thunderclap</i>	Bombing Berlin to bring about surrender
<i>Torch</i>	Allied invasion of French North West Africa in 1942
<i>Trident</i>	Third Washington Conference May 1943

ABBREVIATIONS

ACAS	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff
ACAS (I)	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff - Intelligence
ACAS (O)	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff – Operations
ACAS (P)	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff - Policy
ACM	Air Chief Marshal
AD	Air Defence
AEOF	Allied Expeditionary Air Forces
AM	Air Marshal
AVM	Air Vice-Marshal
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
COS	Chiefs of Staff
COSSAC	Chiefs of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander
D. B. Ops	Director of Bomber Operations
DCAS	Deputy Chief of the Air Staff
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JPS	Joint Planning Staff
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare
MRAF	Marshal of the Royal Air Force
PM	Prime Minister
PUS	Permanent Under-Secretary
RAF	Royal Air Force
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SASO	Senior Air Staff Officer
S of S	Secretary of State
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces
VCAS	Vice Chief of the Air Staff

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Leadership, the so-called Warrior's Art, has been an inherent part of military consciousness for as long as historians, and warriors themselves, have been recording their thoughts.¹ For example, Kolenda quotes from Xenophon to explain that leaders needed mental agility as well physical might in order to achieve great deeds.² The requirement for intellectual capacity at senior levels is a recurring theme in this analysis. The American historian, turned leadership writer, James MacGregor Burns wrote: 'Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth'.³ This may be so; the extensive literature on leadership seems to confirm Burns' statement, but the association of good leadership with achievement of results also remains a consistent theme. People look to their leaders for an appealing vision and trust them to take them in the direction most likely to achieve mutually beneficial results. In more extreme circumstances, leaders are required to build trust, set standards of performance, display personal courage and rationalise sacrifice.⁴

There are many definitions of leadership, to the point that almost every author has his or her own.⁵ For the purposes of this dissertation the definition of leadership espoused by the United Kingdom Defence Leadership and Management Centre (DLMC) will be used:

¹ Christopher D. Kolenda, (ed.), *Leadership: The Warrior's Art* (Carlisle PA: Army War College Foundation Press, 2001).

² Kolenda, *ibid.*, 'What is Leadership? Some Classical Ideas', p. 3. General Barry R. McCaffrey (US Army, Retired) in the Foreword also appeals to the Ancients with mention of Plato: p. xi.

³ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper, 1979), p. 2.

⁴ Lieutenant General Walter F. Ulmer Jr., 'Introduction', in Kolenda, *Leadership: The Warrior's Art*, p. xxxi.

⁵ Burns, *Leadership*, p.2.

Leadership is visionary; it is the projection of personality and character to inspire the team to achieve the desired outcome. There is no prescription for leadership and no prescribed style of leader. Leadership is a combination of example, persuasion and compulsion dependant on the situation. It should aim to transform and be underpinned by individual skills and an enabling ethos. The successful leader is an individual who understands him/herself, the organisation, the environment in which they operate and the people that they are privileged to lead.⁶

The DLMC differentiates leadership from command and management. Command is a ‘position of authority and responsibility to which military men and women are legally appointed’. Management is ‘the allocation and control of resources (human, material and financial) to achieve objectives’.⁷ These definitions are comprehensive in their own right. Nevertheless, it is the relationship between them, in a given context, that will often determine the success of the leader and of the wider enterprise.

It may seem axiomatic that where there are leaders, there should also be followers and colleagues.⁸ It is, nevertheless, vital that the relationships between them are sound. In *Leadership in the Trenches*, Sheffield stresses the importance of the relationship between men and their officers for the well-being of the force.⁹ At a higher level, Cohen emphasises the importance of relations between soldiers and statesmen pointing out that, especially in wartime, the stakes are great.¹⁰ Tension in relationships, at any level, can be due to many factors including differences in background, outlook, approach and personality. These differences may be accentuated at the top of organisations where the

⁶ Quoted in Air Commodore Peter W. Gray and Jonathan Harvey, ‘Strategic Leadership Education’, in Colonel Bernd Horn and Lieutenant-Colonel Allister MacIntyre (eds.) *In Pursuit of Excellence: International Perspectives of Military Leadership* (Kingston ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2006), p. 91.

⁷ Gray and Harvey, *ibid.* The full definitions are at Appendix 1.

⁸ In innumerable conversations following 360 degree reporting debriefs on the Defence Strategic Leadership Programme, run by the DLMC which the author directed for nearly four years, reports and comment from direct colleagues were almost invariably the most telling.

⁹ G. D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Men Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. xxi.

¹⁰ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), p. 2.

pressure is greater. But the whole issue is complicated by the reality that senior leaders are also responsible for the leadership of the organisation as a whole and not just for their behaviour as leaders in direct relationships.¹¹ This concept must be extended to the requirement for the senior leader to be able to work across the range of 'silos', many of which he or she will have no immediate experience; the danger in this is that the leader will overly concentrate on the 'silo' from which they were promoted, to the exclusion of the others and risk micro-management and the diversion of effort. Depending on personalities, egos and interdependencies, there is a risk that the organisation could come under the sway of an individual. But far more regularly, the pinnacle of the organisation will be run by a top team. Kakabadse points out that the senior management team is a group of individuals who are specifically brought together for the purpose of planning and clarifying direction – unlike a middle management team which is primarily task orientated.¹² This is as relevant in the military environment as it is in the board room of a major company.¹³

In complex military structures, as with multi-national conglomerates, it is highly unlikely that the board, or top team, will be able to act in isolation. Rather, they will have to work alongside other elements of the organisation, or in a hierarchical relationship. The interfaces between these elements can be critical to the success, or otherwise, of the whole enterprise. It is the role of the senior leaders to facilitate these interfaces.¹⁴ The interfaces

¹¹ James G. Hunt, *Leadership: A New Synthesis* (London: Sage, 1991), p. 4. See also Kimberley B. Boal and Robert Hooijberg, 'Strategic Leadership research: Moving On', *Leadership Quarterly*, 11 (2001), pp. 515-549. For the extension of Hunt's work into the military context see Leonard Wong, Paul Bliese and Dennis McGurk, 'Military leadership: A context specific review', *Leadership Quarterly*, 14 (2003), pp. 657-692.

¹² Andrew Kakabadse and Nada Kakabadse, *Essence of Leadership* (London: Thomson, 1999), pp. 298-299.

¹³ See, for example, John Keegan, *The Mask of Command: A Study of Generalship* (London: Pimlico, 1999 [1987]), pp. 40-44.

¹⁴ See Hunt, *Leadership: A New Synthesis*, p. 71 for the stratified systems theory approach. For a more conventional view, see John Adair, *Effective Strategic Leadership* (London: Pan, 2003), p. 95.

may work seamlessly. Alternatively they can be subject to the same frustrations and difficulties as interpersonal relationships. Causes of friction can emerge from any of the areas where senior leaders hold specific jurisdiction, especially formulation of strategy and the apportionment of resources.¹⁵ An inevitable consequence of senior leadership in the public sector is the complicating factor of political involvement. This is a permanent feature of public life, but was all the more prevalent under Churchill's premiership; Alanbrooke's Diaries have provided ample evidence.¹⁶

Given the controversial nature of its strategy, and for many people its potential to be a war-winning force, the senior leaders responsible for the formulation, and execution, of the strategic bombing offensive against Germany were under considerable pressure to deliver the results expected.¹⁷ This thesis seeks to examine the challenges faced by the leaders, at the various stages of development of the offensive from its early inception in the First World War, through the years where aerial bombardment was under threat of abolition, to the Second World War. The challenges were complicated by the unknown nature of the offensive which was being planned; the concepts had neither been tried, nor the technology proven. As the war progressed from phoney to total, the very flexibility of air power compounded the difficulties in that it could be easily diverted to other tasks and

¹⁵ This was particularly true of the discussion in Chiefs of Staff meetings in the mid-1930s. See, for example Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980). Bond is far eloquent on the subject than his air counterpart H. Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars 1918- 1939* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

¹⁶ Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, *War Diaries 1939-1945*, ed. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 2001); see, for example, p. 331 for a heated debate on the employment of bombers over Germany rather than Tunisia in support of ground troops.

¹⁷ There are many books on the evolution of strategy for the bombing offensive, but one of the most persuasive, and scholarly, is Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914 – 1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2002).

other theatres of war. The iteration of the vision and purpose of the enterprise is a recurring theme in the strategic leadership literature.

The Literature

The literature on leadership in general is extensive, with an occasionally uneasy overlap between the battlefield and the boardroom.¹⁸ Beyond these works, the leadership genre has been broadly contributed to by four areas of academic endeavour. The particular areas are: the works of the successful businessmen; the psychology field (including occupational and organisational); the social scientists; and the broad historical church. At the strategic leadership level, the literature review must also take into account the wider field of organisational design (arguably this could be encapsulated into organisational psychology, but the work of Mintzberg et al goes further than this).¹⁹ These will be tackled, in turn, in the Leadership section of the Review. From a military perspective²⁰, the issue of leadership is inextricably linked with command (and management); the ‘command genre’ will therefore be tackled next.²¹ The exploits of Bomber Command have also generated a wide field of material. This review of the literature will examine each in turn.

¹⁸ See for example, Manfred Kets de Vries, ‘Doing an Alexander: Lessons on Leadership by a Master Conqueror’, *European Management Journal*, 17 (2006), pp. 138-245 and Alan Axelrod, *Patton on Leadership: Strategic Lessons for Corporate Warfare* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999). This genre frequently adorns the shelves of airport bookstores, but need not be considered further for the purposes of this thesis.

¹⁹ H. Mintzberg, ‘The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning’, *Harvard Business Review*, Jan/Feb 1994, pp.107–14.

²⁰ The civilian world tends to have an issue with the word ‘command’; this stems from a fundamental misunderstanding that military leaders rely almost exclusively on orders. The reality is that virtually everyone has someone else set in authority over them.

²¹ See Peter W. Gray and Sebastian Cox (Eds.), *Air Power Leadership: Theory and Practice* (London: The Stationary Office, 2002). The chapter by Howieson and Kahn tackles this relationship where Gray looks at Dowding in each of these categories.

The works of successful business people tend to illustrate the subject's (the majority are autobiographical) rise to fame and the leadership lessons gleaned in the process.²² These sources are very specific to the upper echelons of the business world and rarely have any theoretical underpinning. Furthermore, they rarely have a historical context and will therefore not be considered further. The more academic facet of business school literature is sizeable, albeit with a variable standard. Much of the work is empirical, being based on consultancy opportunities with companies (and individuals).²³ Again, these works will not impinge further on the thesis.

One of the better examples of the business school literature merging into social science from the United Kingdom is by Grint who examines the concept of leadership as an 'array of arts' against which individuals and scenarios are examined.²⁴ Although Grint generally avoids the trap, many of his contemporaries are highly selective over their choice of case study ensuring that history is used to support the theory. In his most recent book, Grint uses the concept of 'Tame, Wicked and Critical problems' and applies this theory to a number of events on D-Day to illustrate their applicability.²⁵ This thesis specifically aims to use the leadership theory as an analytical tool, rather than select examples from history.

²² Examples include Jack Welch, *Jack: What I've learned leading a great company and great people* (London: Headline, 2001).

²³ For some of the better examples, see Jim Collins, *Good to Great: why some Companies Make the Leap... and Others don't* (London: Random House, 2001), and Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People; Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1989). The gist of the genre can be appreciated with the amazing discovery of an 8th habit – Stephen R. Covey, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

²⁴ Keith Grint, *The Arts of Leadership* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Grint has been a Reader in Organisational Behaviour at Said Business School, Oxford and then Director of the Lancaster Leadership Centre. More recently, he became Deputy Principal Leadership and Management with Cranfield University within the Defence Academy and worked alongside the author.

²⁵ Keith Grint, *Leadership, Management and Command: Rethinking D-Day* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), ch. 1.

‘Wicked’ problems, to which there is not a linear solution, will recur during the examination of the senior leadership challenge.

As the scientific content increases, a wide subset of leadership work has been produced by psychologists. The majority of these are specialists in either occupational or organisational psychology. Although much of their work is characterised by their attempts to give their research a high degree of scientific and methodological rigour, some researchers do use historical case studies. The most extreme of these took official despatches, battle orders and published letters from the American Civil War archives; from these documents, they derived estimates of the cognitive complexity scores of six Civil War Generals (Burnside, Grant, Hooker, Lee, McClellan and Meade).²⁶ Similar approaches have been used to develop personality profiles of key leaders from letters and diaries; others have used biographies and autobiographies.²⁷ Notwithstanding these examples, very few works utilise an historical context. Despite the scope for history to provide both data and context, social scientists tend to eschew these sources on the grounds that the data is insufficiently precise for them to be able to measure leadership accurately (demonstrating repeatability etc).²⁸ Their preference is for surveys (of living people) that can be analysed as hard data. Most historical references tend to be illustrative and therefore tend to have been selectively chosen to match the hypothesis under discussion.

²⁶ P. Suedfeld, R. S. Corteen and C McCormick, ‘The Role of Integrative Complexity in Military Leadership: Robert E. Lee and his opponents’, [Special Issue: Applications of Social Psychology to military issues], *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, (1986) 16, pp. 498 – 507.

²⁷ An example of this approach is Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (London: Harper Collins, 1997) who uses a cognitive approach (i.e. concentrating on the human mind) with portraits of senior leaders and their relationships with their followers.

²⁸ Allan English, *The Masks of Command: Leadership Differences in the Canadian Army, Navy, and Air Force*, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, 25-27 October 2002. Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Available on <www.rmc.ca/academic/conference/iuscanada/papers/english_commandpaper.pdf>.

The next discrete area worthy of consideration is that occupied by the social scientists; they have either produced stand-alone pieces or, more often, have contributed to business school curricula. A number of these use historical examples to illustrate ideas put forward. This case study approach is also widely used by psychologists and will be dealt with below. Probably the best known and most influential author is James MacGregor Burns, who was cited earlier in the Introduction. In their chapter entitled ‘A New Vision of Leadership’ Sashkin and Rosenbach describe Burns’ *Leadership* as ‘ground breaking work of a political scientist and historian’.²⁹ Burns’ work was taken forward by Bernard M. Bass to look at leadership as either transactional or transformational.³⁰ In the former, Bass argues that the leader could either be laissez-faire; lead by contingent reward (through either a contract or carrot and stick approach); or manage by exception. For an ideal example of this contractual approach in a Bomber Command scenario, Musgrove cites the 30-sortie tour of duty as being his contract with the Service and made it a replacement for leadership.³¹ What Musgrove omitted to mention was that after a six month rest period, crews were returned for a further full tour! Transformational leadership involves ‘Charisma’, ‘Inspiration’, ‘Individualised Consideration’ and ‘Intellectual Stimulation’. This unlocks the ability and motivation so ordinary people do extraordinary things.

No review of leadership literature would be complete without reference to the work of John Adair. His work is well known throughout the UK military officer corps. He was a Sandhurst academic who, in the 1960s, was sent off to garner current thinking on

²⁹ Marshall Sashkin and William E. Rosenbach, ‘A New Vision of Leadership’, p. 50, in Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach, eds., *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000).

³⁰ Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (London: Macmillan, 1985) and *Transformational Leadership, Industrial, Military and Educational Impact* (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998).

³¹ Frank Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers: An RAF Navigator’s Perspective* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005), p. 44.

leadership theory in an effort to bring teaching up to date in the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He devised a model of functional leadership based on the now legendary three circles arranged in a Venn diagram; the circles represent ‘Team’, ‘Individual’ and ‘Task’ needs, set within a specific context. He then defines a common set of functions: ‘Defining the task’; ‘Planning’; ‘Briefing’; ‘Controlling’; ‘Supporting’; ‘Informing’; and ‘Reviewing’. This approach has been adopted by each of the Initial Officer Training establishments, not least because it provides a controlled mechanism for running training exercises. Adair has sold many books based on this simple theory and is adamant in his discussions that no other theory of leadership is necessary – his three circles do the job.³² What becomes interesting is that his work is rarely, if ever, cited outside of the military context. The behavioural science community do not believe that it has any intellectual or scientific rigour. Adair’s predictable riposte is that his theory has stood the test of time in the most demanding of academies. He contends that Leadership training should be based ‘on the established body of knowledge’ – i.e. his work.³³

Adair’s work provides a useful transition from general leadership theory to the strategic leadership literature. Adair expanded his model of team, task and individual needs to embrace seven strategic functions:³⁴

- Providing Direction for the Organisation as a Whole – *Purpose/Vision*
- Getting Strategy and Policy right – *Strategic Thinking and Planning*

³² John Adair, *Effective Leadership; How to Develop Leadership Skills* (London: Gower, 1993). John Adair, *Effective Teambuilding; How to make a Winning Team* (London: Gower, 1986).

John Adair, *Inspiring Leadership; Learning from Great Leaders* (London: Thorogood, 2002).

John Adair, *Great Leaders* (Guildford: Talbot Adair Press, 1989).

John Adair, *Developing Leaders; The Ten Key principles* (Guildford: Talbot Adair Press, 1988).

³³ See the interview by Sue Weeks in *The Edge*, (the House Magazine of the Institute of Leadership and Management), September 2005, ‘Professor versus Professor’ in which Adair and Professor Keith Grint (then Director of the Lancaster Leadership Centre) exchange views on the nature of leadership education and training.

³⁴ Adair, *Effective Strategic Leadership*, p. 95.

- Making it Happen – *Operational and Administrative functions*
- Organise/Reorganise – *Making the organisation fit for purpose*
- Release the Corporate Spirit – *Energy, Morale, Confidence, Esprit de Corps*
- Relate the organisation to others and to broader society – *Allies, Partners, Stakeholders*
- Develop today and tomorrow’s leaders – *Succession Planning the long term view*

These bullets are emphasised to a greater or lesser extent in the wider strategic leadership literature. The language contained therein will recur generally throughout the analysis, with the inter-linkage of direction and ‘vision and purpose’ a consistent element.

A number of authors have confirmed the intuitive assertion that a senior leader’s personality can become imprinted on the organisation.³⁵ Furthermore, the top team can define the values of the organisation and create a social structure which embodies them.³⁶ There is considerable consistency in the literature on the strategic leader’s responsibility for setting the vision and direction of the organisation.³⁷ While high-level directional leadership is often associated with charisma, it is by no means essential.³⁸ When discussed in a disciplined leadership context, charisma must be analysed through the subjective lens of the followers and not on absolute, or objective, scale.³⁹ This has particular importance should one consider looking at Harris’s personality when he was Commander-in-Chief (C-

³⁵ D. Miller and C. Droge, ‘Psychological and Traditional Determinants of Structure’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 31(1986), pp. 539-560.

³⁶ P. Selznick, *Leadership in Administration* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

³⁷ J.P. Kotter, *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management* (New York: Free Press, 1990). M. Sashkin, ‘The Visionary Leader’, in J.A. Conger and R.N. Kanungo, eds., *Charismatic Leadership: The Elusive Factor in Organisational Effectiveness*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988). See also William L. Gardner III and John R. Schermerhorn Jr., ‘Strategic Operational Leadership and the Management of Supportive Work Environments’, in R. L. Phillips and J. G. Hunt, eds., *Strategic Leadership: A Multiorganizational-Level Perspective*, (Westport CT: Quorum, 1992). This work was based on contributions to a conference supported by the United States Army Institute for Behavioural and social Sciences and the United States Army War College held in February 1991.

³⁸ Sashkin, ‘The Visionary Leader’.

³⁹ Sashkin, ‘The Visionary Leader’. See also B.M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*,

in-C).⁴⁰ Notwithstanding the issue of charisma, Gardner and Schermerhorn point out that strategic leaders need to be able to cope with cognitive complexity; be self-reliant; have a strong motivation; be able to develop a value-based vision; then develop policies and programmes for implementing that vision; and finally, engage in behaviours that reflect the values inherent in the vision.⁴¹ Further characteristics have been identified including the ability to make abstract ideas clear; being caring; possessing good communication skills; and a consistency between words and actions over time.⁴² Although a number of these concepts will recur, there is a distinct risk of taking these lists to extremes and the temptation of trying to match individual against them could be seen as an extension to trait theory which was in vogue in the inter-war years, but is now less fashionable.⁴³

Adair's theme of 'making it happen' is reflected elsewhere in the literature. Kotter, for example, refers to this as a management function.⁴⁴ Gardner and Schermerhorn highlight that strategic leadership involves a degree of operational responsibility, in that the organisation must have the internal capacity to be able to pursue the task on a sustained basis.⁴⁵ An extension of this may reflect the leadership's attitude to technology and the organisation's ability to make the linkages between people, processes and technology.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Harris was highly respected by his crews notwithstanding the dangers he sent them into as was evident in the interviews with Lancaster veterans in 101 Squadron Association conducted when the author was officer commanding and president of the Association.

⁴¹ Gardner and Schermerhorn, op.cit., p. 103.

⁴² M. Sashkin and William E. Rosenbach, 'A New Vision of Leadership', p. 56. For an extension of the lists involved, see also Manfred Kets de Vries, 'Doing an Alexander', and Boal and Hooijberg, 'Strategic Leadership research: Moving On', p. 515.

⁴³ See Bernard M. Bass and Ralph M. Stogdill, *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1990).

⁴⁴ J. P. Kotter, *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ Gardner and Schermerhorn, op. cit., p. 105.

⁴⁶ John J. Sosik, Don I. Jung, Yair Berson, Shelley D. Donne, and Kimberly S. Jaussi, 'Making all the Right Connections: The Strategic Leadership of Top Executives in High Tech Organizations', *Organizational Dynamics*, 34(2005), p. 48.

The strategic leadership literature has therefore several offerings that can underpin the analysis of the leadership of Bomber Command and its relationship with the Air Ministry and these will be expanded upon below. But as Boal and Hooijberg point out, there has been little contemporary (let alone historical) work done on the environmental and organisational context that surrounds the conditions, timing and rationale of the leaders' decisions.⁴⁷ A combination of the top team and their immediate context therefore represents a practical way forward.

The literature on command and leadership, and their inter-relationship, follows a traditional mix of monographs and collections of papers. The key texts will be dealt with in turn. Cohen takes four wartime leaders – Churchill, Lincoln, Clemenceau and Ben Gurion – and examines how they worked with their generals.⁴⁸ He contends that all four were successful, comfortable with technology and avid students of warfare. Much of the early part of this book has resonance with the importance of key relations at the very pinnacle, or apex, of strategic decision making.⁴⁹ Cohen points out that senior leaders have basic common tasks such as setting direction, choosing subordinates, monitoring performance, inspiring achievement and handling external constituencies. He takes this latter point further, stating that in wartime the stakes are exceptionally high and gaps in knowledge and mutual understanding so great; these factors are exacerbated by differences in background and personality. Relationships are therefore critically important, not just to

⁴⁷ Boal and Hooijberg, 'Strategic Leadership Research: Moving On', pp. 515-549.

⁴⁸ Cohen, *Supreme Command*.

⁴⁹ See H. Mintzberg, *Structures in Fives: Designing Effective Organisations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1983) in which the master of strategy uses a model with the strategic apex, the middle line, the operational core, the techno-structure and the support staff. There is scope to examine Bomber Command against this model – albeit in further work.

the military historian, but to anyone involved in the study of leadership.⁵⁰ In his chapter on Churchill, Cohen is taken with the idea of artistry, by which he means the ability to combine technical detail with an overall sense of where the whole is going; he takes this concept from Churchill's own comparison of statesmanship with painting. Inevitably, the technical detail is vital to achieving the decisive edge and strategic leaders need to be comfortable with the ambiguity symptomatic of a time of radical change and innovation.

For the purpose of this literature review, Cohen provides a key text. His focus on civil military relations is key to the discussion on leadership. Although it is a statement of the obvious to point out that Cohen does not deal with Bomber Command, his introductory comments do highlight the importance of relationships between political leaders and their senior generals. This adds to the complexity of the task facing the senior military leaders in that they have to recognise that, even in wartime, politics impact on the formulation of strategy.

Van Creveld in *Command in War* investigates the historical evolution of command, control and communications – C³ in the modern jargon.⁵¹ He discusses the nature of command and describes its prime function as visiting death and destruction on the enemy within the shortest period of time and at minimum loss – something which the architects of the bomber offensive would associate themselves. Such an approach is, however, at odds with international legal, and ethical, notions of discrimination and proportionality. These

⁵⁰ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, pp. 1-2.

⁵¹ Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1985).

will be dealt with in a later chapter, but suffice it to say that Van Creveld's work has been subject to challenge in a number of areas.⁵²

John Keegan, in his oft-cited work *The Mask of Command*, looks at the activities of four military leaders – Alexander the Great, Wellington, Grant and Hitler.⁵³ He portrays them in the light of being an archetypal hero, anti-hero, unheroic and a false hero respectively. In his introduction, Keegan deliberately attempts to distance himself from social scientists who have tried to seek universality from the traits and behaviours of generals. Rather, he posits that the demands of generalship (which is more than merely command in the field) will be determined by the context. Keegan looks at a range of command functions, and, critically for this review, looks at the support proffered by the generals' top teams – the staff. Unfortunately, Keegan does not offer a theoretical underpinning for this inclusion, but merely describes them.

There are a number of historical works that focus on failure in war.⁵⁴ The genre that detail mishaps in general will not be discussed further. Pois and Langer's work, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership*, includes a chapter on Churchill, Harris and strategic bombing.⁵⁵ This chapter is unhelpful as it seeks to castigate the main proponents for a pointless offensive. As with so many works that have 'leadership' in the title, the discussion is actually more centred on the 'leaders', omitting any real discussion on how they carried their role or office – or their relationship with the organisation at

⁵² This has been the case Van Creveld's chapter section on the Somme; a point discussed with Gary Sheffield.

⁵³ John Keegan, *The Mask of Command*.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Eliot A. Cohen, and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Vintage Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ Robert Pois and Philip Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership* (Indiana: Indian University Press, 2004), ch. 7, 'Winston Churchill, Arthur Harris and British Strategic Bombing'.

which these individuals were the head. The psychological element of their discussion concentrates on the role of trial and error in animal behaviour experiments and seeks to draw parallels with Harris's inflexible and dogmatic adherence to bombing doctrine. The chapter concludes, somewhat disingenuously, with an admission that the complexity of attrition warfare was such that limited benefit had actually resulted from sticking to the task.

In terms of closing in on the literature directly pertinent to the Second World War and, in particular, the Bomber Command experience, there are a number of chapters in edited works. Brian Farrell's examination of *Leadership and Responsibility in the Second World War*, provides a collection of essays in tribute to the life of Robert Vogel.⁵⁶ Farrell, in his introduction, wrestles with definitions of leadership ranging from Harry S. Truman's desk sign stating the buck stopped with him through to issues of accountability – an important concept when looking at the waging of total war at an extreme beyond the realms of moral philosophy. Paul D. Dickson in his chapter 'Colonials and Coalitions: Canadian-British Command Relations between Normandy and the Scheldt' serves to emphasise the complexity of leadership at the strategic levels when dealing with coalition partners.⁵⁷ Although Dickson barely mentions the air component, he sets a useful reminder that the relationship between allies adds further complexity to the leadership challenge. This can be complicated yet more if the decision making levels of authority between the partners do not exactly align; if there is a break down in communications; or if interpersonal relations become strained. Each of these facets will emerge in Chapter 6.

⁵⁶ Brian P. Farrell, *Leadership and Responsibility in the Second World War* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Paul D. Dickson, 'Colonials and Coalitions: Canadian-British Command Relations between Normandy and the Scheldt' in Farrell, *Leadership and Responsibility in the Second World War*.

Sheffield's work on *Leadership and Command* takes a series of papers produced through the auspices of the British Commission for Military History.⁵⁸ A recurring theme from the papers contained therein is the relationship between leadership and command. John Bourne's chapter, 'British Generals in the First World War', points out that failures in leadership often resulted in dramatic failures on the battlefield.⁵⁹ As the war progressed, the more able started to rise through the ranks, resulting in a shift towards a meritocracy. Furthermore, senior leaders are a product of their own backgrounds, with important lessons for the subsequent study of Bomber Command personnel.⁶⁰ Although Goulter admits to 'Harris fatigue' [emphasis in the original], her paper on Harris fills usefully a gap in the historiography by concentrating on Harris in his time as Air Officer Commanding (AOC) 5 Group and as the DCAS.⁶¹ The thesis will touch on Harris's role in the latter appointment.

Brian Bond and Kyoichi Tachikawa in their *British and Japanese Military Leadership in the Far Eastern War, 1941 -1945*⁶², include chapters on air operations, with Michael Dockrill contributing for the British and Hisayuki for the Japanese⁶³. The very specific theatre of operations precludes any overlap with Bomber Command leadership, but the contest for resources at the very senior echelons will need further consideration.

⁵⁸ G.D. Sheffield (ed.), *Leadership and Command, The Anglo-American Experience since 1861* (London: Brassey's, 2002).

⁵⁹ J.M. Bourne, 'British Generals in the First World War', in Sheffield, *ibid*, p. 93.

⁶⁰ See Tim. Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900 – 1918* (London: Allen Unwin, 1987). Chapter 4 of this work looks in particular at the impact of Staff College training on Haig. Travers' views have undergone significant revision: see Gary Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: HarperCollins, forthcoming in 2010).

⁶¹ Dr, Christina Goulter, 'Sir Arthur Harris: Different Perspectives', Gary Sheffield and Geoffrey Till (eds), *Challenges of High Command in the Twentieth Century* (Camberley: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1999), pp.75-85.

⁶² Brian Bond and Kyoichi Tachikawa (eds.), *British and Japanese Military Leadership in the Far Eastern War, 1941 -1945* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2004).

⁶³ Michael Dockrill, 'British Leadership in Air Operations: Malaya and Burma', and Hisayuki Yokoyama, 'Air Operational Leadership in the Southern Front: Imperial Army Aviation's Trial to be an 'Air Force' in the Malaya Offensive Air Operation' in Bond and Tachikawa, *op.cit*.

Conrad C. Crane, writing in Kolenda's collection, *Leadership: The Warrior's Art* looks at LeMay's leadership role and the ethics of the fire-bombing of Japanese cities.⁶⁴ Crane describes the circumstances leading up to LeMay's switch to low level incendiary raids in some detail, strongly suggesting that tactical considerations and effectiveness were of greater importance than ethical debate. The fire-bombing of Tokyo in March 1945 was followed by a psychological operation involved in leaflet dropping over major cities. This resulted in an exodus of 6.5 million civilians from their homes causing huge disruption. (There is a common theme here with the escalating war in Europe in which changes were more a result of tactical expediency than the consequences of high level policy considerations.)⁶⁵ The archetypal philosophical conversation over the bombing of Japan has centred on the conclusion that the firestorms and the nuclear deliveries prevented huge loss of American (and Japanese) lives in removing the need for an invasion of the home islands. This may well be true, but the debate is complicated by the then widespread, absolute loathing of the Japanese as a race. The ethical debate over the bombing of Germany is more complex and understanding of the pressures on the leadership is not helped by the tendency of modern writers to impose a modern interpretation of international law, ethics and philosophy.⁶⁶

There can, however, be no doubt that ethical (and legal) considerations are a fundamental element of strategic leadership. Contemporary leadership theory considers

⁶⁴ Conrad C. Crane, 'Leadership, Technology, and the Ethics of Total War: Curtis E. LeMay and the Fire Bombing of Japan' in Kolenda, *Leadership: The Warrior's Art*.

⁶⁵ F. M. Sallagar, *The Road to Total War* (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975), pp. 156 – 157.

⁶⁶ See, for example, A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Was the Allied Bombing of Civilians in WWII (sic) a Necessity or a Crime?* (London, Bloomsbury, 2006). Note also the Chapter by Donald Bloxham, 'Dresden as a War Crime', in Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang, (eds.), *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden in 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006).

legal and ethical issues as being of increasing importance as the leader becomes more senior.⁶⁷ The inter-relationship between decision-making on the basis of what is ethically right and what is legal is more complex than at first sight. This is especially true when the law, whether in the commercial sphere or in international relations, is in the process of development.⁶⁸ This is certainly true in the retrospective analysis of the bombing campaigns spawning another discrete genre of literature. Bomber Command has had its share of critics including works such as A. C. Grayling's *Among the Dead Cities*.⁶⁹ These criticisms tend to adopt contemporary jurisprudential thinking along with ethical language that was not in common use at the time that senior leaders were actually making the decisions. It is nevertheless, an important area and will be examined, from the perspective of the leadership challenge, in later chapters.

Two key texts on leadership and Bomber Command are Mark Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, and Allan English, *The Cream of the Crop*.⁷⁰ Both works represent the authors' doctoral theses. Wells analyses aircrew selection, reaction to combat, morale, leadership and ability to withstand the stress of flying.⁷¹ He provides an excellent chapter on the importance of leadership at the group level and below emphasising the vital need for good people to be at squadron commander level if the units are to operate effectively. English looks critically at the Canadian experience over the Second World War, again with an emphasis on the human dimensions.

⁶⁷ See for example, Hunt, *Leadership: A New Synthesis*, p.160.

⁶⁸ Kakabadse, *Essence of Leadership*, p.384.

⁶⁹ A. C. Grayling, op. cit. There are also many works on Dresden which will be tackled in due course.

⁷⁰ Allan D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew 1939 – 1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill and Queen's University Press, 1996).and Mark K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Experience in the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

⁷¹ For the debate on the stigma attached to the lack of moral fibre, see Edgar Jones, "'LMF': The use of Psychiatric Stigma in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War', *Journal of Military History*, 70 (2006), pp. 439-458.

In terms of the relationship between senior Bomber Command commanders and their ‘colleagues’ in the Air Ministry, Cox’s analysis in Gray and Cox, *Air Power Leadership: Theory and Practice*, is excellent⁷² and is worth reading in parallel with Biddle’s chapter in the same volume which describes Portal’s relationship with Churchill.⁷³ These relationships, primarily in the context of the development of bombing policy and doctrine are also covered in Biddle’s *Rhetoric and Reality*.⁷⁴ In the academic arena, the unpublished thesis by Cording deals with the relationship between the Air Ministry and Harris in considerable detail and draws heavily on the Bufton Papers; this will be covered in a later chapter.⁷⁵

The more general works on Bomber Command have little specific discussion on leadership issues in general, nor on the relationship between Bomber Command and the Air Ministry. As a number of the more influential works draw heavily on the Official History, that will be dealt with first.⁷⁶ The four volume set on *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945* was compiled by Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland and published in 1960.⁷⁷ The first point to note with this work is that it just tackles the strategic bomber offensive and is not, therefore, the official history of Bomber Command. It has, however, come to be viewed as such and this has tended to skew the historiography

⁷² Cox, ‘Harris and the Air Ministry’ in Gray and Cox, *Air Power Leadership*.

⁷³ Tami Davis Biddle, ‘Winston Churchill and Sir Charles Portal: Their Wartime Relationship, 1940-1945’, in Gray and Cox, op. cit..

⁷⁴ Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*.

⁷⁵ Rex F. Cording, *The Other Bomber Battle: An Examination of the Problems that arose between the Air Staff and the AOC Bomber Command between 1942 and 1945 and their Effects on the Strategic Bomber Offensive*, PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 2006.

⁷⁶ Sebastian Cox, ‘Setting the Historical Agenda: Webster and Frankland and the debate over the Strategic Bombing Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945’, in Jeffrey Grey, *The last word: essays on official history in the United States and British Commonwealth* (London: Praeger, 2003), p.164.

⁷⁷ Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1960).

and much of the subsequent debate.⁷⁸ That Webster and Frankland do not tackle leadership head on is not through their lack of interest in the subject; rather it reflects the notion that the art and science of leadership as a subject in its own right has tended to be a post-war phenomenon.⁷⁹ The attitudes towards leadership of those serving at the time, and their debt to the ‘Trenchard legacy’, will be dealt with at the start of Chapter 2 where it leads into the formulation of, and adherence to, doctrinal thinking.

One area on which Webster and Frankland do concentrate was the deterioration in the relationship between Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris when he was C-in-C and the CAS, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Charles Portal, in 1944.⁸⁰ The great extent to which the ‘Whitehall machine’ attempted to dampen the implied criticism of Portal caused Webster and Frankland considerable angst at the time of writing and stoked much controversy on publication.⁸¹ The Harris/Portal relationship will be looked at in more detail in a subsequent chapter where it will be dealt with in its own right, but also in the context of the impact that high level spats have on the associated top teams and their relationships.

A key difficulty in using Webster and Frankland as a basis for a history of Bomber Command is the problem of deciding just which of the raids, campaigns or offensives were

⁷⁸ Cox, ‘Setting The Historical Agenda’, p. 164.

⁷⁹ For example, the idea of using exercises to test for leadership skills was developed by psychologists working for the British Army in the Second World War following 50% failure rates in officer cadet training in 1942. The work the development of these tests was not published until 1949, by which time the tests had become widely used by all three Services and are recognisable today. Henry Harris, *The Group Approach to Leadership Testing*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1949). Prior to this point, Regular officer selection was based more on school and parentage: see also Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*.

⁸⁰ Portal was promoted to Marshal of the RAF on 1 January 1944. See Denis Richards, *Portal of Hungerford: The Life of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford KG, GCB, OM, DSO, MC* (London: Heinemann, 1977).

⁸¹ Noble Frankland, *History at War: The Campaigns of an Historian* (London: de la Mare, 1998), Chapter 4 in general and pp. 100-105 in particular. See also Cox, ‘Setting The Historical Agenda’, p.164.

strategic in nature, which were designed to support operations leading up to the invasion of France and which were in support of other Commands. Both Hastings and Verrier draw heavily on Webster and Frankland and this theme is evident in both.⁸² Hastings, for much of his work, follows a narrative theme linking the development of bombing policy with first-hand accounts of some of the major raids. His occasional forays into leadership issues concentrate on Harris as an individual.⁸³ Neither author looks in any depth at the relationship between the two organisations.⁸⁴

Beyond Hastings and Verrier, there are many books on Bomber Command at the tactical level that have little, if any, relation to this thesis. This trend is typical of that identified by Black in *Rethinking Military History* in which he laments the tendency for military historians to become compartmentalised concentrating ‘largely on developments at the front’.⁸⁵ Ironically, this trend is very much mirrored in the leadership field with a preponderance of studies at the lower management levels; this reflects the difficulty in obtaining study samples of higher level executives.⁸⁶

The vast majority of the contemporary leadership literature focuses on, unsurprisingly, the individual.⁸⁷ This inevitably ranges from ‘great man’ theory, through trait (and neo-trait) theory, transformational, situational, functional, emotional intelligence into the business world of ‘gurus’ and the magical number lottery – pick your favourite

⁸² Cox, *ibid.*, p. 164, Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1993 [1979]) and Anthony Verrier, *The Bomber Offensive* (London: Batsford, 1968).

⁸³ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, p.188.

⁸⁴ Verrier, *The Bomber Offensive*, p. 216, for example, admits that the Air Staff were divided in their views on Harris’s objectives, but does not go into any real detail.

⁸⁵ Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. xi.

⁸⁶ Hunt, *Leadership: A New Synthesis*, p. 11-12.

⁸⁷ For example, Craig Scarlett, APS, ‘Sir Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris: An effective leader in command?’, Geddes Papers, Australian Command and Staff College, 2004.

number and there will be an appropriate number of ‘habits’ or traits. Some work has been done on psycho-history, but the lack of methodology makes it unconvincing and will not be followed further.⁸⁸ Biographical treatment of the key individuals has been attempted, albeit not in a leadership theory context. The older biographies tend to the hagiographic which gloss over major areas of conflict, or are evidently biased to the benefit of their subject.⁸⁹ Probert’s biography of Harris is a much more balanced work.⁹⁰ A more prolific author of Royal Air Force senior officer biographies, Vincent Orange, has dealt with a number of important men. His work on Tedder is comprehensive in scope and approach, but that on Slessor is less so.⁹¹

A review of the equivalent works on Second World War generals would reveal a specific genre that is absent from the air world. There are a number of books reviewing the performance, in command, of senior army officers. The earliest of these was by C. N. Barclay who took a series of case studies of generals from the early days of the War.⁹² Others effectively look at the same officers in the context of them being Churchill’s generals.⁹³ In terms of relationships with Allies, which will feature strongly in Chapter 6,

⁸⁸ P. Suedfeld, R. S. Corteen and C McCormick, ‘The Role of Integrative Complexity in Military Leadership: Robert E. Lee and his opponents’.

⁸⁹ Saward’s biography of Harris and Richards’ of Portal are immediate examples. Dudley Saward, *Bomber Harris* (London: Cassell, 1984) and Richards, *Portal of Hungerford*.

⁹⁰ Henry Probert, *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times* (London: Greenhill, 2001).

⁹¹ Vincent Orange, *Tedder: Quietly in Command* (London: Cass, 2004); *Slessor: Bomber Champion: the life of Marshal of the RAF Sir John Slessor, GCB, DSO, MC* (London: Grub Street, 2006). See also his work on Park – *Park: the biography of Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park GCB, KBE, MC, DFC, DCL* (London: Grub Street, 2001). Although English by origin, Orange has spent much of his academic career in New Zealand and has clearly associated himself with ‘fellow kiwis’ such as Park. The latter believed that Slessor engineered his dismissal from the Service, *Park*, p.145. This may explain some of the disappointing nature of the Slessor biography.

⁹² C. N. Barclay, *On Their Shoulders: British Generalship in the Lean Years 1939-1942* (London: Faber, 1964). He covers the likes of Gort, Wilson and Wavell with the thesis that they actually performed as well as could have been expected in the context.

⁹³ Richard Mead, *Churchill’s Lions* (London: Pen and Sword, 2007); John Keegan (ed.), *Churchill’s Generals* (London: Cassell edition published 2005[1991]); Raymond Callahan, *Churchill and his Generals* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2007).

Danchev's works on the relationships that Dill forged in Washington are significant.⁹⁴ But there are no equivalent studies for, say, Slessor's time in Washington. Beyond the standard biographies, one of the more relevant works on leadership from a naval perspective is Roskill's *The Art of Leadership* in which he expresses his views on the essence of military leadership.⁹⁵ Roskill draws on a wide range of examples from military and naval figures. This is an example of the use of 'great man theory' which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In summary, the literature review can be characterised by paradoxes. At first sight, there are vast numbers of books on leadership. But the literature on strategic leadership is limited. Likewise there is a huge range of material on Bomber Command, but little is focused on leadership and less still on the strategic leadership and direction of the campaign. Although Danchev's work on the relationships between Dill and the Americans suggests that there is considerable scope for these issues to be explored, apparently little work has been done on this for any of the services. Nor has work looked at the strategic leadership of a campaign from its inception to its conclusion using contemporary leadership theory as an analytical tool.

The leadership literature strongly suggests that there is a paradigm shift in the challenge of moving up into the strategic arena. It would therefore be fruitful to concentrate on the modern theory of this transition in order to analyse the direction of the

⁹⁴ See Alex Danchev, *Very Special Relationship: Field Marshal Sir John Dill and the Anglo-American alliance 1941-44*, (London: Brassey's, 1986). See also Alex Danchev, 'Dilly-Dally, or Having the Last Word: Field Marshal Sir John Dill and Prime Minister Winston Churchill', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22, 1987, pp.21-44 and Alex Danchev, *A Special Relationship: Field Marshal Sir John Dill and General George C. Marshall*, *JRUSI*, 139 (June 1985), pp.56-61.

⁹⁵ Captain S. W. Roskill, *The Art of Leadership* (London: Collins, 1964).

Offensive. This significant shift is consistent with the strategic studies literature which looks at the role of the senior commanders (the generals), and in particular the relationship between them and the politicians.⁹⁶ The extensive literature on strategy formulation, senior leadership and policy generation – coupled with widely varying usage of similar terminology in the military context (contemporary and historical) risks confusion in analysis as trailed in the discussion on Webster and Frankland. This issue will be covered in the next discrete section.

Terminology

The literature on strategic bombing uses ‘doctrine’, ‘policy’ and ‘strategy’ to tell much the same story; ‘ideas’, ‘thinking’ and ‘planning’ can be added to the lexicon.⁹⁷ To prevent the risk of confusion, or duplication, some definition of key terms is necessary. In the ‘strategic’ leadership literature the terms ‘senior’, ‘executive’ and ‘strategic’ are used interchangeably, often within the same book: Zaccaro goes on to confirm that only between 2% and 5% of the literature on leadership covers the senior area.⁹⁸ In a military environment, there is a reluctance to use the first two of these titles, as ‘senior’ embraces a range of ranks and ‘executive’ either refers to an appointment or has inferences of civilian management terminology; hence ‘strategic leadership’ is the marked preference.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ For example, Cohen, *Supreme Command*.

⁹⁷ Neville Jones, *The Origins of Strategic Bombing: A Study of the Development of British Air Strategic Thought and Practice up to 1918* (London: Kimber, 1973); Neville Jones, *The Beginnings of Strategic Air Power: A History of the British Bomber Force 1923-39* (London: Cass, 1987); Scot Robertson, *The Development of RAF Strategic Bombing Doctrine, 1919-1939* (Westport CT, Praeger, 1995); Harvey B. Tress, *British Strategic Bombing Policy Through 1940: Politics, Attitudes and the Formation of a Lasting Pattern* (Lewiston NY: Mellen Press, 1988). H. Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars 1918 1939*; Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*.

⁹⁸ Stephen J. Zaccaro, *The Nature of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis of Success*, (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), p.7.

⁹⁹ The author was Director of the Defence Leadership & Management Centre for over three years and was responsible for running the Defence Strategic Leadership Programme for officers and officials of 1* rank and above; anything that had clear links to MBA studies was viewed with some scepticism.

In its broadest dictionary sense, 'strategic' is seen as serving the ends of strategy; it also refers to those materials essential in fighting a war; but it also refers to those weapons that are 'used for attacking an enemy's home territory as a longer-term military objective'.¹⁰⁰ Strategy in turn, comes from the Greek *strategia* – meaning 'generalship'. The first dictionary definition given is 'the art of war'; this is followed by the 'management of an army, or armies in a campaign'; the next version of the definition is 'the art of moving troops, ships or aircraft etc. into favourable positions'. The final definition given is 'a plan of action or policy in business or politics etc.'.¹⁰¹ From these definitions it is clear that 'strategy/strategic' could be taken to mean what anyone chose it to mean. From a more purist military doctrinal viewpoint, strategy is instinctively linked to the higher organisation of defence and includes the art of developing and employing military forces with grand strategic objectives.¹⁰² It is axiomatic that, at the highest levels of international relations, the strategic levers of power encompass all aspects of government including industrial, economic, diplomatic, legal and political, as well as military.¹⁰³ The wider business nomenclature reinforces the high level nature of strategy formulation:

Strategy is the direction and scope of an organisation over the long term which achieves advantage for the organisation through its configuration of resources within a changing environment to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder expectations.¹⁰⁴ [Emphasis added]

¹⁰⁰ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Ninth Edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 1377.

¹⁰¹ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p. 1377.

¹⁰² *Leadership in Defence* (Shrivenham: The Defence Leadership Centre, 2004), p.63.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Gerry Johnson and Kevin Scholes, *Exploring Corporate Strategy* (London: Prentice Hall, 2003), p. 7.

Among the authors on business strategy, Mintzberg acknowledges the linkage of, and differentiation between, strategy and tactics and acknowledges the long-standing debt that the business world owes to military thinking.¹⁰⁵ Mintzberg also states that care must be taken not to label things simply as tactics or strategy, because perspectives will vary according to from where in the hierarchy the plan is viewed.

This issue is more complex in the typical military model which interposes ‘operations’ between ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics’. The last of these is very much the business of those involved in close contact with the enemy and represents the means by which local victory is achieved. The operational level of war has historically embraced the theatre of operations in which a commander has control. It is the level at which campaigns, and major operations, are planned and directed – usually in accordance with direction from the strategic level which, in turn, has political direction. The strategic level maintains the overview of all theatres and other commands.¹⁰⁶ A common thread running through these levels is the acquisition of resources at the highest governmental levels and the subsequent prioritisation of those resources, namely money, personnel and materiel.¹⁰⁷ Competition for resources is inevitably intense, especially in the years immediately preceding a major conflict, during hostilities, and in the aftermath when the need to reduce public spending is paramount. It is essentially the role of committees, such as the Chiefs of Staff, to decide upon the relative priorities.¹⁰⁸ Contemporary doctrine acknowledges a degree of overlap in the levels of warfare and that the dynamic nature of conflict will result in interaction

¹⁰⁵ Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Amongst the panoply of doctrinal publications see, for example, *AP3000, British Air Power Doctrine* (Third edition, Directorate of Air Staff, MoD, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ *AP 3000*, p. 1.1.2.

¹⁰⁸ For narrative examples see the references in Alanbrooke’s *War Diaries*, p. 236-238.

between the levels.¹⁰⁹ For much of the Bomber Command Offensive against Germany, the art of the operationally possible seriously influenced what could be sensibly planned at the strategic level.¹¹⁰

For the purposes of this thesis, ‘strategy’ will be used to refer to the higher organisation of, in this specific case, the Air Ministry and its development and employment of air power in the prosecution of grand strategic objectives – eventually the overthrow of the Axis forces. In terms of the Bomber Command part in this, the thesis will follow the example set by Webster and Frankland in using the Strategic Air Offensive against Germany to refer to: ‘...direct attack on the enemy state with the object of depriving it of the means or the will to continue the war’.¹¹¹ It is immediately clear from this definition that Bomber Command operations over France would fall outside these terms. So would attacks on Germany with other objectives in mind. But it may be argued that all activity was grist to the mill. The reality of the prioritisation of targets and the subsequent allocation of resources was to put real strain on individual relationships, on relationships between staffs and between allies; for example, the debate over targeting priorities in the run up to *Overlord* occasioned considerable friction between Portal, Harris and Tedder. These will be dealt with in some depth.

‘Policy’, again at its simplest dictionary definition, is the ‘course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual etc’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ AP3000, p. 1.1.3.

¹¹⁰ Frankland, *History at War*, p. 64.

¹¹¹ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p. 6.

¹¹² *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p. 1057.

Thus policy can be formulated at each of the levels within an organisation. In practical terms, the strategy projects the long term goals and higher aspirations. The policy is an iteration of how this can be done. A sub-set of the policy nomenclature is use of the term to represent a set of rules to supplement formal regulations.¹¹³ ‘Policy’ could therefore be formulated on almost any subject. In most bureaucracies, it invariably is and the Air Ministry was no exception.¹¹⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, the term will be used in the context of senior decision making and not in terms of strategy formulation or doctrinal thinking.

‘Doctrine’ is, again at its simplest, ‘that which is taught’.¹¹⁵ Although this definition may appeal to the dictionary writers, it has considerably less relevance for the military audience. For them, however, doctrine has been defined as:

fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of objectives. Doctrine is authoritative, but requires judgement in application, it is dynamic and must be reviewed for relevance.¹¹⁶

In the context of strategic bombing, this contemporary definition is not helpful in that doctrine is based upon both theory and practice.¹¹⁷ The concept was still unproven and the approach of many senior officers to the subject actually more closely reflected the religious definition of doctrine in which it is used to state ‘principles of belief’.¹¹⁸ A more useful approach to this issue reflects that taken by Corbett in looking at the use of theoretical study. He suggested that this type of doctrinal thinking allows politicians and military planners to be able to utilise ‘mental power and verbal apparatus’ on a level playing

¹¹³ For example, the regulations on commissioning senior non-commissioned aircrew were straight forward, but Harris sought authority, through a change in policy, to commission sergeant pilots to prevent problems in mixed-rank crews. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, p. 123.

¹¹⁴ For example, note the 16 volumes of correspondence in AIR 2.

¹¹⁵ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p. 398.

¹¹⁶ *AP3000*, p. 3.11.1.

¹¹⁷ Philip S. Meilinger, *Airwar: Theory and Practice* (London: Cass, 2003), p. 36.

¹¹⁸ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, *ibid.* See Meilinger, *Airwar: Theory and Practice*, ch. 2.

field.¹¹⁹ For the purposes of thesis, ‘doctrine’ will be used sparingly and then to reflect ‘doctrinal thinking’ in the Corbett sense, rather than the contemporary usage.

Senior Leadership – The Underpinning Theory

There are many definitions of leadership, management and command.¹²⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, the definitions used by the United Kingdom Defence Academy are comprehensive and of sufficient authority.¹²¹ But as Katz and Kahn point out, there are significant qualitative differences between the requirements of junior and senior levels of leadership.¹²² Although leadership development should be a continuum through rank level within an organisation, contemporary literature emphasises the step changes between face-to-face leadership and the running of an organisation. Both Katz and Kahn, and more recently Day and Lord, consider lower level leaders to be primarily interested in the deployment of technical knowledge and the administration of an existing system (on the tacit assumption that it is fit for purpose even though it may not be). Middle level leaders ‘interpret, and elaborate structure policy and strategy’.¹²³ Leaders at the top level ‘create organizational structure, formulate policy and develop corporate strategies’.¹²⁴

Day and Lord emphasise that the vast majority of practical organisations are open and must therefore interact with their environment.¹²⁵ Although their table of direct and indirect influences is orientated towards the corporate world, the parallels with the thesis

¹¹⁹ Julian S. Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy*, (London: Longmans, 1911) p. 3.

¹²⁰ R. M. Stogdill, *Handbook of Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1974). Stogdill comments that ‘there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there persons who have attempted to define the concept’, p. 259.

¹²¹ These definitions are published in *Leadership in Defence* and are reproduced at Appendix 1.

¹²² D. Katz and R. L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: Wiley 1978), p. 537.

¹²³ David V. Day and Robert G. Lord, ‘Executive Leadership and Organizational Performance: Suggestions for a New Theory and Methodology’, *Journal of Management*, 14 (3) (1988), p. 459.

¹²⁴ Day and Lord, *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Day and Lord, *ibid.*, p. 461.

topic are valid. Targets in the external environment include influence on Government policy and the acquisition of resources. Strategic planning and organisational design help to bring about adaptation to that environment. This leads to the requirement, internally, to ensure that the organisation, management processes and reporting systems are in place and fit for purpose. Organisation climate and culture must also be improved to increase employee motivation and commitment.¹²⁶

Zaccaro adds that senior leadership is also concerned with longer time lines than the lower levels in the organisation.¹²⁷ He goes on to synthesise the various models and has proposed the following definition of senior leadership:

That set of activities directed toward the development and management of the organization as a whole, including all of its subcomponents, to reflect long-range policies and purposes that have emerged from the senior leader's interactions within the organization and his or her interpretations of the organization's external environment.¹²⁸

Zaccaro expands his own research by using Stratified Systems Theory and applying it to the United States Army; he contends that senior leadership embraces 3* and 4* grade officers – Air Marshal and Air Chief Marshal in Royal Air Force ranks.¹²⁹ For the basis of the thesis, it will not be necessary to take this theory any further other than to acknowledge a considerable degree of consistency in the levels under consideration. Likewise, Zaccaro's definition of senior leadership does not require significant overhaul. It is, however, worth adding that the senior leader has to cope with increasingly complex tasks

¹²⁶ Day and Lord, *ibid.*, Table 2.

¹²⁷ Stephen J. Zaccaro, *The Nature of Executive Leadership*, p. 13.

¹²⁸ Zaccaro, *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Zaccaro, *ibid.*, p. 27.

brought about by the need to cope with the uncertainties, and risks, inherent in both the internal and external environments.¹³⁰

It is a moot point, at this stage, as to whether military education programmes, and systems of succession planning, identify and educate officers to fill these demanding requirements, in addition to them having the technical expertise and courage necessary to progress in their respective services. This latter point has particular relevance to services such as the RAF where prowess as a pilot is essential to progress through the ranks, but may not be sufficient at the higher levels of command. Proficiency at the lower levels of leadership, as evinced by Katz and Kahn, may not necessarily qualify officers for the middle and senior levels of leadership. Although it is outside the scope of the thesis to conduct an analysis of each of the officer's personal and professional attributes, succession planning is an integral part of the duties of the senior leader and this will be a consistent theme running through the chapters.

The organisational theory literature is vast, as is that on the leadership of change. From an empirical approach, Jackson and Bramall have suggested, possibly simplistically, that real change in military affairs only comes about when three key factors come together: defeat, public opinion and cost.¹³¹ From a practical viewpoint, it could be argued that significant change in the political landscape could be added to this list whether it be in terms of liberal imperialism, pacifism or a narrow focus on economical determinants. The modern literature emphasises the importance of this external environment on an organisation and how the senior leadership must take cognisance of it if they are to avoid

¹³⁰ Hunt, *Leadership: A New Synthesis*, p. 15.

¹³¹ General Sir William Jackson and Field Marshal Lord Bramall, *The Chiefs: The Story of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff* (London: Brassey's, 1992), p7.

(potentially cataclysmic) failure.¹³² In the ideal world, a senior team will monitor this environment and make incremental change as appropriate; a top team will seek, from within their organisation, to influence their environment for the benefit of their organisation and to some extent this can be seen in Trenchard's approach to RAF policy in 1921 (see below). Many historians, especially when dealing with inter-war strategy, policy and doctrine, seek to impose a degree of logic and causality yet modern literature acknowledges that the most effective senior managers recognise that they have only limited power to impose corporate renewal from the top.¹³³ Rather, they 'create a climate for change by specifying the direction in which the company should move, without insisting on specific solutions'.¹³⁴ This may appear similar to mission command, but is arguably a degree more subtle. The cognitive complexity involved in such an approach does not suit all personality types (or traits) and Norman Dixon would argue that many in the senior echelons of the military are unsuited to wrestling with ambiguity on this scale, both by natural inclination to anti-intellectualism and poverty in education and personal development.¹³⁵ It would be tempting, and mischievous, to conduct an analysis on the basis of Dixon's work, but it could not be conducted in a rigorous manner and is, in any case, social psychology rather than history.

¹³² Jean Hartley, 'Organizational Change and Development', Peter Warr (ed), *Psychology at Work*, 5th edn. (London: Penguin, 2002 [1971]), pp, 402 – 404. Various tools are used in the commercial world such as PEST – Political, Economic, Sociological and Technological. This has recently been expanded to PESTLE to include Legal and Environmental. The author has used these approaches with top teams (2*- 4*) and it is an interesting reflection on cognitive capacity as to the willingness to embrace a different approach. The teams under question in this thesis did all of this intuitively.

¹³³ Eugene McKenna, *Business Psychology and Organisational Behaviour* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2006), p. 544.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Cape, 1976).

Thesis Content

From the various recurring themes in the literature on strategic leadership one in particular needs to be emphasised because it features throughout this thesis (and in its title). That is the relationship between strategic leadership and direction. Senior leaders set the vision and purpose of the organisation or enterprise. In so doing, they set the direction as discussed above in the review of the theory. Beyond this, the direction is critically important because it takes the enterprise from the conceptual plane into the operational sphere where something is actually done to ‘make it happen’. The strategic leadership literature emphasises the importance of the interfaces between open organisations; where there is action needed between the sides, direction will often be the means by which ends are sought and achieved through these interfaces. In this thesis, the use of the word is complicated by the formal mechanism by which the will of the Air Council was translated into instructions to the front line. This was through Directives (or Directifs (sic)). Many of these were formal and the more important will be discussed. Others tended to reflect changes in targeting policy or political imperatives. It was the sheer quantity of these to which Harris objected and this will be covered in the last two substantive chapters. But it may also be argued that Harris may not have grasped the subtleties or distinctions. The emphasis on direction is also important because of the popular perception on inspirational leadership (discussed above, especially in the context of the work of Burns and then Bass). But in the vast majority of organisations, especially in wartime, this type of leadership must run in parallel with straight direction if the war aims are to be achieved.

This thesis will examine a number of more general recurring themes beyond the setting of the vision and purpose for the bomber offensive, both in terms of its conceptual

development and its execution. The ‘direction’ of the offensive, in all of the meanings of the word, will be explored in the context of the experience of the senior leaders, the organisation they grew into, and its fitness for purpose. The complexity and ambiguity of the challenges facing the senior leaders will be discussed, particularly at the interfaces with other organisations and allies. The nature of the interfaces between the senior military leaders and their political masters will be of key importance because the relationships varied depending on the personalities involved at each level. Another theme which will continue throughout the thesis is the development of thinking on the ethical and legal dimensions of aerial warfare and the challenges this brought to the senior leaders at the Command, Air Ministry and political levels of government. This was, and remains, a vexed issue for the senior leaders in the United Kingdom, and for their counterparts across the Empire. Repercussions continue, not least in Canada where the remembrance of crews lost in the Command is marred by continuing accusations of war criminality.¹³⁶ The topic must be examined in the context of what was taught to the participants at all levels and to what extent ethical debate was part of the discussion process. This leads in turn into the debate on the development of international legal thinking and its interpretations. Given that the legal instruments were in draft, it was very much a question of interpretation and policy formulation. This was intuitively at odds with the desired object of a strategic bombing campaign designed to take its effects to the enemy heartlands and people. Although much of the debate on law, policy and, to a lesser extent morality, occurred prior to 1942, and the appointment of Harris to Bomber Command, it is necessary to set the scene for the conduct of the bomber offensive and the establishment of the need for there

¹³⁶ David L. Bashow, *No Prouder Place: Canadians and the Bomber Command Experience, 1939-1945* (St Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell, 2005) and interview with author October 2006 following Bashow’s Presentation to the Air Crew Association Metro Toronto Branch, 9 September 2006 (author’s collection).

to be a ‘just war’; this in turn sets the conditions for the debate on Dresden.¹³⁷ The thesis will be confined to the air operations against Germany, and not venture into the wider employment of Bomber Command, other than to highlight the debates at the strategic level over some of these ‘diversions’.

The second chapter will explore the theme of education by examining the intellectual context in which the new Service developed. Without attempting to undertake a deep analysis of the culture of the Royal Air Force, it will establish the background into the thinking behind how and why things were approached in a given way.¹³⁸ It will start with an analysis of what was understood by leadership and ‘morale issues’. This examination will look at the origins of the Royal Air Force in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) and distil the likely thinking of senior officers into what was expected of leaders in general and them as senior leaders in particular. The chapter will then start the examination of the legal issues. The final section in this chapter will examine the formulation of the strategy, and air doctrine, which was to underpin much of the thinking by the organisation of the Service in the face of the rising German threat and the dangers of a further Depression.

Chapter three will examine the organisational context of the inter war years where the survival of the new Service was paramount. The chapter will look at the constitutional and legal basis on which the Air Ministry, and its leaders, operated and start to explain some of the issues surrounding the ‘direction’ of war through the Air Council. The chapter

¹³⁷ Peter W. Gray, ‘Dresden 1945 – Just Another Raid’, *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, 4(1), 2001, pp. 1-16.

¹³⁸ For a ‘social history’ see John James, *The Paladins: A Social History of the RAF up to the outbreak of World War II* (London: Macdonald, 1990), followed by Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

will outline the relationships between the Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff and how this developed. This context is important to establish formally because the senior leaders had to operate within it under successive Prime Ministers culminating in Churchill and his role as Defence Minister from May 1940 onwards.

Chapter four will examine the challenges facing the senior leaders in the period where the disarmament talks in Geneva threatened the Service with the complete abolition of military aviation; this was seriously considered both in the talks and in the Cabinet. In this context, the chapter will continue with the development of legal thinking on the restriction of aerial bombardment as an alternative to outright abolition. Overlapping with this tension over arms limitation, was the growing realisation that Germany was becoming a real threat and some form of air parity had to be achieved. This brought a completely new range of challenges with the struggle for resources intense across the Services and expansion the order of the day. But technology was not in a position to keep pace and the senior leaders were faced with real dilemmas as to what to order in terms of airframes to build crew competency while well aware that the doctrinal potential of the Command was still some way from being operationally achievable.

Chapter five will then take this challenge forward into the years when Bomber Command was at war; hostilities were underway, but the force was effectively impotent. The realities of the story were becoming embarrassing and costly, and survival of the force in being was under threat and the concept risked being abandoned. It is easy to say that anyone can lead in times of plenty, but in the face of adversity real leadership is essential. This is also the time at which relationships can be become seriously strained – often with

long-term consequences. This chapter will examine the challenge for the senior leaders in aligning the vision of the air offensive with art of the possible and the advent of area bombing. The legal and moral thinking will be discussed in the context of the war becoming more 'total'.

Chapter six will examine the grand strategic and strategic levels and analyse the relationships between the senior leadership team and their American colleagues, both before Pearl Harbor and subsequently. The chapter will look at the strains the relationship came under both in the setting of priorities, and in how the desired ends could be achieved. As *Overlord* became a necessity, the stakes became higher and inter-personal relationships came into play. The establishment of air superiority for *Overlord* was paramount, but the debates over the language of 'command' direction and supervision were far from simple.

Chapter seven will look at the interface between the strategic and operational levels within the RAF. Throughout this debate the correspondence between Portal and his staff, and Harris became increasingly strident with the vexed question lurking in the background as to whether Portal should have sacked the C-in-C.

The final chapter will conclude by examining the senior leadership from the inception of the offensive through to the end of the war. This chapter will highlight the complexity of the conceptual and practical issues, and the ambiguity brought about by its non-linear nature. Inherent in this is that the flexibility of air power made it all the more desirable in so many theatres and for so many tasks. Both because of the promise of air power and the stakes being so high, the pressure on the strategic leaders was all the greater.

Chapter Two

THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

This chapter will examine the various factors relevant to the professional development of the future officers who were likely to be responsible for the leadership and direction of the strategic bomber offensive. It will start with an analysis of the contemporary understanding of leadership and the requirement to make an organisation ‘fit for purpose’.¹ The chapter will then go on to set the base level understanding of the ethical and legal dimension which would underpin much of the early debate on strategy and targeting policy; ironically, this debate would re-surface towards the very end of the war as individuals sought occupancy of the ‘moral high ground’ and contested the ethical viability of strategic bombing.² The final section of this chapter will cover the broad understanding of the doctrine of strategic bombing and its relationship with the other roles of the air power. Each of these issues is consistent with the modern literature on senior leadership in which, in turn, argues that the development of future strategic leaders should not be left to chance, but should be subject to professional training and education. Similarly, a sound ethical and legal base is essential to underpin the strategy, its development and execution. Finally, it is essential that senior leaders are able to develop, and articulate the purpose, role and vision of their organisation. Having decided on the vision and purpose, the leaders are then able to direct the conduct of war

¹ This expression is widely used in the leadership and management field usually meaning that the organisation, and its structure, is suitable for the fulfilment of its aims and purposes.

² See, for example. Peter W. Gray, ‘Dresden 1945 – Just Another Raid’.

The issues to be discussed in this chapter are not easy ones with which to wrestle. Nor were they at the time under discussion when the understanding was less developed, the disciplines less precise and the military education system not as focused. Furthermore, the complexity of military strategic leadership was not always acknowledged. There is a distinct tendency to regard senior officers in the first half of the twentieth century (and beyond) as buffoons, or ‘Colonel Blimps’.³ The revisionist school has not entirely eradicated the ‘Lions Led by Donkeys’ characterisation of senior military personnel.⁴ An academic psychologist has suggested that the military, and in particular those at senior levels, are anti-intellectual by nature and the system favours their advancement over their more gifted colleagues.⁵ This may be an extreme hypothesis and it could be argued that Dixon is selective in his examples to prove his point. The modern literature is, however, consistent in the assertion that senior leaders need to have above-average intelligence, but genius levels are not required.⁶ Adair sees this level of intelligence as necessary, but not sufficient.⁷ The intellectual skills of the senior officer ideally need to be developed, honed and then applied in a logical and coherent manner. Slim emphasised that his thinking on morale and raising the fighting spirit of his army was not based on study, but on ‘some experience and a good deal of hard thinking’.⁸ Slim went on to set the intellectual challenge for the commander to ensure high morale:

³ See, for example, J. P. Harris, ‘The British General Staff and the Coming of War’, *Historical Research*, 59 (140), p.198.

⁴ For the original see Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961). For a more balanced approach see Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War, Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001). See also Lewis Page, *Lions, Donkeys and Dinosaurs: Waste and Blundering in the Armed Forces* (London: Heinemann, 2006), in which the author is considered to fall into the third category, p.151.

⁵ Norman F. Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, ch.14.

⁶ See the meta-analysis presented by Charles Handy, *Understanding Organisations* (Fourth Edition, London: Penguin, 1999[1976]), pp. 22, 41, 98, 120 and 239.

⁷ John Adair, *Effective Strategic Leadership*, p. 96.

⁸ Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000 [1956]), p. 182.

- a. He must be convinced that the object can be attained: that it is not out of reach.
- b. He must see, too, that the organisation to which he belongs and which is striving to attain the object is an efficient one.
- c. He must have confidence in his leaders and know that whatever dangers and hardships he is called upon to suffer, his life will not be lightly flung away.⁹

Slim was writing within his own context, but the challenges could have been scripted specifically for the senior airmen, politicians and senior officials who were destined to be the strategic leaders responsible for the bomber offensive.

The role of air power in general, and the use of aircraft capable of offensive action, would be a continuing theme throughout the period 1917 to 1945; occasionally there would be unanimous accord. But there would also be a degree of acrimony, especially over targeting priorities.¹⁰ For example, both Harris and Spaatz (his American counterpart) had hoped that the success of the Bomber Offensive would have led directly to the collapse of the German will to fight thus obviating the need for any form of large-scale invasion. The reality was that the debate would expand to encompass plans of attack that would concentrate on transportation systems, oil and targets directly related to the land offensive.¹¹ Some of this debate was borne of the experience gained during war thus far. Similarly, some senior officers naturally had to support the deployment of major war fighting assets because their own part of the campaign required them. But the almost religious adherence to the potential of strategic bombing was consistently present in the debate. The chapter will therefore review the thinking, and the teaching, that influenced those senior personnel who were so vital to the debate as it evolved.

⁹ Slim, *ibid.*

¹⁰ This rose to something of a crescendo in the later war years as the best use of the Combined Bomber Offensive in the months before D Day. See, for example, Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.233.

¹¹ Each generic set of targets would have its own champion with Portal favouring oil where Tedder preferred transportation. See, for example, Orange, *Tedder*, p.260.

Fundamental to the structure of the RAF, was the premise that the best form of defence of the Nation was offensive action by aircraft against the country of the potential aggressor. Although the active offensive had to be combined with a defensive system, the proportion allocated to home defence should be the 'lowest possible minimum'.¹² This thinking was applied consistently through the inter-war years and underpinned the formation of the front line Commands in 1936.

Leadership Thinking and Teaching

Much of the voluminous literature on leadership is of relatively recent origin. In the first half of the twentieth century, leadership was more a question of what one did, rather than what was studied. Officers tended to come from a higher social class than their men and ensuring the well-being of their troops, along with achievement of the task and maintenance of discipline, was an intuitive process.¹³ Sheffield describes the role of the public school system and team games in formulating the characters of those who become the officer corps in the First World War.¹⁴ He states that the application of

the public school ethos to military leadership was effective. Paternal, courageous, self-sacrificing officers earned the loyalty and love of their men.¹⁵

But it was only with the rapid expansion of the British Army during the First World War, and the concomitant broadening of the pool from which potential officers were recruited, was it thought necessary to issue unofficial 'Guides to Officership'.¹⁶ These guides emphasised the nature of the relationship between the officer and his men

¹² AIR 8/61. Report of the Romer Committee; 6 Feb 1924.

¹³ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 1-3.

¹⁴ Sheffield, *ibid.*, chap.4.

¹⁵ Sheffield, *ibid.*, p.51.

¹⁶ Sheffield, *ibid.*, Appendix 4.

stressing the need to balance firmness with sympathy; that orders should be enforceable; and that all have ‘feelings, tempers and temperaments’.¹⁷

Of the senior airmen who would be responsible for the relationships and debates of the period, the majority had joined their respective service, or arm, either before, or at, the outbreak of the First World War. The following examples illustrate the point. Portal, who would be CAS for much of the Second World War, joined the Royal Engineers as a motor-cycle despatch rider (acting corporal) on 6 August 1914 cutting short his time at Oxford (having been previously educated at Winchester). He was commissioned shortly thereafter, and then joined the RFC as an observer in July 1915.¹⁸ The first squadron to which he was appointed was commanded by Major Brooke-Popham, later to be Portal’s Commandant at the RAF Staff College.

Harris (Commander-in-Chief Bomber Command, 1942-1945) was also public school educated, albeit at Allhallows College near Honiton, a somewhat less prestigious establishment than Portal’s old school. He joined the army in Rhodesia and fought in South-West Africa. Harris came back to Britain in October 1915 and immediately volunteered to join the RFC – weeks of marching in South Africa had convinced him that, in future, it was preferable to fight in a sitting posture!¹⁹

Tedder was educated at Whitgift and went up to Cambridge, to read history, in 1909. He graduated and joined the consular service returning to Britain at the end of 1914. Tedder was commissioned into the Dorsetshire Regiment. After considerable persistence,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Richards, *Portal*, pp. 35-41.

¹⁹ Probert, *Bomber Harris*, pp. 33-35.

he joined the RFC in January 1916.²⁰ These short examples illustrate a degree of consistency in the start of three key players' background which was not untypical across the Services. With their public school backgrounds and cadet corps service, their subsequent thinking on leadership would have been conditioned by their experiences in the army, of which the RFC remained an integral part until the formation of the RAF on 1 April 1918. These experiences may have been enhanced by reading the various guides discussed above – or by their having to recommend them to new officers under their care. The degree to which any official publication actually influences its audience is always difficult to assess and the RFC situation, where the officer corps was doing much of the actual fighting and therefore had less interaction with the other ranks than their counterparts in the trenches, makes their likely impact even more questionable.

A similar debate could be had over what was to become a logical progression for all of the key contenders – attendance at Staff College. The degree of influence emanating from the reading, teaching, or the wider learning environment, can easily be overstated. Terraine quoted correspondence between Esher and Hankey in 1915 suggesting that

Obviously history is written for schoolmasters and armchair strategists. Statesmen and warriors pick their way through the dusk.²¹

On the other hand, Travers' contention that Haig had been considerably influenced by his attendance at the Army Staff College at Camberley, probably goes beyond what most

²⁰ Orange, *Tedder*, pp. 8-30.

²¹ These comments were made following the presentation of the Chesney Gold Medal at RUSI in 1982; the literature in question was Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longman, 1911) and Esher and Hankey suggested that out of all who might benefit from reading such books, probably only Churchill had done so. John Terraine, 'Leadership in Coalition War: The Achievements of World War I', *JRUSI*, 127 (4) (1982: Dec), p. 11.

observers would think reasonable.²² Haig attended Staff College in 1896 -1897 and Travers' contention was that Haig combined his experiences of Sudan and South Africa with Staff College teachings and applied them to the strategic planning and execution of major battles in the First World War – including Passchendaele and the Somme.²³ In practical terms, it would be surprising if any officer did not take forward some of the teachings from institutions such as the Staff College and apply them in later life. Where Travers probably overstates the case is in his belief that Haig did so 'tenaciously'.²⁴ It is always possible to draw parallels of concept or fact; but it is much more difficult to assign accurately the degree in which they have been applied. The debate could be extended to include the relevance, and influence, of doctrine manuals and journals. The linkages, and potential influence will be dealt with at each stage in the chapter.

An examination of Staff College thinking, throughout the sections of this chapter, does, however, have some merit. In the first instance, the attendees are in no doubt as to the privilege of having been selected for the course – in the Army case, having had to pass an examination before consideration. In Dowding's (later Commander-in-Chief for Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain) case this was preceded by a year's leave of absence, on reduced pay, to prepare and attendance at a crammer.²⁵ Small wonder that the students were influenced to some extent! Second, the competition resulting from this process ensured that the students were in a greater concentration of high calibre peers that they had experienced hitherto resulting in the opportunity to debate and share

²² Travers, *The Killing Ground*, chap. 4.

²³ Travers, *ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁴ Sheffield, *The Chief*.

²⁵ Vincent Orange, *Dowding of Fighter Command: Victor of the Battle of Britain* (London: Grub Dtreet, 2008), pp. 16-18.

experiences.²⁶ Third, the full year (or two in the Camberley instance) allowed ample time for the students to think; to read; and to commit some of their thoughts to paper for assessment and possibly for publication. Fourthly, for the early courses the CAS personally selected the candidates for the course. Finally, the prestige, and importance, of the courses ensured that the students received presentations from very senior officers. In the case of the first RAF course at Andover in 1922, Trenchard was due to deliver the inaugural address. In the event, this was actually read by Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond who apologised both for CAS' absence, but also for that of the Secretary of State for Air.²⁷ It must, however, be emphasised that the courses were not specifically academic in nature and were certainly not the degree awarding institutions of recent years. The reading lists were comparatively 'light' although some of the works had widespread currency.²⁸

Squadron Leader Portal was selected to attend the first of the RAF Staff College Courses at Andover in April 1922 and not only listened to the opening address from Air Commodore Brooke-Popham, but also his thoughts on 'Morale'.²⁹ Brooke-Popham lamented the economies of the time which prevented the establishment of stables and 'horses-allowance' for his students.³⁰ He nevertheless set the tone – and more importantly

²⁶ The students at both Staff Colleges (Camberley for the Army and Andover for the RAF) prepared lectures based on their experiences. In Harris's case, as a relatively mature student at Camberley, he gave formal lectures on the use of Air Control in Iraq: see, *Staff College Camberley Junior and Senior Divisions Work 1929* (hereafter known as the Camberley Reds).

²⁷ *RAF Staff College: Opening Address to First Course by Air Marshal Sir H. M. Trenchard Bart., KCB, DSO, ADC, Chief of the Air Staff*, RAF Staff College Records, copy held by author.

²⁸ Especially Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, *The Science of War: A Collection of Essays and Lectures 1891-1903* (Colonel Neill Malcolm ed.), (London: Longman 1905 [1927]). Fuller was also deemed worthy of inclusion. This work is also referenced in a presentation delivered to the Royal Naval War College at Greenwich in 1924 and reproduced at RUSI. Rear-Admiral F. C. Dreyer, 'Leadership and History in War', *JRUSI*, 72 (1927: Feb/Mar), p. 491.

²⁹ London, LHCMA, KCL, Brooke-Popham Papers 1/5/3 and 1/5/4 for the opening address and 1/6/1 for *Some Notes on Morale*.

³⁰ Richards, *Portal*, p.79.

the element of continuity of thinking with Camberley by emphasising the need for economy among the students:

Show young officers how to economise on weekends, cocktails, port and cigarettes, and save money to keep a horse which is much better for him than a motorcycle. There are good men who do not hunt and bad ones who do, but every man is improved by hunting.³¹

Brooke-Popham went on to explain the three objects of the Staff Course. The first of these was to train the participants to become staff officers in both peace and war.³² This was the classic role of the Staff College whether it was Camberley or Andover with emphasis on preparing officers to serve on the Staff of headquarters at various levels; the Army course included lectures on the role of officers at each level of headquarters.³³ Implicit in this is that the staff organisation should be 'fit for purpose' and that each officer understood his role and purpose.

The second aim was much broader in that the Staff College sought to give 'future commanders some instruction in the broader aspects of war whether on sea, on land, or in the air'.³⁴ The Commandant then went on to say that the Staff Course was designed to

found a school of thought and to assist in solving problems regarding the organisation, training or employment of the Air Force.³⁵

So attendance on the course had practical outcomes; but more importantly, it was designed to educate and broaden those who had been identified as future senior commanders. The final objective was particularly important in that, without using modern jargon, Brooke-

³¹ Brooke-Popham Papers 1/5/3 – *Preliminary Notes* and 1/5/4 *Commandant's Address*.

³² Brooke-Popham Papers 1/5/4.

³³ The Camberley Reds. The lectures were interspersed throughout the Junior and Senior Divisions.

³⁴ Brooke-Popham Papers 1/5/4.

³⁵ Brooke-Popham, *ibid*. This is discussed below in the formulation of doctrine.

Popham was encouraging his charges to take a collective responsibility for the vision and purpose of the organisation.

The Commandant's theme, which has clear resonance with modern thinking on strategic leadership, was reinforced in his *Preliminary Lecture for Students* in which Brooke-Popham warned the students that they would indeed become the mysterious 'they' with all of the attendant responsibilities. He added that they would have to be 'far more unselfish, and work for others, not only your own little command'.³⁶ This again chimes with modern literature which emphasises that the difference between strategic leadership and the levels below is this responsibility for the interfaces of the organisation with other bodies in parallel or above.³⁷ This was reinforced in the Commandant's *Final Address* in which he enunciated his version of the motto of the staff officer: 'Honour the King. Loyalty to your Chief. Sympathy with the Troops'.³⁸ Critically, Brooke-Popham went on to define the 'Chief' as collectively being the immediate superior and the 'Air Council and the Air Ministry'. Portal may well have later regretted that Harris went to Camberley and therefore missed this particular admonition.³⁹

The need for commanders to have sympathy with the plight of their troops effectively reinforces the emphasis placed on morale. Brooke-Popham prepared his own notes on the subject in a 16-page paper in 1923.⁴⁰ He wrestled with the difficulty of reducing aspects of human nature to science; but also admitted a role for the discipline of

³⁶ Brooke-Popham Papers, 1/5/6, *Preliminary Lecture to Students*.

³⁷ Day and Lord, 'Executive Leadership and Organizational Performance', p. 461.

³⁸ Brooke-Popham Papers 1-5-7, *Final Address*, 29 March 1923.

³⁹ The consequences will be examined in detail in the context of the debate between Portal and Harris over targeting oil in the winter of 1944 in Ch.7.

⁴⁰ Brooke-Popham Papers 1/6/1, *RAF Staff College. Some Notes on Morale*.

psychology. Clearly linked with this debate is the role of leadership and the Commandant suggests that the following factors contribute to the art of leadership:

- i.* Disinterested zeal for the cause.
- ii.* Confidence in subordinates
- iii.* Confidence in ultimate success.
- iv.* Personality.
- v.* Prestige.
- vi.* Efficiency.
- vii.* Ability to judge character.⁴¹

Brooke-Popham then went on to emphasise the inter-linkage between leadership and morale by identifying several key historical figures (such as Nelson and Cromwell) and analysing their styles. The Commandant recommended the writings of Kipling by commenting that the requirements of leadership can be found in his poem *IF*.⁴² In terms of the historiography of leadership theory, ‘Great Man Theory’ in which the apprentice is encouraged to emulate those who have succeeded in great deeds, has been long standing. For example, Machiavelli recommended:

So the prudent man must always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding. If his own prowess fails to compare with theirs, at least it has an air of greatness about it.⁴³

But the use of the deeds of Great Men in the analysis of leadership is entirely consistent with the extant use of Great Man theory in the wider teaching of military history. In this,

⁴¹ Brooke-Popham, *ibid.*

⁴² Brooke-Popham, *ibid.* Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, pp. 51-53. For the text of the poem it is instructive to note Wavell’s (almost inevitable) inclusion in his anthology: A. P. Wavell [Field Marshal Viscount Wavell GCB, GCSI, GCIE, CMG, MC], *Other Men’s Flowers: An Anthology of Poetry*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), p. 326.

⁴³ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, (trans. George Bull), (London: Penguin, 1961), p.19.

historians studied great victories (and occasionally significant defeats), and from these the immutable qualities of leadership could be distilled.⁴⁴ It is therefore no surprise to find the students tasked to produce essays on morale. A selection from the first course, presumably of the better ones, was chosen for publication in *Air Publication 956*. Among these preserved, not only for posterity, but for wider readership among the new Service, was the essay by Squadron Leader C. F. A. Portal in which he examined the morale in the forces of Cromwell, Nelson and Garibaldi.⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, Portal's work is in accord, both with broad contemporary thinking,⁴⁶ and the remarks made by his Commandant (and former Squadron Commander). Morale and leadership were entirely interlinked with the resulting achievement of extraordinary deeds by folk who would not normally have performed to that level – often reaching the heights of heroism. But the thinking and discussion at the Staff College also focused on the basic tenets of staff work, strategic leadership and making an organisation 'fit for purpose'. Although the teaching may not have been couched in explicit management style terminology, the graduates from Portal's course, many of whom subsequently had distinguished careers, were very likely to have internalised some of the thinking, especially given the prestige of the course.

The relationship between leadership and morale was first expounded in an official RAF document with the issue of *Air Publication 1300, Royal Air Force War Manual*

⁴⁴ See for example the chapter on *Conceptual Frameworks*, in Stephen Morillo with Michael F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

⁴⁵ Squadron Leader C. F. A. Portal DSO, MC, 'An Essay on Morale', *Air Publication 956, A Selection of Essays From the Work of Officers Attending the First Course at the Royal Air Force Staff College 1922-1923*. Chapter VIII.

⁴⁶ See also Brevet Colonel J. F. C. Fuller, DSO, 'Moral, Instruction and Leadership', *JRUSI*, 65 (1920: Feb/Nov), p.656. And Flight Lieutenant E. J. Kingston-McCloughry, DSO, DFC, RAF, 'Morale and Leadership', *JRUSI*, 74 (1929: Feb/Nov), p.305.

which included a short chapter on ‘Command Leadership and Morale’.⁴⁷ Leadership was defined as *the power to influence and inspire men*.⁴⁸ The section on morale built on this explaining that high morale would allow greater heights to be achieved than was possible through the exercise of professional skill alone.⁴⁹ The closest the Manual approached modern thinking was to make the explicit linkage between the establishment of high morale, leadership and the need to influence the environment through organisation and administration.⁵⁰ This nevertheless allowed the foundations for leaders ensuring that their organisation was ‘fit for purpose’.

The Contemporary Thinking on the Ethical and Legal Use of Armed Force

Aside from popular accusations that Machiavelli advocated leaders acting in a ruthless, or unethical manner, there is a standing assumption that leaders are required to establish values and uphold them in such a way that their people are willing to follow.⁵¹ More recently, General Viscount Wolseley in his *Life of John Churchill*, writing in 1894, stated that

history proves that it [the army] has seldom fought well in what it believed to be an unrighteous cause. Unless the Rank and File are interested in their work, there will be no enthusiasm, and from an army without enthusiasm little can be expected.⁵²

The essence of this, written as it was by a distinguished soldier, was that the need for a just cause was paramount for military forces to be expected to function (presumably in the absence of prevailing laws of armed conflict which newly under development).⁵³

⁴⁷ AIR 10/1910, *Air Publication 1300, Royal Air Force War Manual; Part I Operations*. (Hereafter AP 1300), ch III.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

⁵¹ The reality is that Machiavelli espouses these standards for commanders. See Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, (trans. Neal Wood, Cambridge MA, Da Capo Press, 2001 [1521]), p. xxxviii.

⁵² General Viscount Wolseley, *The Life of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough to the Accession of Queen Anne* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1894), Vol. 2, p.84.

According to modern literature, an effective organisation requires a climate in which there is a shared perception of what is right and wrong, and of how ethical issues should be handled.⁵⁴ Furthermore, leaders, especially at the organisational level, play a critical role in establishing an appropriate climate.⁵⁵ The debate over the requirement for ethical behaviour is also considered to extend to the arena of international affairs.⁵⁶ But it is also recognised that the Realist school of international relations frequently requires politicians, senior officials and, by association and direction, strategic military planners to acknowledge the primacy of the pursuit of the national interest.⁵⁷ Beyond the realm of politics and organisation psychology, philosophers have also sought an acceptable means of intellectually balancing the various interests. Statman describes this as the ‘tragic solution to a tragic dilemma’; his work was specifically written to find a way through the moral maze facing decision makers in supreme emergencies and ‘national-defence wars’.⁵⁸

Any particular situation will be complicated by the reality that the dilemmas will be played out at various levels of debate. These may emerge in a logical and linear pattern of, for instance, philosophical and ethical debate influencing the international lawyers whose writings form one of the sources of international law.⁵⁹ In turn, government law officers

⁵³ Wolseley was commander-in-chief of the British Army from 1895-1901; see Hew Strachan, *Politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp.65-66.

⁵⁴ Marcus W. Dickson, D. Brent Smith, Michael W. Grojean and Mark Ehrhart, ‘An organizational climate regarding ethics: the outcome of leader values and the practices that reflect them’, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12 (2001), pp.197-217.

⁵⁵ Michael W. Grojean, Christian J. Resick and D Brent Smith, ‘Leaders, Values and Organizational Climate: Examining Leadership Strategies for Establishing an Organizational Climate Regarding Ethics’, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 55 (2004), pp. 223-241.

⁵⁶ Mark Clarence Walker, ‘Morality, self-interest, and leaders in international affairs’, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17 (2006), pp. 138-145.

⁵⁷ Walker, *ibid.*, p.142.

⁵⁸ Daniel Statman, ‘Moral Tragedies, Supreme Emergencies and National-Defence’, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 23 (3) (2006), p.311.

⁵⁹ The writings of jurists has long been recognised as an important source of international law. See, for example, Ian Brownlie, *Principles of Public International Law*, (Oxford: Clarendon, fourth edition, 1990 [1966]), pp. 24-25. See below for an example of an Air Ministry official acting in this guise.

advise politicians and military planners of the latest developments and policy changes result. In practice, however, the debates may occur in isolation – or more likely in either a chaotic or anarchic manner. In some administrations, the debates will be monitored and those that suit a given course of action will be preferred. This is Realism in international relations in full play.⁶⁰

To varying degrees, each of these scenarios was evident in the period from the formation of the RAF in 1918 through to the end of the Second World War. It is unlikely that the senior leaders would have seen the debates in the theoretical terms of the previous paragraph. But they nevertheless had to participate in them as they progressed over the period and, indeed, beyond into the era of recriminations and the unedifying sight of senior personnel distancing themselves from reality of some of their harsher decisions and policies. It is therefore important to examine the intellectual and practical understanding of the philosophical/ethical debate, the international legal issues and the policies that arose, especially where these ran counter to established doctrinal thinking.

Philosophers tend to regard their studies as being of higher order than, say, the laboratory work of scientists.⁶¹ Ethics, often loosely referred to as moral philosophy, are concerned with the values that inform people's lives when they are deciding what to do, and informs their views on the actions and thinking of others.⁶² Beyond reference to this set of values, most people are willing to accept moral constraints on what they should do

⁶⁰ For a relatively understandable introduction to the concepts of Realism and Neo-Realism see Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 20-40.

⁶¹ Bernard Williams, 'Ethics', in A. C. Grayling, *Philosophy 1: A Guide Through the Subject* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1995]), p. 547. See also Editor's Introduction, pp. 1-2.

⁶² Bernard Williams, *ibid.*, p.546.

and from what they should refrain. But even in his short introduction to the subject of ethics, Williams adds caveats such as ‘unless life is desperate’ and ‘most of the time’.⁶³ He goes on to refine the definitions of ‘ethics’ and ‘moral’, suggesting that the former is relatively broad, encompassing wider aspects of life and activity. He suggests that ‘moral’ is narrower in focus concentrating on obligations and rules. Notwithstanding these finer points, this thesis will use ‘ethics’ as the umbrella term thus avoiding potential confusion with ‘morale’ as something that bombing sought to lower.⁶⁴ The aspect of rules and obligations also risks confusion with the more tangible (albeit only slightly) aspects of international law.

The conduct of the strategic bombing offensive against Germany has been subject to considerable attention and philosophical debate after the war years. A. C. Grayling, for example, is convinced that the bombing offensive was morally ‘very wrong’. He concludes that it was neither necessary, nor proportionate; furthermore, it was contrary to the general moral principles that had existed in Western civilisation for at least five centuries, and possibly back to the ancient Greeks.⁶⁵ The subject has also been approached from the conventional consequentialist (acts to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number) and deontological (concerned with the rights of individuals) standpoints.⁶⁶ The use of armed force has also been explored in the context of Just War

⁶³ Bernard Williams, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Moral and morale were used interchangeably in that period and will be throughout this thesis.

⁶⁵ A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, p. 276-7. Donald Bloxham is even more extreme in his chapter, ‘Dresden as a War Crime’. See also Stephen A. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II: The British Bombing of German Cities* (New York: St. Martins, 1993); this work is diminished by its failure to use the full range of secondary sources and primary ones.

⁶⁶ For the consequentialist view see R. B. Brandt, ‘Utilitarianism and the Rules of War’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1 (2) 1972, pp. 145-165. For the deontological view, see T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), chapter entitled ‘War and Massacre’.

Theory which dates back, from its resurgence in 1977, to the letters of St Augustine.⁶⁷ The theory builds on the work of early Christian writers who, acknowledging the sanctity of human life, tried to impose a degree of rationalism and discipline on the inevitable exercise of violence and taking of life. In 418, St Augustine wrote a short treatise on military morality to a senior Roman official charged with keeping tribesmen from the Sahara out of Roman (Christian) Africa. Augustine advised that war should only be conducted when necessary and then with the minimum force necessary; he added that mercy should be shown to the enemy.⁶⁸ These tenets gave rise to the concepts of *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello* which are central to the Just War Theory and are also key in the International Law of War; in turn, they reflect the rules of going to war and the conduct of combatants in war itself.⁶⁹

The literature on Just War Theory is extensive with key texts published in several editions, each succeeding one with new comment on the latest conflict.⁷⁰ These are supplemented by academic debates on the subject.⁷¹ But it is noteworthy that the historiography on Just War Theory has flourished since the Vietnam War with seminal works such as Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* arising from 'political activism'

⁶⁷ See, for example, Charles Guthrie and Michael Quinlan, *Just War: The Just War Tradition, Ethics in Modern Warfare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p.7. The resurgence was largely due to American philosophers' frustration with the lack of logical explanations for their country's involvement in Vietnam.

⁶⁸ Gary Wills, *Saint Augustine* (London, Phoenix, 2000 [1999]), p. 121.

⁶⁹ Among many secondary sources, see Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos and Mark R. Shulman (eds.), *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp.2-3.

⁷⁰ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). The fourth edition (2006) includes Walzer's comments on the invasion of Iraq.

⁷¹ Such as that published by Jean Bethke Elshtain (ed.), *Just War Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). See also Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) and Alex J. Bellamy, *Just Wars: From Cicero to Iraq* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

rather than philosophical debate in the context of the American involvement in that region.⁷²

Notwithstanding the extent of the post-war debate, it is notable that very little relevant academic philosophy (including Just War Theory) was published in the inter-war years, or during the war itself.⁷³ This dearth therefore goes some way to explaining the absence of similar debate in the files, or Staff College exercises. This in turn provides some defence against the accusation that senior commanders and officials behaved unethically in the development of the offensive and its conduct. What was present throughout was a background level of discussion on the undesirability of repeating the carnage of the First World War. Part of this was articulated in various forms of Christian pacifism which, in its more extreme forms, led to the criticism of the bomber offensive in the House of Lords by George Bell, Bishop of Chichester.⁷⁴ The historiography of peace, or anti-war, movements of the inter-war years is muddled at best.⁷⁵ A. J. P. Taylor has suggested that inter-war dissent existed at varying levels from which the arguments never coalesced.⁷⁶ What did come together was a rush of books, novels, memoirs and plays between 1928 and 1930. These emphasised common themes:

The futility and dreariness of war, the incompetence of generals and politicians, and the ordinary men on both sides victims of this incompetence. The lessons were reinforced on an academic level by American and British historians who studied the

⁷² Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, opening words to the Preface, p.xiii. This is emphasised in Nicholas Rengger, 'On the just war tradition in the twenty-first century', *International Affairs*, 78 (2) (2002), pp. 353-63.

⁷³ A point confirmed by Dr David Rodin in correspondence with the author: 20 November 2006.

⁷⁴ See R. C. D Jasper, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). For a detailed exposition of the arguments in a modern work see G. E. M. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell 1981), pp. 56-61 in which war is equated with murder; this piece uses arguments that were consistent with inter-war religious (Christian) pacifism.

⁷⁵ Louis R. Bisceglia, 'Norman Angell and the Pacifist 'Muddle'', *Historical Research*, 45 (111) 1972, pp. 104-121, makes the point there has been no comprehensive study of the peace movement, p.104.

⁷⁶ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent Over Foreign Policy 1792-1939*, (London: Pimlico, 1993 [1957]), p.169.

diplomatic origins of the war and repeated, with a more scholarly equipment, the views first put forward by E. D. Morel and the U.D.C.⁷⁷

Taylor went on to describe the general opinion as believing that wars were started by mistake – rather than by militarism (German in the case of the First world War), by capitalism, by massive armament, or by grievances. The League of Nations would resolve some, or all of these issues.⁷⁸ Hobsbawm acknowledged that while pacifism had been ‘quite popular’ in the 1930s, it had never amounted to a mass movement and had faded by 1940.⁷⁹ Against this intellectual backdrop of confused (or absent) thinking, it is little surprise that senior folk in the military, and their officials, should typically resort to internalisation of the laws of war with their constraints and assumptions – rather than philosophical reflection.⁸⁰

The standing military view on ethics in conflict can best be summarised as conservative and, to the military mind, appealingly pragmatic. In a lecture to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in February 1898, W.V. Herbert queried whether it was possible to have an ethical side to warfare. He went on to discount the arguments germane to the professional philosopher who ‘will argue a soul into a stone, and beauty into the earthworm’, preferring to align the discussion with ‘the ordinary fight-your-daily-battle individual like you and me’.⁸¹ Herbert dealt with *ius ad bellum* as concomitant with nationhood and therefore inevitable.⁸² But he saw *ius in bello* as having changed, or developed, with ‘women and children not molested – at least, not officially’; ‘open towns

⁷⁷ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 361.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes; The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Penguin, 1994), p.152.

⁸⁰ Rengger, op cit., p.353.

⁸¹ W. V. Herbert Esq., (late Captain, Turkish Army), ‘The Ethics of Warfare’, *JRUSI*, 42 (2) (1898 July/December), p.1022.

⁸² Ibid., p. 1024.

are not shelled and poison gas is held in abhorrence'.⁸³ Herbert concluded with the suggestion that warfare had developed, and needed to continue to develop, a 'universally-accepted code to regulate its conduct'.⁸⁴ But he then went on to stress the primacy of actually winning:

All said and done, 'Win your war' is the most important, and it is the most primitive, maxim of the science of strategy – that is drive your opponent into such a corner that he is content to have the terms of peace dictated to him. The rest comes a long way after.⁸⁵

In an answer to a question from the floor, Herbert explained that a code of ethics could only be relevant between nations of an equal state of civilisation and that it could not reasonably be expected to apply between the English and the Zulus.⁸⁶

This presentation was only 20 years before the end of the First World War and it is unlikely that attitudes would have changed markedly from the date of its delivery through to the years of colonial air policing and the formation of the new commands. The need for parity between the levels of civilisation of the warring states would later have chilling overtones in the justification for a range of activities in Europe and the Far East. The Germans, for example, considered the Slavs to be approaching subhuman and the Japanese had a similar approach to the Chinese. The Americans in justifying their fire-bombing offensive of mainland Japan had a similar mindset.⁸⁷ At a more pragmatic level, the language used by Herbert should not be viewed with modern mindsets of equality and tolerance; his was very much the language and attitude of the time. And this was reflected in the official publications (acknowledging the Journal of the Royal United Services

⁸³ Ibid., p. 1025.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 1028.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 1029.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 1032.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Michael Howard, 'Constraints on Warfare', in Howard, Andreopoulos and Shulman (eds.), *The Laws of War*, op cit., p. 8.

Institute as only quasi-official) such as *C.D 22 Operations Manual, Royal Air Force* issued in 1922 in which chapter XI deals with ‘Aircraft in Warfare against an Uncivilised Enemy’.⁸⁸ The enemy were uncompromisingly referred to as ‘savages’.⁸⁹

The natural progression from a broadly accepted code of conduct, arguably an extension of the chivalric code, is for the required behaviours to be set out in formal language and agreed between nations; ideally this should take the form of a binding treaty. In short to transpose them into an international law of armed combat. Adam Roberts has insisted that the study of [international] law must be integrated with the study of history.⁹⁰ A logical extension of this is that the development of air law, and indeed strategy and doctrine, must be examined in the context of the wider international and domestic political situation. In turn, the developments in thinking must take heed of the pace of technological progress, and in particular the weapons on which restraint was sought.

The literature on the laws of war, and their development, is extensive.⁹¹ Michael Howard makes the point that the role of the military is to use violence with deliberation, with purpose and in a legitimate manner; he characterises this as force and that force between states constitutes war.⁹² This can be taken slightly further with the legal aspect expanded to include the use of force for legitimate reasons and applied in a legitimate manner thereby specifically encompassing *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello*. Within

⁸⁸ *C.D.22 Operations Manual, Royal Air Force*, Air Ministry, 1922; AIR 10/1197.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.126.

⁹⁰ Adam Roberts, ‘Land Warfare: From Hague to Nuremberg’, in Howard, Andreopoulos and Shulman (eds.), *The Laws of War*, op cit., p.117.

⁹¹ In addition to Howard, Andreopoulos and Shulman (eds.), *The Laws of War*, see also Michael Howard (ed.) *Restraints on War: Studies in the Limitation of Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), A. P. V. Rogers, *Law on the Battlefield*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, third edition, 2004 [1996]) and Christine Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁹² Howard, *Restraints on War*, p.3.

Howard's use of 'deliberation', he embraces the elements of choice, decision and the issue of orders.⁹³ The latter, although Howard does not pursue the issue, is important in the context of subordinates being protected from charges of war crimes by the orders of their superiors; the understanding of international law in the inter-war years allowed such protection.⁹⁴ But Howard does make the point that if control does break down, the result is likely to be one that contravenes the ethical and legal dimensions.⁹⁵

The development, and application, of international law has long been problematic in that states have consistently sought to avoid the incorporation of laws that they consider likely to impinge upon their national interests; this is compounded by the absence of any real enforcement mechanism beyond the utterances of the International Court of Justice.⁹⁶ In his detailed review of *Air War and the Law of War*, American military lawyer Hays Parks cites one of the most pre-eminent international lawyers of the Twentieth Century, Sir Hersch Lauterpacht, as stating that 'If international law is the weakest point of all law, then the law of war is its vanishing point'.⁹⁷ Notwithstanding this apparently cynical viewpoint from the legal profession, the advisers to the Air Ministry, and their predecessors in the War Office, took these issues seriously as will become evident below.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ This was obviously pre-Nuremberg Trials. See J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights* (London: Longmans, 1924), p. 47. Spaight's role within the Air Ministry, and as an author, will be described below; it is useful to note his citation, with approval, of the British Manual, *Land Warfare* as agreeing this point.

⁹⁵ Howard, op cit., p.3, he cites the American atrocities at My Lai in 1969 as an example.

⁹⁶ Rosalyn Higgins, *Problems and Processes: International Law and How We Use It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapters 1 and 2 generally and p. 13 in particular.

⁹⁷ W. Hays Parks, 'Air War and the Law of War', *Air Force Law Review*, 32 (2) (1990), pp. 1-225, fn.5. The use of this quotation by an eminent military lawyer is interesting in itself. The original, which is not cited by Parks, was from H. Lauterpacht, 'The Problem of the Revision of the Law of War', *British Yearbook of International Law*, 1952, p.382.

Beyond the evolution the Just War Theory discussed above, the first significant attempt at the codification of the rules of warfare was completed by Dr. Francis Lieber of the Columbia University for issue to the Union Army on 24th April 1863.⁹⁸ The ‘Lieber Code’ became the model for many national manuals and for the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907.⁹⁹ Attempts to prohibit specific (usually nasty) types of weapon had a much longer provenance with, for example, Greek, Roman and Hindu codes banning the use of poisons. Later, the Lateran Council of 1132 declared that the arbalest and crossbow were ‘unchristian weapons’.¹⁰⁰ More recently the 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration sought to ban ‘explosive projectiles under 400 Grammes weight’ (sic).¹⁰¹ This Declaration is also particularly significant in its attempt

to alleviate the calamities of war; That the only legitimate object which States should endeavour to accomplish during war is to weaken the military forces of the enemy.¹⁰²

This was followed by the 1899 Hague Conference which was originally called under a Russian initiative designed to slow down the potential impact of Western technology and, ideally, to avoid war completely.¹⁰³ For obvious reasons, air power was not high on the agenda, but Commission I of the conference agreed a 5-year moratorium on the discharge of explosives or projectiles from balloons.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Adam Roberts and Richard Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, third edition, 2000 [1982]), p.12-13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁰⁰ Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, p.53.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.54-55 for the full document.

¹⁰³ Adam Roberts, ‘Land Warfare’, pp. 120-122.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, pp. 35 and 59. For detailed commentary see Parks, ‘Air War and the Law of War’, pp.9-12.

The prohibition on the utilisation of balloons had expired by the time of the 1907 Hague Convention which duly renewed the ban.¹⁰⁵ And although manned flight had occurred by this time, its military utility was not uppermost in the minds of the delegates. Technological advances in artillery and ballistics, however, were such that the dangers of long range bombardment resulted in Convention IV laying down the formal Articles which would later influence the 1923 Convention on Aerial Warfare and the thinking of officials in the interim.¹⁰⁶

The advent of the First World War saw rapid developments in the aircraft and associated weapons. As the range, and payload, of the aircraft increased so did the capability to carry the war deeper into the homelands of the belligerents. Technology had, however, only progressed so far and there were no real navigations aids, resulting in inaccuracies in bombing. For example, a German raid, by aircraft as opposed to Zeppelins, on 13 June 1917 against the ‘docks, wharves, railways, Government Stores, and warehouses situated in the centre of the town on the banks of the Thames’ actually hit a council school in the East End of London killing or injuring 120 children.¹⁰⁷ But as Parks points out, aerial bombing (or bombardment) was not the worst offender when it came to lack of discrimination. The German ‘Paris Gun’, which was used in conjunction with their offensive in March 1918, had a range of 75 miles and could only be aimed at the centre of Paris.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix 3 for the text of the articles.

¹⁰⁷ J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights*, p.220.

¹⁰⁸ Parks, ‘Air War and the Law of War’, p.22.

During the First World War, the War Cabinet were clearly concerned about the legality of aerial bombardment of undefended (or open) towns and cities and the possibility of ‘tit for tat’ reprisals. The War Office accordingly produced two memoranda clarifying the situation.¹⁰⁹ The General Staff summarised the use of aerial bombardment and outlined the history of the development of the law. In the second paper, the Staff pointed out that the renewal (in 1907) of the Hague Declaration of 1899 outlawing the launching of projectiles had not been fully ratified, and not at all by the four Central Powers, thereby leaving it without binding force. The paper went on to confirm that although bombardment of undefended towns was forbidden, there remained doubt on both sides as to what constituted defence, openness and the removal of legal protection when the town contained targets of military utility.¹¹⁰ The interplay between technological capability, the needs of discrimination and the desirability of tapping the potential of offensive air power would continue to challenge the exponents of the new air arm throughout the period covered in this thesis.

The challenges of iterating the advantages of air power will be covered in the final section of this chapter. The development of the legal thinking in how to limit, contain or prohibit the use of aircraft continued almost seamlessly. There was, however, a new impetus as the various powers tried to recover from the shock of four years of brutal warfare. The Paris Aerial Navigation Convention of 1919 did nothing to constrain potential belligerents.¹¹¹ The Washington Naval Conference (more correctly titled the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armament) made a brief attempt to ban novel

¹⁰⁹ TNA PRO CAB 24/44 ‘Air Raids on Open Towns; Memorandum prepared in the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence in accordance with War Cabinet 358, Minute 9’, 7 March 1918. Followed by CAB 24/48 ‘The Legal Aspects of Bombardment from the Air’, 12 April 1918.

¹¹⁰ CAB24/48.

¹¹¹ Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, p.140

forms of warfare, including aircraft, but concluded that this would not be practical.¹¹² Instead the baton was taken up by the Hague Commission of Jurists which commenced on 11 December 1922 under the chairmanship of John Bassett Moore of the United States.¹¹³ The delegation consisted of representatives of the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the Netherlands; each delegation consisted of legal and technical experts.¹¹⁴ The delegation from the Britain included J. M. Spaight, a senior official from the newly formed Air Ministry.¹¹⁵ The Hague Conference finished on 19 February 1923 with the unanimous adoption of a two-part report; the first part covered *Rules for the Control of Radio in Time of War* and the second *Rules of Aerial Warfare*.¹¹⁶

These Rules made a brave attempt to impose some degree of humanitarian control on the development of air power. But the 1923 Hague Rules were not ratified by any of the nations with France, the Netherlands and Great Britain particularly opposed to their adoption.¹¹⁷ The conventional view, therefore, was (and remains) that they were a political and legal failure.¹¹⁸ The reality was that the states involved were not prepared to fetter what was still a largely untested weapon of war that clearly had considerable potential.

That said, the Hague Rules provided a foundation level of understanding of what possible future laws of aerial warfare might look like, or be based upon.¹¹⁹ The Rules also provided a useful vehicle for the evolution of those that had been specifically drafted for

¹¹² Parks, 'Air War and the Law of War', p.24.

¹¹³ Roberts and Guelff, op cit., p.140

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ See M. W. Royse, *Aerial Bombardment and the International Regulation of Warfare* (New York: Harold Vinal, 1928), pp.215-216.

¹¹⁶ Roberts and Guelff, op cit., p.140. The full text is at Appendix 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p.140.

¹¹⁸ Tami Davis Biddle, 'Air Power', in Howard, Andreopoulos and Shulman (eds.), *The Laws of War*, p.148.

¹¹⁹ For example, we see repeated attempts by the Air Ministry, and the Admiralty to change those Rules though to 1939. See ADM 116/4155 Note form Air Plans to the Admiralty dated 17 August 1939.

Land or Naval warfare. Furthermore, rules for the third dimension acknowledged that air operations could operate over either environment without discrimination; by implications, crews could not be expected to follow one set or the other depending on their geographical location.¹²⁰ Probably most importantly, in absolute terms in Britain and more specifically for the development of thinking in the Air Ministry, the sessions in the Hague kept the issues close to the forefront of intellectual endeavour. This was due in no small part to the efforts of J. M. Spaight, who was a delegation member in 1923. In addition to being a senior official in the Air Ministry (having transferred from the War Office on the formation of the new organisation), Spaight was a prolific author writing on issues such as the legalities of land warfare.¹²¹ He was also a keen advocate of air power publishing numerous texts including one on the likely future role of air power in a potential major war which was published in a series edited by Liddell Hart.¹²² Spaight's work has three facets that are both distinct, and complementary. He was an air power advocate; an academic lawyer (a jurist in his own right); and a senior official. What then is the evidence for his influence on the existing and future members of the Air Ministry?

The difficulties of establishing influence are considerable, particularly when those who should be susceptible are idealists wedded to the invincibility of their ideas or weapons.¹²³ Nevertheless, Higham considers Spaight to be an air power theorist without whom no survey would be complete; he describes him as being 'Trenchard's good friend'.¹²⁴ Some degree of influence may be assumed from such an association. Spaight's

¹²⁰ J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights*, p.35.

¹²¹ J. M. Spaight, *War Rights on Land* (London: Macmillan, 1911).

¹²² J. M. Spaight, *Air Power in the Next War* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938).

¹²³ Robin Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain: 1918-1939* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1966), p.242.

¹²⁴ Higham, *ibid.*, p.230.

academic pedigree (including an LLD), along with his status in the, then small, Air Ministry also implies a degree of influence, especially over legal issues.¹²⁵ This is seen quite specifically in 1921 when he proffered text and advice, which was taken in full, for the draft of CD22 the RAF's first Operations Manual.¹²⁶ Spaight then took his academic knowledge, and experience of attending the Hague Conference, and articulated his thinking in *Air Power and War Rights* first published in 1924.¹²⁷ In his preface to the second edition, he wrote of the great honour to have had his book officially recommended to candidates for the RAF Staff College, implying that there was a captive audience of potential students to be influenced.¹²⁸ Spaight saw his intermediate work, *Air Power and the Cities*, as being part of a continuum.¹²⁹ Beyond the rather high-flown prose of his published work, Spaight also produced two legal briefs for internal Air Ministry consumption; these are undated, but the AHB archivist's assumption was that they were written in 1927.¹³⁰ Higham has suggested that Spaight's influence comes through in a memorandum published by Trenchard in 1928 which points up the likeness between naval and air bombardment.¹³¹

There are, however, a number of more explicit references to Spaight's work which confirm his influence. In the CAS's submission to a Chiefs of Staff Meeting in 1928, the equivalence of naval and air bombardment was reintroduced with a specific reference to

¹²⁵ In 1927 when Spaight produced two legal briefs on the use of air power, he was an Assistant Secretary of which there only eight in the Ministry. This was a 2* level equivalent. *The Air Force List April, 1927*.

¹²⁶ Neville Parton, 'The development of Early RAF Doctrine', *Journal of Military History*, 72 (4) 2008, p.1166. See AIR 5/299, 'Printing and Publication of RAF Operations Manual CD22' for the full saga.

¹²⁷ J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights*, op cit..

¹²⁸ J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights*, (London: Longmans, second edition, 1933) 'Preface'.

¹²⁹ J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and the Cities* (London: Longmans, 1930), page v.

¹³⁰ AIR 8/86 and AIR 8/87 'The Doctrine of Air-Force Necessity' by J.M. Spaight OBE, LLD (?1927) (sic).

¹³¹ Higham, *Military Intellectuals*, p.179. The Trenchard memorandum is reproduced in Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945* (London: HMSO, 1961), vol. IV, p.73. Much of the language in the section on international law sounds as if drafted by Spaight.

the *British Year Book of International Law* article written in 1923 by Spaight.¹³² A similar, but even more explicit, reference occurred four years later in the context of Air Ministry proposals for amendments to the Hague Rules in which a minute to the CAS confirmed that:

Some help has also been given by Mr. Spaight whose book on ‘Air Power and War Rights’ has been considerably drawn on in framing the paper.¹³³

The minute sheet is subsequently initialled with ‘*I agree* J.M.S.’ presumably indicating Spaight’s concurrence with the paper. It is clear from (then) Group Captain Portal’s signature to a number of minutes on the file (as Director of Operations and Intelligence) that the future CAS was fully conversant with the debate.¹³⁴ The fact that Spaight was employed at the time as Director of Accounts clearly did not limit his influence on international legal matters.¹³⁵ A similar minute to the CAS on Disarmament links potential use of bombing with reprisals and specifically cited Spaight as the source of legal advice (again still as Director of Accounts).¹³⁶

Although Spaight saw his *Air Power and War Rights* and *Air Power and the Cities* as being a series with the first edition of the former in 1924; the second in 1933 and the latter book being published in 1930, it was clear that any amendments that Spaight sought to make to the second edition were limited by the printing requirements of not being able to change the pagination. The most significant difference between the two editions is the introduction of discussion on disarmament.¹³⁷ Spaight’s work was a readily available

¹³² ‘The War Object of an Air Force’ produced for COS 147 (69th Chiefs of Staff Meeting). AIR 9/8 Folio 1 Air Staff 17 May 1928.

¹³³ AIR 8/141 ‘Rules of War, Hague Rules: Air Ministry Proposals’, 3 November 1932.

¹³⁴ AIR 8/141 and *The Air Force List, October 1932*.

¹³⁵ *The Air Force List, October 1932*, p14.

¹³⁶ AIR 8/139, Minute to CAS dated 5 May 1932.

¹³⁷ J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights*, ‘Preface’; and *Air Power and the Cities*, (London: Longmans, 1930), page v. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights* (third edition, 1947) in which he admits to there being

source of legal advice for his colleagues in the Air Ministry, and those who were likely to become staff officers having attended the Staff College at Andover. At the most basic level he provided a straightforward iteration of the Draft Rules and a guide to their interpretation. More importantly, Spaight also provided detailed examples of where the British, French and German air forces had used air power in the First World War. This was not just of historic interest, but presented clear evidence of the custom and practice of states – *opinion juris*.¹³⁸ He took the analytical process a stage further by highlighting areas where the Draft Rules would be likely to be impractical guidelines for future commanders. Spaight was prophetic in his identification of the difficulty in discriminating between military targets and neighbouring civilian populations.¹³⁹ He went on to highlight the potential difficulties for airmen in operating at considerable height and in bad weather.¹⁴⁰

As a keen author on wider air power issues, as well as having the insight from his position in the Air Ministry, Spaight was well aware of the contemporary thinking on the morale-damaging potential of air attack. He therefore commenced his chapter on ‘Bombing: (III) Civilian Property’ with a discussion on bombing ‘for a political or psychological end’.¹⁴¹

The object of their attack will be moral, psychological and political rather than military: the aim will be to so to disorganise and disturb the life and business of the enemy community as to make it impossible for the enemy State to continue to resist, and at the same time to create in the enemy population as a whole a feeling of depression and hopelessness, to make a whole nation war-weary.¹⁴²

little difference between the two volumes, p.vii. For disarmament and international law see the second edition p. 256-259.

¹³⁸ Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights*, ch. IX provides details over pp. 233-238 of targets, and dates that they were attacked, which would be forbidden should the new rules be adopted.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.217.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.220-226.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.239.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.239.

Spaight then introduced a degree of realism into the jurisprudential arena by acknowledging that states would accept the prohibition on attacking civilian property, but that they would qualify it with the proviso that ‘common sense and practicability’ would not prevent attacks from taking place.¹⁴³ He suggested that jurists and statesmen should acknowledge this pragmatism and, instead of seeking outright prohibitions, they should attempt to impose some degree of control. This conditional use of language is important in that it allowed Spaight to introduce his next theme in which there was ‘a right to bombard certain categories of purely civilian property [which] should be recognised and regulated’.¹⁴⁴ Characteristically, he then went on to describe custom and practice in land and naval engagements.

Spaight summed up his thinking on the subject, as a jurist seeking to influence his peers in the legal arena on whom would fall the responsibility of formulating revised rules, by bluntly stating that:

Let there be no mistake about it: the cities will be bombed, whatever rule is laid down. In no other way will belligerents be able to seek to obtain the moral effect which they will certainly seek.¹⁴⁵

This set the tone for the thinking in the Air Ministry and subsequently Bomber Command. There was a complete acceptance that air warfare should be waged in as humane a way as possible consistent with the exigencies of the conflict. This was underpinned by the conflicting wishes to see as fair a code of rules as could be achieved, and this was still being sought in August 1939.¹⁴⁶ But there was also an underlying awareness that future conflict would not be so constrained for long. In the interim, therefore, moral and legal

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.239.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.240.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.259.

¹⁴⁶ See the Minutes of the meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee on Bombing Policy at the Outset of War 11 August 1939. ADM 116/4155.

thinking was allowed to develop in parallel with the new Service's thinking on how best both to survive the predations of the other arms and build a unique, and potentially war winning strategy and doctrine.

Air Doctrine and Strategy

At first sight, the literature on Royal Air Force policy, strategy and doctrine is extensive.¹⁴⁷ The formal, academic, literature is supplemented by a range of works, including those by Spaight detailed above, that were published over the period of the inception of Bomber Command and these will be discussed in due course. In order to complete the intellectual context, it is nevertheless necessary to examine the thinking that is likely to have influenced those in the period responsible for the formulation of formal thinking and teaching.

As thinking about the employment of air power emerged from the First World War, any purity in the debate was almost instantly altered by the requirement of Trenchard, Sykes (as the first heads of Service) and their respective staffs to justify the new Service remaining in being.¹⁴⁸ This required the staffs to be able to articulate what air power could do, what it was for, how it could be developed and, critically, why the new weapon

¹⁴⁷ Including Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*; Jones, *The Origins of Strategic Bombing*; Jones, *The Beginnings of Strategic Air Power*; Malcolm Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power* (London: Allen Unwin, 1986); Robertson, *The Development of RAF Strategic Bombing*; John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War* (London: UCL Press, 1999); Tress, *British Strategic Bombing Policy*; Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*; Scot Robertson, 'The Development of Royal Air Force Strategic Bombing Doctrine between the Wars: A Revolution in Military Affairs', *Aerospace Power Journal*, Spring 1998, pp. 37-52; Phillip S. Meilinger, 'Trenchard and "Morale Bombing": The Evolution of Royal Air Force Doctrine Before World War II', *Journal of Military History*, 60 (April 1996) pp. 243-70.

¹⁴⁸ Sir Frederick Sykes, *From Many Angles; An Autobiography* (London: Harrap, 1942), Appendix V 'Review of the Air Situation and Strategy for the Information of the Imperial War Cabinet, 27 June 1918). See also Eric Ash, *Sir Frederick Sykes and the Air Revolution 1912-1918*, (London: Frank Cass, 1999), p.137. For a wider discussion of the impact of inter Service debate see Richard Overy, 'Doctrine not Dogma, Lessons from the Past', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, 3(1) 2000, p.34-37.

should be wielded by an independent arm. There needed to be a consistent message to prevent the other two Services making mischief. There was therefore a range of articles, formal publications and lectures articulating the role of air power, although these did not concentrate exclusively on the future of strategic bombing.

Whether or not this stream of official (and semi-official) consciousness constituted formal doctrine depends on the use of the term. For the purposes of this thesis, it would not be appropriate to try and precisely prescribe which definition of doctrine should be used and how inter-war thinking fitted into this. There were, however, several consistent themes, as well as some fundamental flaws, in the thinking over the period. Whatever definition of doctrine is used there is an underlying assumption that, for it to be valid, it has been underpinned by evidence of fundamental principles that have been refined over a period of time. The thinking should then have been subject a process of review and evaluation.¹⁴⁹ Other than some experience of air power in policing operations, the actual inter-war experience provided no scope for the RAF to evaluate the potential of strategic bombing.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, there was a serious, but not always admitted, gap between the technological realities of the fledgling Service, and its supporting industry, and the aspirations of the advocates of strategic bombing. But this combination of negative factors did not deter the senior military officers, and their successors who worked through the ranks and the Staff College process, from imbibing, internalising and reiterating the thinking over the period covered by the thesis. The suggestion that the Air Staff possessed an ‘almost passionate faith in the efficacy of the bomber offensive as a major war-winning factor’, coupled with the debate as to whether the belief was justified does not detract from

¹⁴⁹ Overly, ‘Doctrine not Dogma, Lessons from the Past’, p.38.

¹⁵⁰ Meilinger calls this ‘an evidential vacuum’: ‘Trenchard and “Morale Bombing”’: p.243.

the fact that that was actually what they thought and formed the intellectual basis for their plans.¹⁵¹ It is also relevant to note that this faith was not merely a figment of the British airmen's imagination. The indications from colleagues in the United States, and from influential authors such as Fuller and Liddell Hart encouraged them in their belief.¹⁵²

The origins of the thinking run somewhat deeper than would seem obvious if examined in the cold light of technological advance in powered flight. British thinking had been (and arguably still was) dominated by concerns of Empire and the use of maritime power to protect the trade routes. Diplomacy was aimed at preventing continental engagement. Meilinger has suggested that this maritime legacy was evident in early air power thinking; it is also evident in Frankland's use of Mahanian theory to underpin his analysis of the strategic bomber offensive against Germany.¹⁵³ This allowed British thinkers to remain comparatively detached from the Clausewitzian insistence that defeat of the enemy army was the precursor to victory. Armies could be side-stepped by air power aimed at the heart of the enemy interior; this mirrored the long Naval tradition of bombarding (and blockading) the enemy homeland.¹⁵⁴ Superimposed on this high-level thought was a generally held deep abhorrence of the attrition and casualties of the First World War; future strategy would need to avoid a repetition.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections* (London: Cassell, 1956), p.205.

¹⁵² B. H. Liddell Hart, *Paris or the Future of War* (London, Kegan Paul, 1925) and J. F. C. Fuller, *The Reformation of War* (London: Hutchinson, 1923).

¹⁵³ Meilinger, 'Trenchard and "Morale Bombing": p.243 and Noble Frankland, *The Bombing Offensive Against Germany: Outlines and Perspectives* (London: Faber, 1965), pp. 8 and 106.

¹⁵⁴ Neville Jones, *The Beginnings of Strategic Air Power*, p.xii.

¹⁵⁵ Meilinger, op cit., p.243. This theme is also picked up in the biographical works.

The story of the formation of the Royal Air Force as an independent air arm has been well told, not least in the Official History.¹⁵⁶ The critical document, *The Second Report of the Prime Minister's Committee on Air Organisation and Home Defence against Air Raids, dated 17th August 1917*, established the new Service under its own Air Ministry. The review was initiated by the Prime Minister (Lloyd George), and carried out by him and General Smuts, in order to examine the arrangements for home defence and air organisation generally.¹⁵⁷ Its final paragraph emphasised that 'air supremacy may in the long run become as important a factor in the defence of the Empire as sea supremacy'.¹⁵⁸ But the end of the First World War saw an immediate constriction on budgets and pressure from the Army and Royal Navy for the reintegration of 'their' elements of the new Service.¹⁵⁹ Trenchard's response was a detailed Memorandum issued in December 1918 iterating the *Air Power Requirements of the Empire*.¹⁶⁰ His recommendations included provision of a balanced force embracing home defence, a striking force (which could be used for Imperial police work), specialist forces for cooperation with land and sea forces, kite balloon and airship services and units to undertake coastguard duties. In Part II the CAS examined the strategic considerations:

Future wars between civilised nations will be struggles for life in which entire populations, together with their industrial resources, will be thrown into the scale. Evolution has brought about the creation of air fleets to meet the demands of such warfare. These will consist of home defence units and striking forces. The object of the striking forces will be nerve centres, the armies and navies of the opponent, the population as a whole, his national moral and the industries, without which he cannot wage war.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ H. A. Jones, *The War in the Air* Vol. 6, pp.1-27. The Appendices include copies of the relevant documents. The originals are in AIR 8/2 encl. 5, 6, 8.

¹⁵⁷ AIR 8/2, encl. 5 para. 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, para.11.

¹⁵⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive*, vol.1 pp.52-3. They cite Trenchard as likening the great instrument of war to 'Jonah's Gourd' which withered away overnight.

¹⁶⁰ *Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff on Air Power Requirements of the Empire*, AIR 8/6 Air Power Requirements 1918-1928, encl. 4.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, para. 5. Emphasis in the original. Moral and morale are used interchangeably.

The following years saw repeated attempts by the other two Services to disband the Royal Air Force, stimulating considerable correspondence and Cabinet debate.¹⁶² The ensuing doctrinal approach therefore evolved with serious political, financial and bureaucratic influences, but contained three enduring themes.

The first of these was the vital importance of air superiority, involving the defeat of the enemy air force and providing the home defence that public and political pressure insisted upon.¹⁶³ Practical experience of day, and especially night, air defence of the United Kingdom had highlighted the considerable difficulties involved. Furthermore, adequate defence required close liaison between army and air force units – between fighters, search lights and anti-aircraft artillery. Although this had descended to a bureaucratic level by 1924 (with formation of the Romer Committee), the Headquarters of Air Defence of England (under command of an Air Marshal) included fighter and bomber squadrons.¹⁶⁴ This latter point acknowledges the key Trenchardian dictum that air power was considered to be an essentially offensive weapon.¹⁶⁵ The third element of the doctrinal thinking was the emphasis on the psychological impact of air power being more significant than the physical effect. It was conventional thinking to cite the Napoleonic dictum that the moral

¹⁶² Trenchard's memoranda on this debate, along with Cabinet papers and War Office and Admiralty submissions can be found in AIR 8/2.

¹⁶³ This was part of the rationale for the Smuts report. AIR 8/2.

¹⁶⁴ The first Meeting of (sub-committee of) the Joint Air Ministry and War Office Committee on Anti-aircraft Defence was held under the chairmanship of Major-General C. F. Romer. See AIR 8/61.

¹⁶⁵ See *The War Object of an Air Force*, AIR 9/8. From as early as 1916, Trenchard was insisting that the 'moral effect of the aeroplane on the enemy...can only be done by attacking and continuing to attack'; see Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, pp. 71-74.

was to the physical as three to one.¹⁶⁶ Trenchard conveniently expanded the arithmetic to a factor ten to one for air power (and on one occasion even twenty to one).¹⁶⁷

These thoughts, not surprisingly, found their way into the earliest doctrine manuals. The opening sentence of *CD22 – Operations Manual, Royal Air Force*, stated that the ‘Royal Air Force will be trained in peace and led in war in accordance with the doctrine contained in this volume’.¹⁶⁸ Parton makes the tacit assumption that the writing, and subsequent publication, of *CD22* actually resulted in a doctrine manual.¹⁶⁹ It is evident that the Air Ministry intended that it should be circulated to every officer in the Royal Air Force of Flight Lieutenant rank and above.¹⁷⁰ The nature of the content of the manual meant that it had to remain classified at ‘Confidential’ meaning that it had to be stored in a locked steel chest which would be specially issued for the purpose!¹⁷¹ At a time of financial stringency, this gives some idea of the Air Ministry’s determination to disseminate thinking on Air Power to the widest corners of the new Service.¹⁷² Notwithstanding the limited track record of air power prior to publication it is clear that much effort went into distilling the experience of those who had flown in the First World

¹⁶⁶ Henderson, *The Science of War*, p. 173. This work was widely used in the Staff Colleges in the inter-war years.

¹⁶⁷ Meilinger, ‘Trenchard and “Morale Bombing”’: p.250. In a Conference paper, Dr. David Jordan described Trenchard as the master of the unfounded statistic! Joint Services Command and Staff College, 13 June 2008. See (more prosaically) Air Staff Memorandum No.11 of 1923 *Air Strategy in Home Defence – The Correct Objective*. AIR 8/71. For a withering summary of Trenchard’s approach see Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p.72.

¹⁶⁸ AIR 10/1197, *CD22 – Operations Manual, Royal Air Force*. (Hereafter *CD22*)

¹⁶⁹ Parton, ‘The development of Early RAF Doctrine’, p.1163. He deals with the publication of the document under the heading ‘Major Doctrinal Publication’. This view is supported by Meilinger, ‘Trenchard and “Morale Bombing”’, p. 257.

¹⁷⁰ AIR 5/299, ‘Printing and Publication of the RAF Operations Manual, CD22’, minute by the Director Training and Organisation dated 26 April 1922.

¹⁷¹ For the content see the correspondence between the Air Ministry and the Admiralty at AIR 5/299 encl. 14 and Parton, op cit for comment. For the steel chest saga see AIR 5/299 minute of 15 June 1922 and the results of a Court of Inquiry into the loss of a manual at Gosport – 24 April 1923.

¹⁷² AIR 5/299 has copious correspondence on requirements for all overseas commands.

War; the first Staff College Course at Andover spent a considerable period of time going through the document making detailed amendments.

In the fine library I was present at a Conference engaged on the 'Operations Manual of the Royal Air Force'; and here round a long table were collected ten officers each of whom had won very great distinction in the late war. They had before them a first draft of the Manual and were amending it sentence by sentence in the light of experiences in the field.¹⁷³

Considerable use was made of the document with 75 copies going to the Royal Naval College at Greenwich; the RAF Staff College Commandant confirmed to the Air Ministry that it was 'the basis for instruction' and that students were 'constantly told to refer to it'.¹⁷⁴ The Manual also became the basis for the officers' promotion examination.¹⁷⁵

The Manual consisted of eleven chapters, the first six of which were adapted from the *Field Service Regulations*, Volume II, 1920 by permission of the Army Council.¹⁷⁶ Chapter seven dealt with 'Aerial Operations and Aerial Fighting' with the next three covering co-operation with the Navy and the Army and then combined operations. The final chapter dealt with 'Aircraft in Warfare against an Uncivilised Enemy'. The critical chapter on Aerial Operations had only a short section on 'Bombing' which is described as 'the long range artillery of the air'.¹⁷⁷ Its operational uses were summarised as:

- (i) Destruction of fighting personnel.
- (ii) Destruction of material on land and sea.
- (iii) Morale effect upon enemy populace.
- (iv) Incendiary effect.

¹⁷³ AIR 5/299 includes a detailed description in an article by Major C. C. Turner published in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'Air Staff College, Strategy of the New Arm. A Visit to Andover', 1 December 1922.

¹⁷⁴ AIR 5/299 Admiralty request dated 29 January 1923. Commandant minute to Air Ministry dated 12 January 1926, encl.196A

¹⁷⁵ AIR 5/299 encl.203 dated 22 March 1926.

¹⁷⁶ CD22, Note I, p.1.

¹⁷⁷ CD22., p.57.

The section on attack on enemy towns was immediately made subject ‘the rules which may be laid down as the result of international agreement in regard to the bombardment of towns from the air’.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, bombardment for the sole purpose of attacking morale and in the absence of legitimate objectives was considered not to be justified; both the Hague and Geneva Conventions were specifically detailed as constraining the commander.¹⁷⁹ The advice on the use of incendiary bombs was limited to the practicability of damage to military buildings and is a far cry from the carnage inflicted on Hamburg, Belgrade and Tokyo.¹⁸⁰

A similar layout was used in the successor document, *Air Publication 1300, Royal Air Force War Manual; Part I Operations* first published in 1928.¹⁸¹ There was, however, no mention of reliance on *Field Service Regulations* and the opening chapters have considerable variation. The sections devoted to operations with the Army and Royal Navy and Combined Operations were retained.¹⁸² The air power element in this manual was split into four chapters covering Air Warfare, Air Bombardment, Air Fighting and Air Attack on Aerodromes.¹⁸³ The opening paragraph stated that ‘the special responsibility of the air forces in war is security against hostile air power’. But that this ‘cannot be assured by defensive measures alone; it ultimately depends upon a successful air offensive’.¹⁸⁴ The Manual goes on to emphasise that the range and powers of evasion allow aircraft to strike directly at ‘the enemy’s means of resistance... such as naval or military organisations, or

¹⁷⁸ CD22., p.58

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ By the RAF, the German air force and the USAAF respectively.

¹⁸¹ *API300*, As an interesting aside, the final chapter on Warfare against an ‘uncivilised’ enemy is replaced with ‘Air Operations in Underdeveloped and Semi-civilised Countries’.

¹⁸² *API300* ch XI-XII. It was notable that the chapter for the Navy was subject to further work – possibly to keep the classification below confidential.

¹⁸³ *API300*, Contents.

¹⁸⁴ *API300*, ch. VII, para,1. (Not page numbered).

centres of production'.¹⁸⁵ The principle of offence being better than defence was emphasised throughout, as is the severe effect of bombardment on moral.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, sustained attack would cause the enemy to divert aircraft to home defence.¹⁸⁷ The need for air superiority ran through air power sections as a continuous thread, albeit with the caveats acknowledging the difficulty of home air defence against a determined and disciplined bomber formation.¹⁸⁸ Overall the themes remained generally constant, but it is significant that *API300* (unlike its predecessor) stressed the primacy of the strategic bombing offensive over the battle for air superiority. It is also significant that both manuals cover a lot of ground in addition to the primacy of the bomber, thereby explicitly acknowledging that the RAF had other things to do.

The consistent 'Trenchardian' doctrinal themes were reinforced through the full circle in lectures not only to the Staff College students, but also more widely.¹⁸⁹ The Staff college lectures on air power were, however, few in number and, significantly, delivered by the Commandant in person.¹⁹⁰ Similar lectures were delivered to the other Staff Colleges.¹⁹¹ As is evident from the Air Publications giving samples of student essays, the students were exposed to a wide range of subjects and were not 'strange though it may

¹⁸⁵ *API300*, ch. VII, para.3.

¹⁸⁶ *API300*, ch. VIII, para 13.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 27.

¹⁸⁸ *API300*, ch VIII, paras 23-26 and ch. IX.

¹⁸⁹ See Allan D. English, 'The RAF Staff College and the Evolution of British Strategic Bombing Policy 1922-1929', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 16(3) (September 1993), pp.408-431. See also Wing Commander R. A. Mason, *History of the Royal Air Force Staff College 1922-1972* (Unpublished paper , 1972).

¹⁹⁰ See Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 41. For an example of a Commandant's lecture see Brooke-Popham's address emphasising the primacy of the offensive against the enemy's centres rather than attacks on his air force. Brooke-Popham Papers 1-5-8 dated 27 March 1926.

¹⁹¹ The Camberley Reds: 'Air Warfare' by Air Vice-Marshal H. R. M. Brooke-Popham, pp151-157.

seem) nurtured on the pure milk of Douhet'.¹⁹² A similarly catholic variety of titles is evident in the subjects chosen for publication in the *RAF Quarterly*. This was first published in 1930 under the editorial guidance of Squadron Leader C. G. Burge, who it would appear, also published articles under the pseudonym 'Squadron Leader'.¹⁹³ Although the degree of influence is hard to quantify, it is noteworthy that a number of middle-ranking officers, who would rise to senior positions during the Second World War, chose to contribute to journals such as the *RAF Quarterly* and the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*.¹⁹⁴ These journals were also strongly recommended to candidates aspiring to attend the Staff College at Andover.¹⁹⁵

The current and future leaders were not only subject to official (and semi-official) indoctrination on air power, but were also exposed to a range of external stimuli advocating the use, or even primacy, of air power. Liddell Hart, for example stressed that

Victory in air war will lie with whichever side first gains the moral objective...

And..

If... the decisiveness of the moral objective is admitted, is it not the height of absurdity to base the military forces of a nation on infantry which – even if

¹⁹² Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.41. Slessor goes on to say that he had never heard of Douhet at that time. This is borne out by interviews conducted by Tony Mason, *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal* (London, Brassey's 1994), p. 45. APs 956, 1097, 1152, 1233 and 1308.

¹⁹³ For the detective work in identifying Burge, see English, 'The RAF Staff College', fn. 90; English makes the point that Burge had been a Personal Assistant to Trenchard in 1926-1927. He had earlier published *Basic Principles of Air Warfare: the influence of air power on land and sea strategy* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1927).

¹⁹⁴ Examples include Wing Commander T. L. Leigh-Mallory, 'Co-operation between the Army and the Royal Air Force during 1929', *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, 1(1), January 1930, pp.37-44, and 'The Maintenance of Air Superiority in a Land Campaign', *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, 2(1) April 1931, pp. 243-252; Wing Commander W. Sholto-Douglas, 'A Floatplane Tour in the Southern Sudan', *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, 2(1), April 1931, pp. 211-221. These titles give a flavour of the range of topics covered. For a RUSI example see Squadron Leader J. C. Slessor, 'The Development of the Royal Air Force', *JRUSI*, vol. 76, May 1931, p.328.

¹⁹⁵ Wing Commander R. Graham, 'Some Notes on Preparing for the Staff College Course', *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, 2(1) April 1931, p. 263. Other recommended reading included the *Army Quarterly*, Air Council Instructions, The Bible, *The Times*, the leading article in the *Financial Times* and the perennial guides to writing decent English.

unopposed – take weeks to get to reach Essen or Berlin, for example, when aircraft could reach and destroy both in a matter of hours.¹⁹⁶

Similarly, Fuller emphasised the vital importance of control of the air, but went on to suggest that air warfare would allow economic destruction to replace the carnage of the trenches.¹⁹⁷ He also stressed the agility and manoeuvrability of aircraft over the infantry concluding that ‘THE TRADITIONAL SOLDIER IS DOOMED’.¹⁹⁸ These works were duly added to the RAF Staff College reading lists.

Other authors, such as L. E. O. Charlton, used the experiences of the First World War to predict the likely course of the next conflict. His book, *War over England*, described (in a fictional setting) the early air raids on London, concluding that air defence was a lost cause. He then went on to describe the horrors of air attack on the civilian populations.¹⁹⁹ For the potential future leaders, Charlton’s work was significant because he was a recently retired Air Commodore and had worked with many of them in the Air Ministry.

For better, or worse, the risk of untold horrors from the air was pervasive. During the discussions on disarmament in 1932 – both in Ministerial meetings (which as Lord President of the Council he chaired on behalf of the Prime Minister) and internationally - Stanley Baldwin became increasingly concerned about ‘the appalling consequences of a

¹⁹⁶ Liddell Hart, *Paris or the Future of War*, p. 48.

¹⁹⁷ Fuller, *The Reformation of War*, pp. 140-142. See also Colonel J. F. C. Fuller, ‘The Supremacy of Air Power’, *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, 1(2), April 1930, pp.240-246.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.145 (Fuller’s emphasis).

¹⁹⁹ L. E. O. Charlton, *War Over England* (London: Longmans, 1936). See also his earlier work *War from the Air; Past Present and Future* (London: Nelson, 1935) which was based on a series of Cambridge lectures (see Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.108).

future war conducted from the air'.²⁰⁰ His biographers lament that this became something of a passion with Baldwin allowing the emotion in his speeches to impinge on the logic.²⁰¹ In the House of Commons on 10 November 1932, Baldwin admitted that disarmament would not stop war, but could make it less dangerous. He then went to shock his listeners:

I think it is well also for the man in the street to realise that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through. The only defence is offence, which means that you have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves.²⁰²

Baldwin then went on to devolve the responsibility for the potential annihilation of European civilisation onto the heads of those who advocated air warfare.²⁰³

The consistent themes of air power being an essentially offensive tool and the importance of air superiority thus gained widespread currency and became firmly embedded in the thinking of the existing and future leaders. They were reinforced by public speeches and external journal articles.²⁰⁴ But the central belief in the primacy of offensive bombing operations (with the disproportionate impact on morale) had to be balanced against the public and political requirements adequately to defend the home base. Furthermore, the RAF could not just sit and await the coming of the massive bombing fleet; exercises had to be carried out with the other Services and the work of imperial policing had to continue. These seemingly conflicting priorities explain the variety of air power issues included in the doctrine publications, the Staff College syllabi and in journal

²⁰⁰ Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: a Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), p.731.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.735.

²⁰² 270 Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Official Report 5th Series, c632.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Squadron Leader J. O. Andrews, 'The Strategic Role of Air Forces', *JRUSI*, 76, (1931: February/November), pp. 740-743.

articles. The diversity of the challenges also impacted on the development of the institutional structure of the Air Ministry and its subordinate commands.

This chapter has set out the intellectual context in which the future leaders of the bomber offensive were professionally developed and has provided an explanation as to why their thinking may have evolved. This has then to be set in the context of the organisations in which they worked as more junior officers and for which they would eventually become responsible. In particular, the formation of the Air Ministry and how it grew to meet the likely challenges will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

THE ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The previous chapter set out the intellectual context in which the future leaders of the strategic bomber offensive either commenced or continued their professional development. This chapter develops some of the key themes by describing how the organisation into which they were introduced evolved. As their careers moved forward, these leaders built on the foundations and their progress became inextricably linked with the development of the organisation. No organisation arrives on the scene fully fledged, or without some evidence of an evolutionary process; indeed Barnard, in his classic text on the subject, has argued that organisations specifically emerge as a result of individuals co-ordinating their efforts in furtherance of a common purpose.¹ Furthermore, once formed, the organisations are open systems vulnerable to the vicissitudes occasioned by changing events, especially at the interfaces with other entities.² These may be inside an organisation where different parts, or divisions, may have competing priorities. The interfaces exhibit friction during times of stress or competition for resources. Even a superficial examination of the conduct of the war from 1914 to 1918 reveals such tensions between the War Office and the Admiralty, and across wider government. Superimposed on all of this was the rapid growth of air power with the concomitant requirement for its organisation, supply and utilization.³

¹ C. I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 95.

² Zaccaro, *The Nature of Executive Leadership*, p.12.

³ See, for example, J. M. Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power* (London: Longmans, 1927). Interestingly, Spaight, who was still serving as a senior official in the Air Ministry at the time of publication, was very circumspect in his dealings with individuals' reputations. Cooper had the luxury of being able to tell the objective story. See Malcolm Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*.

This chapter will not attempt to replicate the extensive literature (detailed in the previous chapter in the context of the intellectual background) on the birth of the Royal Air Force, and its evolution through to 1936. Nevertheless, there are certain key elements of the debate and controversies at the interfaces that had a direct impact on the growth of the new organisation, and its subsequent employment in battle. Furthermore, they also had an impact on thinking that, once internalised, underpinned the development of subsequent structures. The first of these was that the growth of air power came about through an inexorable cycle of technological innovation fuelled by increased operational demands for ever-improved equipment.⁴ Neither the Admiralty nor the War Office seemed sufficiently agile in meeting these challenges, particularly when the German Fokkers were in ascendancy.⁵ The second enduring theme was the seemingly paradoxical demand for air power to be utilised primarily for the defence of the United Kingdom in general, and London in particular, while the operational priority was for unremitting offensive in support of the army in France. Inextricably intertwined in this was the public and political clamour for reprisals in the face of German air attacks.⁶ The final theme was the growing realisation that air power was capable of independent action beyond that envisaged by the two older Services. All these themes would recur from the onset of the problems in 1916 through to the end of the Second World War and it is therefore worth examining their provenance.

⁴ See Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, pp.51-53 on the development of aero-engines. For occasions such as the Fokker Scourges in which the Germans gained marked ascendancy see, for example, John H. Morrow, Jr., *The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1993), p.92. See also ch.19 in Richard P. Hallion, *Taking Flight: Inventing the Aerial Age from Antiquity to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵ Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power*, p.58.

⁶ See Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, pp. 63, 71 and 116.

This chapter will outline the legal and political frameworks in which Departments of State conducted their business in peacetime and, in particular, during times of crisis. It will then go on to examine the formation of the various organisational mechanisms that were introduced in turn to try and remedy some of the perceived deficiencies in the *status quo* leading to the formation of the Air Ministry and the Royal Air Force as an independent Service. Following the consistent themes described above, and in particular the priorities of offence against defence of London, the chapter will then look at the early years of the new organisation and at the friction at the interfaces; in the light of ensuring that the new service had a real purpose and was fit to carry this out, the chapter will look at Trenchard's role.

The Constitutional and Legal Basis

A brief explanation of the legal position of Departments of State will help to explain a range of issues from the use of Orders in Council, through the role of the Cabinet Committee structure, to the role of the Air Council in 'directing' Bomber Command leaders on the course of action to be taken. This latter issue was subsequently a bone of contention with Harris who, when he was DCAS (November 1940 – May 1941), stopped the practice of his subordinates writing to Commanders-in-Chief saying that they 'were directed' to act in a given way; Harris

looked upon Commanders- in-Chief in the field as responsible people who were not to be bothered by the trumpery opinions of young Jacks-in-office who felt that they could blow themselves up with the full authority of the Air Council. But the same thing began again when I left the Air Ministry and was myself a Commander-in-Chief.⁷

⁷ Marshal of the RAF Sir Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (London: Collins, 1947), pp.49-50.

From this brief quotation, it can be seen that Harris was something of a lone voice in bemoaning a system that was clearly well entrenched.

The essence of the constitutional status of Departments of State is that the authority is derived from the Crown. Over time, English legal thinkers had conceived a duality between the King as a person and the Crown as being ‘suggestive of a more general public, governmental or administrative sphere’.⁸ This evolved into the Crown as a corporation embodying the King; the King in Council; and the King in Parliament comprising the Lords and the Commons.⁹ Out of these elements, the English (sic) Constitution maintains that Parliament is sovereign in that it can make and unmake laws; that none of these are absolutely binding on successive Parliaments; and that all laws can be dealt with in the same way (i.e. there are no special status constitutional laws).¹⁰ The unwritten nature of the Constitution has allowed it to evolve and adapt to circumstances, at least until the advent of European legislation.¹¹ Notwithstanding resulting complications, the situation for the period in question in this thesis was straightforward. Despite the lack of a formal document there was, however, a series of rules, practices and conventions for the guidance of the Prime Minister and her or his Government.¹² In practical terms, an Act of Parliament would be ushered through the Commons and the Lords in accordance with the practices and conventions prior to receiving Royal Assent. In the normal course of events Parliament would ensure that the law-making elements of the Act were clearly iterated in

⁸ J. W. F. Allison, *The English Historical Constitution: Continuity, Change and European Effects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.51.

¹⁰ Albert Venn Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (6th edition, London: Macmillan, 1902 [1885]), ch.1. Dicey is criticised by Allison, *The English Historical Constitution*, p.105 as being too insular, but the fact that Dicey’s study remained a standard text until 1959 (10th edition) indicates its longevity in conservative times.

¹¹ Colin Turpin, *British Government and the Constitution: Text, Cases and Materials* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p.3.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.4.

the text. But there would be a tacit acknowledgement that not every eventuality could be foreseen so a clause would be added allowing that ‘His Majesty might by Order in Council direct...’ thereby allowing the Minister and his officials to turn the Act into a practical means of administrating the Department.¹³ The combined process also allowed the Ministers, and bodies such as the Air Council, to take on legal powers under the original Act. It was from this chain of authority that Harris’ young ‘Jacks-in-office’ derived their authority, ultimately from Parliament, but through the exercise of the power of the Crown and the authority hence vested in the Secretary of State at the head of the Air Council.

The conventions of the Constitution effectively regulated the workings of the Cabinet, providing the essential rules.¹⁴ The critical element was that the Cabinet was (and remains) responsible to Parliament ‘for the general conduct of affairs’.¹⁵ But, in practical terms, the volume of business facing the Prime Minister and her/his colleagues has long been such that the full cabinet alone would have been swamped with business and this led to the delegation of specific work to specialist committees.¹⁶ Of these, the Committee of Imperial Defence is the most important and has the longest history.¹⁷ The role of this Committee, and its successors, along with the Chiefs of Staff Committee is again an essential backdrop to the organisational context.

¹³ Quotation taken from ‘*The New Ministries and Secretaries Act, 1916*’ which established the statutory powers for the Air Board. Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power*, p.96.

¹⁴ Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, pp. 417-419. See also N. H. Gibbs, *Keith’s The British Cabinet System* (London: Stevens, 1952), p.2.

¹⁵ Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, p. 364.

¹⁶ Gibbs, *ibid.*, p.110.

¹⁷ Gibbs, *ibid.*, pp.110-111 and Sir Ivor Jennings, *Cabinet Government* (third edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959[1936]), p.305.

The Cabinet Committees and the Chiefs

The control and responsibility of the military has been close to the heart of English constitutional thinking since at least the accession of William of Orange; prior to that, the sovereign was solely responsible for the defence of the realm and military affairs.¹⁸ As Parliament gradually asserted its sovereignty, and real power vis-a-vis the Crown, so the concept of ‘civil control’ of the military gained in credibility.¹⁹ In Britain, in particular, the shadow of Cromwell ensured that never again would the civil authorities risk the military being allowed the scope to become too powerful; in essence, this was done by placing command of the military in the hands of officers who were responsible to the Crown and the administration under civil ministers reporting to Parliament.²⁰ This latter facet would occasionally have a deleterious effect on operational efficiency, or even worse, would allow encourage politicians to impose their version of strategy.²¹ A standard pattern emerged in which the Prime Minister and his close colleagues would formulate military strategy in the context of the diplomatic situation; the only records would usually be the Prime Minister’s reports to the Sovereign.²² Inevitably, and typical of the British Constitution, the situation was rarely as straightforward as this with complicating factors such as a senior member of the Royal Family acting as the Commander-in-Chief and the

¹⁸ See, for example, Jackson and Brammall, *The Chiefs*, p.3.

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntingdon, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), p.81. See also Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* p.3.

²⁰ Strachan, *ibid.*, pp. 43- 45. See also Jackson and Brammall, *The Chiefs*, p.xxi. See also Ian Roy, ‘Towards the Standing Army 1485-1660’, David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.45.

²¹ Jackson and Brammall, *The Chiefs*, ch.4, ‘Political Dictatorship versus Professional Judgement: Lloyd George, Jellicoe and Robertson, 1917-18’.

²² *Ibid.*, p.6.

abundance of advice available in the House of Lords from ennobled senior military personages.²³

Events in the Nineteenth Century, such as Crimea, the scale of the American Civil War, and the rise of the Prussian war machine with its victories over Austria and France ensured change in the process of the formulation of military strategy.²⁴ The Cardwell Reforms (which had been in progress since his appointment in 1868) and Disraeli's formation of the Colonial Defence Committee in 1877 was the start of a process of evolution.²⁵ It nevertheless required further failure in the Boer War to stimulate Lord Elgin's Royal Commission which duly gave the view that the principal cause of failure was that inter-departmental communication had been inadequate with the Army unaware of the Foreign and Colonial Offices efforts.²⁶ Balfour set up a Cabinet Defence Committee in December 1902, but gave it considerably more credibility by chairing it himself and inviting the professional heads of the Army and Navy to attend; Hankey (who was to be Secretary of the successor Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) for many years) has made the point that 'in strict constitutional theory, the Prime Minister was the only member'.²⁷ The ensuing debates, however, were far from harmonious not least because the two Services had diametrically opposed outlooks on strategy with the Navy favouring an elegant Maritime strategy based on Command of the Sea (which would have distinct echoes in the inter-war period when the RAF struggled to survive). The Army, on the other

²³ There are many examples of this. See for example, Wellington's experiences at the hands of the Duke of York in Richard Holmes, *Wellington: The Iron Duke* (London: HarperCollins, 2007 [2003]), pp. 267-268.

²⁴ For the full detail of Crimea onwards see Peter Borroughs, 'An Unreformed Army? 1815-1868', in Chandler and Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army*, p.183

²⁵ See, for example, Edward Spiers, 'The Late Victorian Army 1868-1914', in Chandler and Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army*, p.187.

²⁶ Spiers, *ibid.*, p.203 and Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p.29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.31. See also Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command; 1914-1918* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), p.45-46 for Balfour's primacy in the establishment of the CID and his constitutional standing.

hand, was unable to string together a coherent case and their dire straits were made worse by the Elgin Commission's criticism of the War Office's poor management.²⁸ Balfour asked one of the Elgin Commission's members, Lord Esher, to review the situation and the War Office was reformed along the lines of the Admiralty with an Army Council.²⁹ This set the pattern that the Air Ministry followed in the years from 1917. The other important output from the Esher Committee was the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) which came into being on 4 May 1904.

The Esher Committee reported that:

The British Empire is pre-eminently a great Naval, Indian and Colonial Power. There are, nevertheless, no means of co-ordinating defence problems, for dealing with them as a whole, for defining the proper functions of the various elements, and for ensuring that on the one hand, peace preparations are carried out upon an consistent plan, and, on the other hand, that in times of emergency, a definite war policy, based on solid data, can be formulated.³⁰

The challenges that the Esher Committee sought to tackle, in making the high level machinery of defence 'fit for purpose', were to remain relevant through the First World War and during the preparations for the Second.³¹ Having the machinery in place and actually exercising it to its full utility were, however, different matters. In attempting to make the system work, an important facet of the new Committee was the establishment of a permanent secretariat (under Sir George Clarke who had been a member of the Esher Committee).³² The penchant of successive Prime Ministers for inviting senior establishment figures to sit on the Committee, even though they had no direct departmental

²⁸ Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p.33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.36-37.

³⁰ Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, p.46.

³¹ As previously defined, 'fit for purpose' implies that the organisation, and its top team, is at least capable (but better if optimised) to fulfil the functions inherent in the vision and purpose of the entity.

³² *Ibid.*, the other member was the First Sea Lord, Admiral 'Jackie' Fisher.

responsibilities, tended to make the body somewhat cumbersome, but once installed their removal would have seemed ‘discourteous’.³³ This led to the proliferation of sub-committees, especially where there were enquiries to be conducted.³⁴ Again, these sub-committees would have a significant role to play in the development of policy through to the Second World War. In particular, the work of the Air Defence Standing Sub-Committee, which was endorsed by the CID on 25 April 1912, led to the formation of the RFC later in the same year.³⁵

Jackson and Bramall have suggested that by the outbreak of the First World War, the efforts of the Esher Committee had resulted in a system that was technically fit for purpose, ‘if used properly’.³⁶ In particular, Hankey’s so-called ‘War Book’ ensured that the CID had co-ordinated Defence policies and priorities and that the War Office had been brought into the twentieth century in terms of its organisation being relatively fit for purpose.³⁷ Jackson and Bramall, however, went on to lament what they considered to be failures in progress in that the Secretariat had not developed into a full blown ‘Great General Staff’ along the Prussian lines and that there was no overall ‘supremo’ – beyond the Prime Minister in ‘Supreme Command’.³⁸ Sir William Robertson (as CIGS) commented that the Cabinet either had no confidence in the General Staff or did not know how to use it.³⁹ Hankey effectively acknowledged this, and the accusation that that

³³ Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, p.48.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Raleigh, *The War in the Air*, p.199. CAB 38/20/1, Report of the Standing Sub-Committee on Aerial Navigation dated 29 February 1912.

³⁶ Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p.56.

³⁷ Ibid. For Hankey on the War Book and its genesis see *The Supreme Command*, p85.

³⁸ Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p.56. See also Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen 1914-1918* (London: Cassell, 1926), p.151.

³⁹ Robertson, *ibid.*

Asquith allowed the machinery of defence to slide into haphazard cabinet discussion.⁴⁰ In terms of the development of the system, as opposed to its specific workings, it will not be necessary to follow the detail of the First World War. It is merely sufficient to say that the CID barely functioned as intended over the period.⁴¹

Lloyd George, who had developed his own system of government in the latter days of the War, continued with his War Cabinet until November 1919.⁴² The (now) three Chiefs of Staff were frequently ‘at loggerheads’ especially during the period 1920-23, primarily over the role of air power in the contexts of the future of the battleship, the reformations of the RNAS and Imperial Policing; these debates were all the more bitter because resources were so scarce.⁴³ The Sub-Committee on National and Imperial Defence of the CID played host to the discussions which queried the very existence of an independent air force.⁴⁴ Almost inevitably, it required the three harbingers of change to provide the next catalyst for further organisational development. The issues of economy and the perpetual balancing act between Imperial priorities, Defence requirements and Treasury conservatism over the economy remained a constant backdrop. From the operational perspective, Britain had very nearly gone to war with Turkey over the ‘Chanak affair’.⁴⁵ Lloyd George sought the views of the Chiefs and that was exactly what he got –

⁴⁰ Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, p.86. See in particular, Hankey’s quotation of Lord Curzon’s description of Cabinet meetings in which there was neither agenda nor order of business.

⁴¹ See John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c.1900-1916* (London: Routledge, 1974), ch.10.

⁴² Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p117.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.119. The full debate can be followed, from the Air Staff perspective, in AIR/8/2 enclosures 2, 5 and 7. AIR/8/71 contains detail on the use of air power in Imperial Policing.

⁴⁴ For the Air Staff briefing papers, see AIR 8/63 and CAB 24/71 ‘Memorandum on the Post War Functions of the Air Ministry’ dated 12 December 1918 and CAB 24/73 Admiralty Memorandum on ‘Memorandum on the Post War Functions of the Air Ministry’ dated 7 January 1919 for examples of the battle for survival.

⁴⁵ See Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy between the Wars*, pp.121-122.

three separate viewpoints each from a predictable single Service viewpoint.⁴⁶ The momentum for change was inescapable with the notion of a unified Ministry of Defence again raising its head as an option in a memorandum from Viscount Haldane entitled 'The Direction and Staff Work of Imperial Defence'.⁴⁷ Haldane also considered that in providing advice to the CID the 'three Chiefs would have been in full consultation before coming to sit with it, and they would come with views which they had worked out with their respective Ministers'.⁴⁸ This was taken further with the publication of the Salisbury report which sought, among other things, to regularise the *ad hoc* Chiefs of Staff Committee that Hankey had been encouraging. The report saw no reason to take the issue of a combined Ministry of Defence any further, considering that it had been fully debated.⁴⁹ The report went to state that:

[T]he existing system of co-ordination by the Committee of Imperial Defence is not sufficient to secure full initiative and responsibility for defence as a whole and requires to be defined and strengthened.⁵⁰

In addition to the functions of Chiefs of Staff as advisers on questions of sea, land or air policy respectively, to their own Board or Council, each of the three Chiefs of Staff will have an individual and collective responsibility for advising on defence policy as a whole, the three constituting, as it were, a Super-Chief of a War Staff in Commission. In carrying out this function they will meet together for the discussion of questions which affect their joint responsibilities.⁵¹

The critical issues in this were the emphasis on the collective nature of the Chiefs' endeavours and advice and that they effectively became a unified entity. The Chiefs of Staff Committee met formally on 17 July 1923 for the first time.⁵² It is beyond the scope

⁴⁶ See F. A. Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence 1885-1959* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.191. See also Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p127.

⁴⁷ Submitted to the Sub-Committee on National and Imperial Defence dated 2 April 1923; AIR/8/63.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2. With Trenchard's blue crayon in emphasis down the side.

⁴⁹ CAB/24/162, CP 461 (23) The Salisbury Report, dated 15 November 1923, p.11, para. 36. The Cabinet decision on the Salisbury Memorandum is at CAB 23/46 Cabinet Conclusions 31 July 1923 along with the full text.

⁵⁰ CAB/24/162, p.11, para. 36(2).

⁵¹ CAB/24/162, p.12, para. 36(8).

⁵² Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p129. Minutes at CAB/53/1.

of this thesis to study the efficacy of the COS committee in detail, but Beckett and Gooch have commented that ‘what might have proved a beneficial development became little more than an arena for inter-service wrangling over roles and resources’.⁵³ As will become clear during the subsequent treatment of Disarmament and re-armament, these issues would be central to the development of the RAF and of its bomber force in particular.

For the period up to the formation of Bomber Command as a distinct entity in 1936, the direction from the government, and the reciprocal function of providing advice, would, for better or worse, be channelled through the Chiefs of Staff and, where necessary, endorsed by the CID. In the interim the responsibility for provision of advice and setting up the staff functions to support the CAS lay within the Air Ministry.

The Air Ministry

From its inception in 1912, it was inevitable that there would be competition between the component parts of the ‘Flying Corps’ (consisting of a ‘Naval Wing, a Military Wing, and a Central Flying School for the training of pilots’) for resources and over operational policy issues.⁵⁴ This ‘marital bliss of 1912 was, however, short-lived’ when the Naval Wing became the Royal Naval Air Service and its Military counterpart, the Royal Flying Corps.⁵⁵ Further major change towards a unified air entity would require the impact of Jackson and Bramall’s harbingers of change: defeat, cost and public opinion.⁵⁶ For

⁵³ Ian Beckett and John Gooch (eds), *Politicians and Defence: Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy 1845-1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), Introduction, p.xiv.

⁵⁴ Raleigh, *The War in the Air*, p.198. See also H. A. Jones, ‘The Birth of the Royal Air Force’, *JRUSI*, 83 (1938), p.1 who cited the original wording from the Haldane Report of February 1912. From a historiographical viewpoint, Raleigh’s opening volume of the Official History of the Royal Air Force has not been much praised and it is interesting that his co-author should publish this piece in the *JRUSI*. See Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p.xvii.

⁵⁵ F.F.G. ‘The Royal Air Force- Administration, Organization and Direction’, *JRUSI*, 82 (1937), p.89.

⁵⁶ Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*, p.7.

military aviation, these came to a climax at the end of 1915 and into 1916 at the height of the so-called 'Fokker scourge'.⁵⁷ This represented a sufficiently serious defeat to have been able to convince people that 'something was seriously wrong with our air administration and that nothing short of radical change would set it right'.⁵⁸ The effects of the 'Fokker scourge' were exacerbated by the apparent impunity with which the German Zeppelins were able to drop their bomb loads on British targets.⁵⁹ These raids caused two, quite specific, reactions from the public that would have far-reaching consequences for the organisation of air power in the inter-war years. The first of these was the outcry that the raids should be stopped by interception prior to them reaching London (in particular); and the second was the demand that Germany should suffer similar treatment.⁶⁰ The debate, in Parliament in particular, was inflamed by the use of high rhetoric with, for example, accusations that RFC pilots were being 'murdered by the government' in having been sent to fly in sub-standard machines.⁶¹ Inevitably, the furore was taken up by Lord Northcliffe and his *Daily Mail*.⁶²

⁵⁷ See C.G. Grey, *A History of the Air Ministry* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1940), pp. 51-54. Grey was an interesting character; he was editor of the *Aeroplane* magazine and often expressed views that were extremely critical of the government on air issues. For a more pragmatic source, and one which is effectively an 'inside voice' as a member of the Air Ministry see J. M. Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power*, p.32.

⁵⁸ Spaight, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ See Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p 42

⁶⁰ See Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, pp. 22-24, Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p43. For an example of contemporary reporting, see 'Air Debate', *The Times*, 17 Feb 1916 in which the First Lord of the Admiralty (Balfour, on behalf of the Prime Minister) confessed to Parliament just how far behind the UK is in the aerial prowess.

⁶¹ See Grey, *A History of the Air Ministry*, pp.55-56 for the exploits of Mr. Noel Pemberton Billing M.P. who was the Member for East Hertfordshire. Billing had an early interest in aviation and founded the Supermarine Workshops in 1911; he was allowed to resign from the RNAS in 1916 (as a Squadron Commander) to enter politics to lobby on behalf of the flying services – which he did with 'vehemence and plain speaking'.

⁶² *Ibid*. See J Lee Thompson, *Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics 1865-1922* (London: Murray, 2000).

Although technological developments were in the ‘pipe-line’ to defeat the ‘Fokker scourge’, the momentum for change was too great and the government set in place an enquiry under the chairmanship of Mr Justice Baihache KC to investigate the perceived ‘maladministration’.⁶³ In practice, this enquiry made little headway with the Admiralty refusing to give evidence and a collective lack of support for its aims.⁶⁴ In parallel with this enquiry, the Joint Air War Committee was set up in March 1916 under the chairmanship of the Earl of Derby (who was not in the Cabinet at the time, but ‘would have the closest possible contact with it’);⁶⁵ its main objective was to tackle the competition between the Army and the Royal Navy for aircraft which Hankey (as Secretary to the CID) described as a ‘matter of utmost difficulty’ and over the limited output of engines as ‘almost a scandal’.⁶⁶ Internal disagreements prevented this entity ever functioning.⁶⁷ The crucial factor, however, was the Committee had no executive powers with which to force one side or the other to concede hard won ground.⁶⁸ It was therefore replaced by an Air Board under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon (Leader of the House of Lords). The unsatisfactory state of affairs continued with both Services ordering their own material without consultation, and frequently without even informing the Air Board.⁶⁹ The acrimony was described by Lloyd George as follows:

When Lord Curzon put forward his plan along these lines [for the formation of a department with the sole and complete control over production of machinery for aerial warfare], he was in turn challenged by Mr. Balfour [First Lord of the Admiralty] in a very caustic and amusing memorandum. To this Lord Curzon replied in suitable terms. It was clear that if the controversy did not conduce to the

⁶³ Ibid., p.57.

⁶⁴ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p.44.

⁶⁵ Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power*, p.70.

⁶⁶ Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, p.549.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p47. For a political view see D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, Vol. IV (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1937), p.1849.

⁶⁹ Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, p.550.

provision of aeroplanes it at least provided excellent entertainment for those who were privileged to read these documents and to hear the discussions.⁷⁰

Furthermore, it is evident that the Prime Minister (Asquith) was unwilling to bring the matter to a head.⁷¹ It has nevertheless been suggested that by dogged determination, and continuing to exist, Curzon's Air Board set a blueprint for future co-ordinated aircraft supply which could be taken forward by its successor.⁷² For future generations, the legacy of Curzon's 'bludgeon' (against Balfour's rapier) was the gradual attrition of the Admiralty's grip on air policy.⁷³ In effect, Curzon took on Trenchard's line that the RNAS should concentrate on work with the Fleet while the RFC did everything over the land (including strategic bombing and the possible reprisals demanded by public opinion).⁷⁴

The lack of formal standing of Curzon's Air Board was remedied in the New Ministries and Secretaries Bill, which became law on 22 December 1916, and provided that the President of the Board 'shall be deemed to be a Minister appointed under this Act' and hence the Air Board became a Ministry.⁷⁵ But as Spaight went on to point out, this Act did more than give statutory existence to the old board; it became a real Ministry, albeit one with limited powers.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Curzon was at pains to suggest that this new Ministry would be permanent, and not just for the duration of hostilities. The membership of the new Board was set out in an Order in Council of 6 February 1917 with Lord Cowdray (an industrialist who had been a Liberal MP and was created Viscount Cowdray in order to take this post) at its head; the powers ascribed to the Board have been described

⁷⁰ Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, Vol. II, p.977. For much of the correspondence, see CAB 42/25/10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 978.

⁷² Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p57.

⁷³ Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, p 551.

⁷⁴ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p58.

⁷⁵ Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power*, p.93.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.94.

as ‘elastic’.⁷⁷ To some extent this, along with the transfer of responsibility for production to the Ministry of Munitions reduced the chaos, and friction, over the supply of aircraft and engines.⁷⁸ Indeed, the Air Board, and its growing staff in the Hotel Cecil (on the Strand, but now demolished), became something of a supply ministry with added responsibility for personnel and general administration.⁷⁹ But there was a critical gap in the field of policy, in particular in the balance between air defence and offence.⁸⁰

The major accusations against the efficiency, or relevance, of the Cowdray Board stemmed from its apparent inability to prosecute raids against Germany or, as events were about to show, to defend London against German attacks.⁸¹ The attack by German Gotha bombers on 7 July 1917 on London, ‘without any effective challenge’, inevitably caused considerable concern.⁸² The ensuing debate in both Houses of Parliament covered the now traditional issues of retribution and improved home defence.⁸³ Accordingly, Lloyd George decided that, although the House had broadly accepted his explanation that the Army in France came first, he considered that ‘we must go far more thoroughly into the matter, with a view to ensuring the best possible use of the air weapon alike and for defence’.⁸⁴ Lloyd George had also developed a marked distrust of his military advisers and used the opportunity to ‘break the strategic stranglehold of the military command’.⁸⁵ He therefore set up a formal committee consisting of himself and Lieutenant-General Jan Smuts who was to confer with representatives from the Admiralty, the General Staff, C-in-C Home

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.100.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.104.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.116.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.116.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.121. See also Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, pp.1859-1864.

⁸² Quotation from ‘The Story of the Raid: The Enemy’s Escape Unscathed’, *The Times*, 9 July 1917.

⁸³ See ‘The Raid: Demand for Machines’, *The Times*, 9 July 1917 for the Lords and ‘Commons and Air Raid: Secret Sitting’ *The Times*, 10 July 1917.

⁸⁴ Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, pp.1862-63. For his statement to the House see *The Times*, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p.98.

Forces and ‘such other experts as we might desire’.⁸⁶ Smuts produced two reports for the War Cabinet and the literature deals with his progress in considerable detail.⁸⁷ Smuts’ Second Report (Committee on Air Organisation and Home Defence Against Air Raids (2nd Report) dated 17th August 1917) denounced the Air Board as being ‘merely a Conference’.⁸⁸ Smuts emphasised that although the Board had ‘nominal authority to discuss questions of policy, it had no real power to do so’.⁸⁹

Smuts’ report then went on to contrast (as opposed to the normal practice of drawing parallels in the functions of) the Air Service with the use of artillery; in this he emphasised that the air arm could ‘conduct extensive operations far from, and independently of, both Army and Navy’.⁹⁰ This ability, and arguably desirability, of independent operations was to become a cornerstone of Trenchard and his Air Ministry’s rhetoric for the period up to the formation of Bomber Command. Smuts acknowledged that the ‘subjection’ of the Air Board and service could be justified in its infancy, but saw every reason why it should now be raised to the status of an independent Ministry in control of its own war service’.⁹¹ The report also considered that the ‘maintenance of three Air Services is out of the question’.⁹² Of the eight specific recommendations in the report, number 2 is important for the context of the organisation that was subsequently to evolve. It recommended that:

⁸⁶ Lloyd George, *ibid.* War Cabinet Meeting 11 July 1917, CAB 24/22 copied in AIR 8/2, E5. Also produced at Appendix II to Jones, *War in the Air: Appendices*.

⁸⁷ See Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, ch.8, and John Sweetman, ‘The Smuts Report of 1917: Merely Political Window-Dressing?’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1981 4(2), pp. 152-174.

⁸⁸ CAB 24/22, (GT. 1658) War Cabinet: Committee on Air Organisation and Home Defence against Air Raids (2nd Report), 17 August 1917, para.4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, para.5.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, para.8.

under the Air Ministry an Air Staff be instituted on the lines of the Imperial General Staff responsible for the working out of war plans, the direction of operations, the collection of intelligence, and the training of the air personnel; that this Staff be equipped with the best brains and practical experience available in our present Air Services, and that by periodical appointment to the Staff of officers with great practical experience from the front, due provision be made for the development of the Staff in response to the rapid advance of this new service.⁹³

The War Cabinet discussed the report a week later and accepted the recommendations of the report, despite a lengthy discussion initiated by the First Lord of the Admiralty (Geddes) who was prepared to accept the new Ministry, but wanted to keep the RNAS intact within the Admiralty.⁹⁴ This viewpoint was one that would return, with considerable vigour, in the interwar years with direct connotations for the future of the new service and its component commands.

In addition to accepting the recommendations, the War Cabinet appointed a further Committee, under Smuts' chairmanship, to bring the new service into being and prepare the necessary legislation 'for submission to Parliament at the earliest possible date'.⁹⁵ The new Committee proceeded with its work reporting to the War Cabinet on a regular basis and finally recommended that the legislation was ready at the meeting on 6 November 1917.⁹⁶ The Air Force (Constitution) Bill became law on 29 November 1917 and had two 'remarkable characteristics'.⁹⁷ The first was that the 'Air Force Act' under which the discipline of the new service would be based, and its commanding officers empowered, was merely a schedule to the 'Constitution Act'; this made it the only Act on the Statute Book with no date and the only one to have entered law by this unorthodox means.⁹⁸ The

⁹³ Ibid., para.10 (2).

⁹⁴ CAB 23/3, War Cabinet 223, Minutes, 24 August 1917, para.12.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ CAB 23/4, War Cabinet 266, Minutes, 6 November 1917, para.10.

⁹⁷ Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power*, p.141.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

second issue would have more significance as the new organisation took shape in that it was largely an ‘enabling measure’ providing a structure around which the real detail would be added by Orders in Council.⁹⁹ In the House of Lords, Lord Curzon acknowledged that it was ‘a skeleton upon which the flesh and blood will have to be reared as time goes on’.¹⁰⁰ As Spaight has emphasised, the debates in Parliament showed clear intent that the new Air Council was to be a permanent fixture and not there merely for the duration of the War.¹⁰¹ The Lord Privy Seal (the Earl of Crawford) stated in his opening address that:

Aircraft can no longer be regarded as a sub-department of the Admiralty or of the War Office. The air is one. It is a unity, far more than the sea is and a hundred times more than the land is.¹⁰²

Although the intent of Parliament was clear, especially to a lawyer like Spaight, it would not prevent the Admiralty from returning to the fray. The Air Council was based on the Army model, not least because it was ‘thoroughly well understood by the vast majority of the officers concerned’.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Major Baird, the Under-Secretary of State for Air, detailed the role and responsibilities of the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) as being:

The Chief of the Air Staff is charged with advising His Majesty's Government as to the conduct of air operations in all questions of air policy affecting the security of the Empire, including Home defence. He is further charged with liaison with the Allies, with the Admiralty, and with the Army Council as regards policy, operations, and intelligence.¹⁰⁴

The first part of this requirement was self-explanatory, but the second element stressed the key role of senior leaders in managing the interfaces between their organisation and those others with which they must make common endeavour.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ HL Deb, 21 November 1917, vol.26 c.1122.

¹⁰¹ Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power*, p.144.

¹⁰² HL Deb, 21 November 1917, vol.26 c.1106.

¹⁰³ Major Baird, Under-Secretary of State for Air to the House of Commons as part of his presentation of the 1918 Air Estimates: HC Deb, 21 February 1918, vol.103,c.959.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., cc959-960.

¹⁰⁵ Zaccaro, *Executive Leadership*, p.13.

One of the other key facets of leadership at the highest levels is the requirement that an organisation must be fit for purpose. In this context, the building blocks were theoretically in place. But as will become evident when dealing with the strategic air offensive in the latter years of the Second World War, even the most perfect organisation (if such thing exists) can only function as well as the personalities (and egos) allow it so to do, especially when the system is under stress. In the case of the embryo Royal Air Force, Lloyd George singularly failed to recruit a workable ‘top team’ and the inevitable strife ensued.¹⁰⁶ Notwithstanding the turbulence over Secretaries of State and the resignation of Trenchard from his post as CAS, the Air Ministry sought, not only to find suitable accommodation, but also to build an Air Staff along the lines of that in the War Office.¹⁰⁷ Given that one of the reasons for the establishment of the new Ministry was to allow air policy to be formed outside the traditional bastions of the Admiralty and the War Office where it had been subservient to the demands of the parent services, it is not surprising to see moves towards this end. Sir William Weir replaced Lord Rothermere as Secretary of State on 25 April 1918 and was to ‘prove to be a dedicated proponent of the doctrine of strategic air power’.¹⁰⁸ Trenchard had been replaced by Major-General Sykes as CAS and one of Weir’s first acts was to force Trenchard into accepting command of the Independent Force in France.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Of the many accounts of Trenchard’s appointment and resignation, followed by that of his Secretary of State (Lord Rothermere) see Malcolm Cooper, ‘A House Divided: Policy, Rivalry and Administration in Britain’s Military Air Command 1914-1918’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1980 3(2), pp. 178-201.

¹⁰⁷ The staff of the British Museum, for example, were less than enamoured at the prospect of the Air Staff taking over the Museum – see CAB 24/35, Letter from British Museum Staff dated 12 December 1917.

¹⁰⁸ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p.128.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.129. For the most comprehensive account of Sykes, see Ash, *Sykes and the Air Revolution*, and for Weir, see W.J. Reader, *Architect of Air Power. The Life of the First Viscount Weir of Eastwood* (London: Collins, 1968).

The Independent Force¹¹⁰

Although Weir and his new CAS were keen advocates of the strategic potential of air power, their thinking was based more on intuition than on established, or detailed theoretical work.¹¹¹ Sykes came into post acknowledging that the ‘final blow against a great land power must be the Army’, but victory ‘could be won with the assistance of an overwhelming strategical [sic] bombing force’.¹¹² The detailed strategy was to follow and was to be embellished as time went on, not least to justify the continued existence of the RAF and its potential for independent offensive air operations. The reality at the time was that the government had long been under remit from public opinion to take the air war to the German people as retaliation. Sykes saw the role of the new entity as being ‘to strike far, wide and hard at the enemy’s manufacturing centres, submarine bases and communications’ and pressed on with his ‘cherished project’.¹¹³

It should not, however, be imagined that work on this scheme only commenced when Weir and Sykes took office. In October 1917, when the War Cabinet discussed the ‘forthcoming offensive, reference was made to the great and growing demand on the part of the British public for retaliation. The War Cabinet:

Approved the arrangements outlined above in regard to machines and objectives, and the Prime Minister impressed on General Trenchard the importance of making a success of the forthcoming air offensive, having regard to the effect that such a success would have on the *moral* [sic] of the people at home.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ As Sykes pointed out, the terms, ‘Independent Air Force (sometimes of the RAF)’, ‘Independent Bombing Force’ and ‘Independent Striking Force’ were all used interchangeably in 1918: Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p.219.

¹¹¹ See Sykes, *ibid.*, pp. 220-227, Ash, *Sykes and the Air Revolution*, p. 159 and Cooper, *Birth of Independent Air Power*, pp. 130-131.

¹¹² Sykes, *From Many Angles*, pp. 226-227.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.224.

¹¹⁴ CAB 23/4, War Cabinet Meeting 244, 2 October 1917, para.2.

The scheme was based on the deployment of two squadrons (one for day and the other for night operations) to Ochey (near Nancy) under the command of Colonel Newall (later to become CAS). Targets were to include the ‘Lorraine iron-works, and, when conditions were favourable, Mannheim and Stuttgart’.¹¹⁵ Notwithstanding the Prime Minister’s direction to Trenchard, the withdrawal of the aircraft from Haig’s offensive (3rd Ypres – ‘Passchendaele’) sparked immediate protest from the CIGS and further debate in the War Cabinet.¹¹⁶ The reality within Newall’s VIIIth Brigade was that the demands from the Army were such that priority was given to communications targets behind German lines (in France) and aerodromes near the lines.¹¹⁷

Matters improved little when Trenchard took command of the Force on 6 June 1918, not least because German defences continued to exact a heavy toll on the bombers necessitating diversion of resources into attacking the defenders’ airfields.¹¹⁸ In his final despatch (dated 1 January 1919), Trenchard had seen his two real alternatives as being:

1. A sustained and continuous attack on one large centre after another until each centre was destroyed, and the industrial population largely dispersed to other towns; or
2. To attack as many of the large industrial centres as it was possible to reach with the machines at my disposal.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ CAB 24/28 for Robertson’s Memorandum to the War Cabinet of 6 October 1917 (GT2234) and CAB 23/4 War Cabinet Meeting 247, 9 October 1917, para. 9 for the debate that ensued. See also Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (eds.), *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918*, (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), p.333 (4 October 1917) for Haig’s record of Trenchard’s report that ‘All members of the War Cabinet seem to have lost their heads over the German bombing’.

¹¹⁷ Cooper, *Birth of Independent Air Power*, p. 132.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 135. See also Jones, *War in the Air*, vol.6 p.119 for a description of German defences. See also p.135 for the actual dates of Trenchard’s arrival in the area; the date quoted is that on which the force formally came into being.

¹¹⁹ The Despatch is available in full in AIR 6/19 (Air Council Memoranda) and quoted extensively in Jones, *War in the Air*, vol.6 p.136.

Trenchard chose the latter option largely because of the small numbers of aircraft and their limitations ‘imposed on long-range bombing by the weather’.¹²⁰ Trenchard further justified his choice:

By attacking as many centres as could be reached, the moral effect [sic] was first of all very much greater, as no town felt safe, and it necessitated continued and thorough defensive measures on the part of the enemy to protect the many different localities over which my force was operating. At present the moral effect of bombing stands undoubtedly to the material effect in a proportion of 20 to 1, and therefore it was necessary to create the greatest moral effect possible.¹²¹

It is an interesting postscript to this despatch to note that Weir, whose term as Secretary of State was limited to the duration of the war at his own request, had advised Trenchard to keep the ‘final operational despatch educational for the benefit of the armchair critics’; Weir also shared his own views of the success of the Force.¹²² The clear implication was that Weir saw Trenchard returning to high office and was keen that he should not burn his boats.

It is a difficult task to analyse the effectiveness of any bomber offensive, even one as limited in scale as that carried out by the Independent Force. In the first instance, the desired effect has to be plainly stated. If the rationale for the Force was merely retaliatory then the very fact that it was formed and operated may be said to have implied success. Measuring the effect on enemy morale was (and is) all the more difficult. It is instructive to note the views of those directly involved in this limited offensive action. Trenchard was unequivocal and trenchant in his private views:

Thus the Independent Force comes to an end. A more gigantic waste of effort and personnel there has never been in any war.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.136.

¹²² Boyle, *Trenchard*, (London: Collins 1962), p.314.

¹²³ Trenchard Papers, RAFM 76/1/32 dated 11 November 1918.

Although these words from Trenchard's (private) diary written on 11 November 1918 have been widely quoted, it could be argued that they reflect his personal frustration at finishing the War in what he perceived to be an operational backwater, rather than directing the main force in support of Haig's army. Furthermore, his attitude belies the fact that much of the Force's activities were in support of the army either against communications targets or enemy airfields. While there may have been some efficiencies had the force operated within Salmond's organisation (what had been the RFC in France under Trenchard for much of the War), these could hardly be described as 'gigantic'. According to his biographer, Salmond's view was that the war would have been won and lost on the north-western front and that the army needed the support of every aircraft that could be used.¹²⁴ In his defence of his strategy, Sykes was at pains to point out that he was working to Cabinet direction and that it was not his role to demur from this.¹²⁵ He went on to say that the 'sudden emergencies' would have been catered for by the switch of resources.¹²⁶ Sykes was also keen to elaborate on the strategy. His autobiography was published in 1942 in which he defended his actions from criticism in Slessor's work *Air Power and Armies*.¹²⁷ Sykes effectively said that even if the 'sole object of war is the destruction of the enemy's army', then destruction of armaments factories, fuel supplies and communications were perfectly valid aims.¹²⁸ Given the animosity between Trenchard and Sykes, there is a risk that the former's language had more to do with their clash than the reality of the situation; by the same token, Sykes had clear views on 'Trenchard's

¹²⁴ John Laffin, *Swifter than Eagles: A Biography of Marshal of the RAF Sir John Salmond* (Edinburgh: Blackwood 1964), p.130.

¹²⁵ Sykes, *From Many Angles*, pp. 236-237.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.237.

¹²⁷ Sir John Slessor, *Air Power and Armies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).

¹²⁸ Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p.237.

predilection for the tactical offensive'.¹²⁹ The implication in this is that Sykes saw himself as the more clear-sighted, especially with hindsight.

In terms of the wider literature in assessing the operational effectiveness of the Independent Force, the Official History was predictably upbeat about its performance and defended Trenchard in particular for his prioritisation of airfield targets in that his organic assets were all that were available for the task.¹³⁰ The *War in the Air* also confirmed that the results justified Trenchard's policy.¹³¹ The debate among scholars is interesting because it reflected (and continues to reflect) debates which were to recur over the effectiveness of the strategic air offensive against Germany in the Second World War. Although C. G. Grey only dealt with the Force in passing, he implied that it had value purely because its operations were independent of the War Office and the Admiralty.¹³² Furthermore, because they were directed from the Air Ministry, these operations were in theory, independent of Haig; but in practice, Trenchard could be relied upon to work very clearly within his erstwhile master's intent. As a keen advocate of the potential of strategic bombing, Jones lamented the lack of opportunity for the Force to prove itself and, by implication, was critical of the commanders for being insufficiently far-sighted in applying the necessary resources thus not exploiting the possible advantages, instead choosing to fight an air war which favoured the Germans.¹³³ Cooper was altogether more pragmatic emphasising the practical and technological limitations of the aircraft, their ordnance and

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.226.

¹³⁰ Jones, *War in the Air*, p.163. See also the Appendices Volume at Appendix XIII for the statistical breakdown of the raids; the Remarks column gives an interesting reflection on the realities of the operations.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.137.

¹³² Grey, *A History of the Air Ministry*, p.85.

¹³³ Jones, *The Origins of Strategic Bombing*, p.212.

the ability of the crews to bomb accurately by day and especially by night.¹³⁴ He highlighted the delays that occurred in production, but is sceptical about the impact on morale.¹³⁵ Webster and Frankland have stressed in the introduction to their four-volume contribution to the Official History of the Second World War, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945*, that the Independent Force was ‘no more than aspiration. Its significance was in the future, not in the struggle of 1918’.¹³⁶

This review of the Independent Force not only provided the precedents for many of the historiographical debates that were to follow the strategic air offensive in the Second World War, but it also set the tone for the often heated discussions that were to follow in Whitehall in the aftermath of the First World War and through into inter-war years. The immediate months saw Churchill, as Secretary of State for War and Air, unceremoniously bundle Sykes off to be Controller of Civil Aviation ‘and console him with a GBE’.¹³⁷ Trenchard was then in post as CAS from 1919 to 1930 and oversaw, first the survival of the new Service, and then its development towards the organisation that would wage the strategic air offensive.

Organisational Survival

The literature encompassing the policy, strategy and development of the RAF in the interwar years, on the face of it, has covered the ground comprehensively.¹³⁸ Yet closer examination has revealed that some of this is highly parochial, and other works have placed an interpretation on events that does seem too simple to have arisen from the

¹³⁴ Cooper, *Birth of Independent Air Power*, p. 135.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, p.41.

¹³⁷ Boyle, *Trenchard*, p.329.

¹³⁸ And accordingly cited previously.

complexities and ambiguities of the time.¹³⁹ Part of Trenchard's task was to operate within these difficulties working the interfaces between his Service and its older equivalents; the other government departments, and the Treasury in particular; the political arena which was no simpler for Trenchard than any other leaders over time; and in the context of the wider diplomatic and international events. In short, he faced the full gamut of challenges facing a senior or strategic leader. The major factors likely to bring about change will be briefly dealt with in turn.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, it was inevitable that all of the Forces would face a period of severe financial retrenchment, at least until the emergence of a new and credible threat, or threats. But even in this area, there are a number of myths as to the targets and severity of the cuts. Ferris and Biddle have both pointed out that the RAF was not as severely mauled as the Royal Navy and the Army, at least until 1925.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Lloyd George's fiscal policy was based on there being no war for the next 5 to 10 years and that the 10-year rule did not appear until 1926 when its impact was felt on all the Services alike.¹⁴¹ In framing its own assumptions a mere two days after the Armistice, the Air Ministry considered it 'reasonably safe to adopt a moderate policy':

- a. That the military situation foreshadows a probability of real and enduring peace, not merely a suspended state of war.

¹³⁹ See, for example, John Ferris' comments on Malcolm Smith's use of the term 'strategic interception' as a means of describing the Air Ministry's thinking on strategic bombing during the 1920s. Ferris makes the point that few in the Ministry actually thought about this issue with any degree of consistency even though Smith's interpretation made eminent sense. John Ferris, 'The Theory of a French Air Menace' Anglo-French Relations and the British Home Defence Air Force Programmes of 1921-25', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 10(1987), p.68 and fn.28.

¹⁴⁰ John Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919-1926* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp.17-21 and Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.82.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, plus John Ferris, 'Airbandit: C³I and Strategic Air Defence during the First Battle of Britain, 1915-1918', Michael Dockrill and David French (eds.), *Strategy and Intelligence during the First World War*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), p.62.

b. That between the first class powers war will not take place within 20 years.¹⁴²

Throughout the period, Trenchard imposed his own, overarching, doctrine on the RAF, that of the vital necessity of economy.¹⁴³ In a Memorandum submitted to the Secretary of State for Air (Churchill) ‘on the Scheme for the Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force’, Trenchard produced a very pragmatic document dealing with issues fundamental to the future of the Service such as units, reserves and the vital importance of training.¹⁴⁴ Trenchard’s ‘White Paper’ stands in contrast to the arguably more visionary, and much more expensive, versions produced by Sykes.¹⁴⁵ This emphasis on economy had virtue beyond the obvious necessity. Not least it served to avoid any criticism from the other two services, and the Treasury, over perceived profligacy on the part of the newcomer. But Trenchard was also firm in his belief that what available funding there was should be concentrated into those areas where the most substantial foundations for the RAF could be laid, such as its Colleges.¹⁴⁶ These preparations were put in place in 1920 during a period of what Trenchard’s biographer has called a period of ‘armed truce’ between the CAS and the First Sea Lord (Beatty).¹⁴⁷ Over this period, Trenchard went no further in his advocacy of air power than political support was available to cover his

¹⁴² AIR 6/19 Vol.4. Air Council Precis. Memorandum on the Post War Functions of the Air Ministry and the Royal Air Force. 13 November 1918.

¹⁴³ This occurs in a number of speeches, notably his opening address to the first Staff College Course at Andover. *RAF Staff College: Opening Address to First Course by Air Marshal Sir H. M. Trenchard Bart., KCB, DSO, ADC, Chief of the Air Staff*, RAF Staff College Records; copy held by author.

¹⁴⁴ See Cmd. 467, *The Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force, 1919.*; this is Trenchard’s so-called ‘White Paper’

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion on Trenchard’s ‘White Paper’, see Barry D. Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule: British Air Strategy 1914-1939*, (London: Croon Helm, 1976), p.167. Sykes’ paper is at AIR 8/6, ‘Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff on Air Power Requirements of the Empire’ dated 9 December 1918. A version (not a *verbatim* copy) is at Appendix VII to *From Many Angles*.

¹⁴⁶ Boyle, *Trenchard*, p.350. See also Cmd. 467, para.10 for the emphasis on accommodation in general, but Halton (Apprentice School) in particular.

¹⁴⁷ Boyle, *Trenchard*, p.350.

position, and played the potential of strategic bombing against the economies offered by substitution of air for ground forces in what Ferris has termed ‘an indirect approach’.¹⁴⁸

The state of truce, during which Trenchard refrained from attacking the other two services, was broken in 1921 when the next round of drastic economies hit the planning process.¹⁴⁹ The requirement for deep cuts was so great that senior politicians, including the Prime Minister (Lloyd George), were seriously contemplating disbandment of the RAF, leaving Trenchard with no option but to put the case for air power in strong terms.¹⁵⁰ In May 1921, Trenchard briefed the CID that in any future war civilian morale would be the key target. This could only be done through strategic bombing and, on the experience in practice and in terms of public opinion, the only counter to this was having the ability and determination to respond in kind.¹⁵¹ Inherent in Trenchard’s assertions was that only an independent force could execute these missions. The upshot was that Balfour (as Lord President of the Council, chairing the CID) agreed that the RAF should have prime responsibility for home defence. Furthermore, the concept of strategic bombing had become firmly embedded in the Whitehall psyche.¹⁵² That said, neither the Army nor the Navy were prepared to accept these conclusions, leading to a running battle between the Air Ministry and the Admiralty (in particular due to their demands for their own air arm) lasting several years and occasioning a considerable amount of staff work.¹⁵³ The row continued to simmer with the Cabinet asked to kill the issue because, according to the Secretary of State for Air ‘the constant attacks upon the independent Air Ministry, both

¹⁴⁸ Ferris, ‘The French Air Menace’, p.64

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of the Financial Policy for that year see Ferris. *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy*, ch.5.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. See Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy between the Wars 1918-1939*, pp.98-107.

¹⁵¹ CAB 2/3, CID Meeting 139, 27 May 1921. Trenchard’s paper is at the Appendix.

¹⁵² See Ferris, ‘The French Air Menace’, p.64.

¹⁵³ See AIR 5/3 for the correspondence and papers.

officially and unofficially, during the last twelve months had rendered the administration of the Air Force increasingly difficult'.¹⁵⁴ Inevitably, no conclusion was reached other than to discuss the matter further.¹⁵⁵

During the process of debate on the 'Role of the Air Force in the Future of Imperial Defence', Trenchard had been happy to point to almost any number of likely instances in which substitution could be used, but was at first reticent to point to a potential foe capable of engaging in a strategic bombing duel. Nevertheless, as relations with France deteriorated over British long-term commitments to French security, all three services attempted to exploit the situation, but as Ferris has noted, the RAF had the most to gain and Trenchard cynically used the issue.¹⁵⁶ Trenchard was able to point to the apparent disparity between the strength of the RAF and the French air force which was within striking range; in Cabinet, it was agreed that 'the French air development constituted a formidable danger to this country'.¹⁵⁷ Although Trenchard adduced no evidence of French aggressive intentions, the spectre of defeat (again one of Bramall and Jackson's catalysts for change) was enough to produce an alarmist reaction among the politicians resulting in Cabinet approval for a modest increase in RAF strength.¹⁵⁸ In the meantime, Trenchard was allowed to deploy aircraft and support personnel (including RAF armoured cars) to Iraq in substitution of large and ponderous ground forces; this is well covered elsewhere in the literature and will not be discussed at length here.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ CAB 23/29, Cabinet Conclusions, 8 March 1922, p.8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁵⁶ Ferris, 'The French Air Menace', pp.66 and 71. The latter shows the degree of intelligence manipulation.

¹⁵⁷ CAB 23/29, Cabinet Conclusions 15 March 1922, p.5.

¹⁵⁸ Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy between the Wars 1918-1939*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.120 for Iraq, 205-207 for Kabul; see also Philip Anthony Towle, *Pilots and Rebels; The Use of Aircraft in Unconventional Warfare 1919-1988* (London: Brassey's, 1989) and David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960).

The issue of the role of the RAF in Imperial Defence was referred to a sub-committee of the CID chaired by Lord Salisbury. This began its meetings, reporting regularly to the CID and the Cabinet, on 15 March 1923 and continued through until October 1923.¹⁶⁰ Salisbury was able to bring some sense to the issue of French air strength reporting to the Cabinet on 9 May 1923, with the Cabinet agreeing that:

The Lord President of the Council, in the course of the debate on Lord Birkenhead's Motion on Aerial Defence in the House of Lords, should make clear that that the Government deprecate any talk of aggression by France towards this country; that they understand that, in the present state of tension on the Continent of Europe, France is bound to take every precaution for her security; that we have no knowledge as to the what the ultimate French armaments will amount to, but that we can conceive of nothing worse than a competition with France and this country;....

And, further, that Lord Salisbury should be authorised to announce that the Cabinet are conscious that a considerable increase in the Air Force will in all probability be required.¹⁶¹

With his work still ongoing, Salisbury returned to the Cabinet on 20 June 1923 with an Interim Report; Montgomery Hyde has described the ensuing Cabinet decision as being 'of great historical importance'.¹⁶² Given its importance to the survival of the RAF at such a vulnerable time, and the foundation that this agreement laid for the future organisation and structure of the Service it is worth to repeat in full (noting the Cabinet's reluctance to make the decision!):

That, though regarding it as a melancholy necessity, they had no alternative but to approve the Interim Report, the recommendations of which are as follows:

- (1) In addition to meeting the essential Air power requirements of the Navy, Army, Indian and overseas commitments (in regard to which a Report will be furnished later), British Air power must include a Home Defence Air Force of

¹⁶⁰ Montgomery Hyde, *op cit.*, pp.134-135. See CAB 23/45, Cabinet Conclusions, 7 March 1923, setting up the sub-committee of the CID; subsequent discussions are in the same series and were often tabled under the side heading 'Air Defence'. The Final report is at CAB 24/162, 15 November 1923.

¹⁶¹ CAB 23/45 Cabinet Conclusions 9 May 1923. The completion of the Locarno Treaty in 1925 finally removed the possibility of any threat.

¹⁶² Montgomery Hyde, *op cit.*, p.135.

sufficient strength adequately to protect us against Air attack by the strongest Air Force within striking distance of this country.

- (2) That the Air Staff be instructed to draw up detailed proposals for the creation of such a Home Defence force, to be organised, in part, on a regular and permanent military basis, and, in part, on a volunteer or reserve basis, but so arranged as to ensure that sufficient strength will be immediately available for purposes of defence. The fullest possible use to be made of civilian labour and facilities.
- (3) That the first stage of the Air Ministry's scheme, which will absorb our entire capacity for aerial expansion in the immediate future, should provide for a strength of 600 first-line machines equal to the Independent Striking Force of the strongest Air Force within striking distance of this country.¹⁶³

The full consequences of this report render the Cabinet's reluctance to agree them unsurprising given the inevitable costs that would accrue. Nevertheless, the agreement ensured that British air strength would not be left in a condition of inferiority in respect of any country within striking range of Britain. In the short term, this would be France; but Salisbury's recommendations would underpin policy when Germany was resurgent after 1933. It is also noteworthy that the total British air strength, comprising bombers and fighters, should equal the strength of the competing bombing force. This led, inevitably to considerable debate in the Air Ministry as to the balance between fighters and bombers with Trenchard invariably favouring preponderance of the latter.¹⁶⁴

At its first meeting in March 1923, the Salisbury Committee, probably very wisely given the moment of their main work, decide to defer the detail the dispute between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry to a separate sub-committee under Balfour's chairmanship. At the heart of the issue was the Air Ministry's determination to keep all air assets and operations under a unified command and not divided into penny packets in the other services (which would have probably resulted in the eventual demise of the RAF). The

¹⁶³ CAB 23/46 Cabinet Conclusions 20 June 1923.

¹⁶⁴ See Montgomery Hyde, *op cit.*, p.138; Neville Jones, *Beginnings of Strategic Air Power*, ch.3; Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.85.

Navy was adamant that it should have its own organic air assets. The Balfour Committee duly reported and the issue was discussed in Cabinet on 31 July 1923.¹⁶⁵ ‘After a prolonged discussion the Cabinet ‘agreed (by a Majority) – (a) to adopt the covering report...’.¹⁶⁶ The majority decision is noteworthy in itself, but given the strength of feeling in the Admiralty, not surprising. Both the Secretary of State for Air and the First Lord of the Admiralty ‘undertook to do their utmost to carry out the decision of the Cabinet in a spirit of goodwill and co-operation’.¹⁶⁷

Over a period of five years, Trenchard had survived the storm, and the RAF had emerged, not just intact, but with peacetime Cabinet approval for its role in the Home Defence of the Great Britain. Furthermore, the principle of substitution, by air power, had been attempted and was working sufficiently well for the costly return to manpower intensive garrisons not to be contemplated. Under classic senior leadership theory, Trenchard would have been expected to provide and communicate the vision and purpose of his new organisation.¹⁶⁸ He would also have been required to make the organisation fit for purpose; react to other organisations at the interfaces of his own; and put in place an appropriate succession plan nurturing young talent.¹⁶⁹ At face value, Trenchard succeeded in each of these challenges, and excelled in most, to earn the soubriquet of ‘Father of the RAF’. But real strategic leadership is actually more complex than the checklist approach advocated by the likes of Adair, or the modern consultancy ‘gurus’. Trenchard epitomised the complexity. In terms of producing a vision for the fledgling Service, it could be argued that Sykes was the more far-sighted; he certainly believed that to be the case. But vision is

¹⁶⁵ CAB 23/46 Cabinet Conclusions 31 July 1923. Report also at CAB 24/12, CP 349 (23) 27 July 1923.

¹⁶⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, p.2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Adair, *Effective Strategic Leadership*, p.95.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

less useful if not couched in a form mindful of the practicalities prevailing at the time. There is no doubt that Trenchard had an extremely strong and forceful personality which Malcolm Smith has described as one of the new Service's greatest assets.¹⁷⁰ Beyond this it was clear that he could be intransigent, stubborn and fierce in defence of his 'organisational patch'.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Ferris has described Trenchard as a 'ruthless and cunning bureaucratic infighter'.¹⁷² These traits, identified by modern authors, are borne out by comments from politicians such as Sir Samuel Hoare (later Viscount Templewood) who was Secretary of State for Air four times. Templewood has described his first meeting with Trenchard as being his first ever with a 'really great man' with evident physical and vocal (hence the nickname 'Boom') presence.¹⁷³ Templewood saw Trenchard as visionary and waxed lyrical in his autobiographical summary of the period, citing Pushkin's poetry as justification for calling the CAS 'a major prophet' with himself as the 'interpreter'.¹⁷⁴ Arguably, Trenchard's greatest strength was his ability to react to the challenges at each of the interfaces between his organisation and the wider environment in a flexible and creative manner and without merely articulating a standard dogmatic line.¹⁷⁵ He effectively created the climate for survival and subsequent evolution; had Trenchard insisted on single-minded adherence to, say, strategic bombing, the Air Ministry would have been defeated in detail on that issue alone. By also extolling the virtues of substitution and home defence with a shrewd emphasis on economy over his rivals

¹⁷⁰ Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p.23.

¹⁷¹ Assessment from Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.80.

¹⁷² Ferris, 'The French Air Menace', p.63.

¹⁷³ Viscount Templewood [Sir Samuel Hoare], *Empire of the Air: The Advent of the Air Age 1922-1929* (London: Collins, 1957), p.39. A contrary view suggests that Trenchard's voice was not particularly loud, 'but in public speaking he emitted a low rumbling noise that did not lend clarity to his pronouncements.' See *Generals' Nicknames*, University of Birmingham Centre for First World War Studies at <http://www.firstworldwar.bham.ac.uk/nicknames/trenchard.htm>, accessed 29 June 2009.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.40-41.

¹⁷⁵ Zaccaro, *Executive Leadership*, pp.87-89 and McKenna, *Business Psychology*, p.544.

Trenchard set the direction for change without being overly prescriptive.¹⁷⁶ This is very much a different Trenchard from the person who has been caricatured as a man more remembered for the volume of his voice than the subtlety of his argument. Notwithstanding this complex picture Trenchard, at his core, was a man who favoured the offensive, many fold, over the defensive. This was a view that was accepted and internalised by virtually all RAF personnel who came into contact with Trenchard, and as he was in post until 1930, certainly set the tone for future development.¹⁷⁷ His organisation was neither single minded, nor obsessive, over strategic bombing, but when the storm clouds started gathering over Europe the need for a command structure that would be fit for purpose gained in importance. This theme will be taken forward in the next chapter which will look at the formation of Bomber Command and its early relationship with the Air Ministry in the context of the expansion of the RAF.

¹⁷⁶ McKenna, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Nor was he above meddling after he left his post much to his successor's chagrin. See Laffin, *Swifter than Eagles*, p.211; Salmond did not hesitate to tell Trenchard that he was out of line when he re-occupied an office in the Air Ministry to work for an aircraft manufacturer and drew upon his old staff for support.

Chapter Four

FROM DISARMAMENT TO THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

Having set out the intellectual and organisational contexts, this chapter will take forward the challenges facing the senior leaders charged with ensuring the continued survival of the RAF, and of designing and then executing the strategic bombing offensive. As has been discussed, Trenchard left the Service with an ingrained sense of economy; reliance on a well crafted hardcore establishment for the training of officers, apprentices and future staff officers; and total confidence that air power should be concentrated on the offensive.¹ His successors did not have to fight the inter-service battles for the survival of the RAF under quite the same circumstances as those that brought out the best from Trenchard, but their challenges could hardly be described as ‘tame’ (and therefore solvable through linear processes, whereas ‘wicked’ problems are complex with no clear or correct solution).² Trenchard had been able to provide a concrete, and cost-effective, role for the RAF by its use in imperial policing, but as Meilinger has suggested, this kept the Service ‘alive’ for only the first post-war decade.³ The following decade produced the extremes of coping with the potential abolition of military aviation put forward at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, which would have inevitably led to the demise of the Service, through to the

¹ For the continuing importance of economy, see Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*, p.275 where he describes *Flight* magazine as advocating the Services to shoulder more of the burden in reducing national expenditure. See also Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny* (London: MacMillan, 1943), p.10.

² Trenchard was followed by Sir John Salmond, Sir Edward Ellington and then Sir Cyril Newall. See Henry Probert, *High Commanders of the Royal Air Force* (London: HMSO, 1991), pp. 8-18; Sir John Salmond was to have been replaced by his elder brother, Sir Geoffrey on 1 April 1933, but the latter was too ill to take up the appointment and died a month later. For the differences between tame and wicked problems in the field of Leadership and Management see H. Rittell and M. Webber, ‘Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning’, *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973) pp.155-169. For the application of this theory in a military context see Grint, *Leadership, Management and Command: Rethinking D-Day*, p.11.

³ Phillip S. Meilinger, ‘Clipping the Bomber’s Wings: The Geneva Disarmament Conference and the Royal Air Force, 1932-1934’, *War in History*, 1999 (3) pp.306-330,

rapid rearmament and the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. This chapter will outline those challenges.

The Geneva Disarmament Conference

The Geneva Conference enjoyed cross-party support in the United Kingdom with Lloyd George, MacDonald and Baldwin firmly behind the main issues.⁴ They considered the country to be bound by Article 8 of the Covenant of the League of Nations in which:

The Members of the League recognise that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.⁵

Furthermore, the preamble to Part V of the Treaty of Versailles required Germany ‘strictly to observe the military, naval and air clauses’ in ‘order to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations’.⁶ Baldwin saw this also as a matter of honour.⁷ Unfortunately the vast majority of States represented, and especially the more powerful, ‘did not care what came out of the Conference, for good or ill, provided their own interests were safeguarded’.⁸ Furthermore, ‘the whole Conference was impractical in its approach to realities, and tendentious suggestions increasingly flowed from the various delegations’.⁹ Londonderry (Secretary of State for Air) concluded that ‘[the Conference] never had a chance of success from the very beginning owing to the fact that, with exception of ourselves, no Power, small or great, had any intention of reducing its armed

⁴ Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.723. It should be noted (as it is by the authors, p.725) that this work was published before Cabinet Papers became available.

⁵ *The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany, signed at Versailles, June 28th 1919*, Part I (London: HMSO, 1919). Cited by Sir John Simon in D.C. (P) 4 as pre-amble to the UK policy line in AIR 8/128.

⁶ *Ibid.* Part V, pre-amble.

⁷ Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.723.

⁸ Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, p.62.

⁹ *Ibid.* Ironically, MacDonald’s attempt to set out figures at the Conference in relation to limitations in numbers set the Conference aghast, *ibid.*, p.63.

forces'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the task had to be tackled. The inherent contradictions did little to make the task easier for those entrusted with giving effect to government policy, or to building a bomber force that could potentially achieve the desired deterrent features.

The leadership challenges facing Lord Londonderry, Salmond (and subsequently Ellington) provide a valuable case study into the role of the strategic leader who, by definition, is responsible for the functioning of the organisation at the political and geo-political levels, as well as at the interfaces with other organisations.¹¹ The issues concerned are almost invariably complex, fraught with ambiguity and intellectually challenging.¹² In the case of Geneva, Salmond and his Secretary of State were dealing with very strong and experienced characters in the Cabinet and beyond (MacDonald as Prime Minister; Baldwin as Lord President of the Council; Sir John Simon as Foreign Secretary; and Eden as Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs and especially latterly, directly involved with the talks in Geneva). In reality, the Service Ministers and Chiefs were in direct conflict with their colleagues, at Cabinet and official levels, for the period leading up to and while the Conference was in session (1931-1934).¹³ The former believed that Britain, not least through economies and the infamous ten-year rule (under which, for financial planning purposes, it was assumed that Britain would not be involved in a war for ten years), had already disarmed beyond a prudent level.¹⁴ The latter group believed passionately in disarmament (albeit with some accepting that unilateral disarmament would

¹⁰ Emphasis in the original, *ibid.*, p.50.

¹¹ Katz and Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organisations*, p.461 and Day and Lord, 'Executive Leadership and Organizational Performance', pp.459 and 461. The suggestion that senior officers are, or should be, apolitical is naive not least because it is a direct responsibility of the professional Heads of Service to brief the Prime Minister and their own departmental ministers: discussed at more length in Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 8, 9 and 18.

¹² Hunt, *Leadership, A New Synthesis*, p.15.

¹³ It was formally convened on 2 February 1932.

¹⁴ Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.731.

be folly) on the basis that possession of great armaments inexorably led to war.¹⁵ These views were widely shared by the British public whose ‘post mortem’ on the First World War had left a ‘deep psychological lesion’.¹⁶

The higher levels of strategy (often called Grand Strategy) were arguably more complex and developed, at different rates, over time. A full diplomatic history of the Conference is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the following examples give an indication of the issues at stake. Germany was becoming stronger, more trenchant in her claims for ‘equality of status’, and ‘growing in spirit’.¹⁷ Concern was therefore growing in France with inevitable demands for mutual security assurances and strident assertions that her armaments were at the lowest level commensurate with national security.¹⁸ The whole plot was further complicated by the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the Japanese government’s subsequent inability to control the army.¹⁹

Given that the rationale for the Conference was based (at least in part) on alleviation of suffering inflicted on the huge scale in evidence during the First World War, it may have been reasonable to assume that each of the military environments was equally at risk of forced reduction, or abolition. Allied fleets had been responsible for the blockade of Germany and, it was estimated, the deaths of three-quarters of a million civilians.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., p.722. See Also A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, pp. 364-378.

¹⁶ Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.721.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.731. For the Foreign Office assessment see PRO 30/69/496, *Suggested Lines of Policy at the Disarmament Conference*, circulated by Simon on 19 March 1932 – this was the Leeper Memorandum named after its author. Para.3.

¹⁸ Ibid., Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.724

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.725-729.

²⁰ Figures quoted in Meilinger, ‘Clipping the Bomber’s Wings’, p.309. AIR 8/151, in the Disarmament series, contains an extract from Hansard dated 11 July 1923 in which Lord Linlithgow made this point in debate. For the full debate see HL Deb, 11 July 1923, vol.94, cc.928-88; the Civil Lord of the Admiralty

Similarly, Terraine offered ‘a grim commentary’ in his tables of casualties during the First World War challenging the myth that the defensive was less costly than the offensive.²¹ The irony therefore was that it was the *potential* of air power, rather than its proven destructive capacity and ability to inflict suffering, which brought it to centre-stage in Geneva. Arguing from this tenuous viewpoint added to the complexity of the leadership challenge.

After some seven years of preliminary discussions, the Conference opened formally in Geneva on 2 February 1932.²² Fifty nine states sent delegations and this rose to sixty one before the end of the proceedings; each state carried an equal vote leading countries that did not have a particular capability to vote for the abolition of weapon systems that they did not possess (such as air power or submarines).²³ Inevitably continental states saw the offensive, or defensive, nature of weapons from their own geo-strategic viewpoint; for example, the United States viewed them as first lines of defence, whereas the Japanese as an island maritime nation (albeit with wider designs) saw large surface fleets as aggressive.²⁴ The British approach was to encourage an all round reduction in armaments and was prepared to set the example even though British air strength was lagging behind

(Linlithgow) at c.944 was actually making the point in terms of control of the sea being paramount, but the Air Ministry was happy to take it in the broadest context.

²¹ John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire; Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992 [1980]), pp.35-47 and p. 43 in particular.

²² For a broader discussion on the early days in Geneva see Maj. Gen A. C. Temperley, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe* (London: Collins, 1938); the author was the British Chief Military Adviser in Geneva; see ch.VI for the work of the Preparatory Commission.

²³ Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*, p.276. For an example of the role of the smaller states in supporting the Benes Resolution see CAB 24/232, C.P. 270 (32) Foreign Office Memorandum on the Resolution dated 28 July 1932. See *The Practicability of Drawing a Distinction between Offensive and Defensive Weapons*, Note by CAS dated 8 September 1931 in AIR 8/124.

²⁴ Meilinger, ‘Clipping the Bomber’s Wings’, p.313. This offensive/defensive divide also featured among the Chiefs with the Navy seeing bombers as offensive: see CAB24/230 C.P. 182(32) dated 31 May 1932. Both the Army and the Navy took every opportunity to encourage the demise of the upstart Service.

that of Italy, France, the Soviet Union and America.²⁵ The Chiefs of Staff Annual Review for 1932 made grim reading in its description of the effects of the ten-year rule and dire economic situation.²⁶ But the Foreign Office saw this as what today would be described as ‘best practice’ with Britain demonstrating real commitment to treaty obligations. The official Foreign Office policy submission to the Cabinet was based on the so-called ‘Leeper memorandum’, named after its author in the department.²⁷ The proposals in this document included the submission that German claims for parity of treatment should be acknowledged; that the British policy should be based on qualitative disarmament; and that HMG should consider proposing ‘the complete prohibition and outlawry in all circumstances of the dropping of bombs from any aircraft on the territory or shipping of another Sovereign State’.²⁸ It was axiomatic to the Foreign Office that Britain should play a leading role at the Conference.²⁹

Notwithstanding the years of preparatory work, or possibly because of them, progress in the actual Conference was ‘slight’.³⁰ This was due, in part, to the crisis in the Far East. But the Conference also suffered from considerable bureaucratic challenges as well as the sheer complexity of the technical issues at stake and discussed in minute detail in sub-committees.³¹ Furthermore, from the earliest stages, it was clear that the issues of German demands for parity of treatment and French concerns for security guarantees

²⁵ CAB 24/227, C.P. 10(32), *Disarmament Conference: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air on Policy in regard to the Limitation of Air Armaments (With Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff)*, 5 January 1932. See also, Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*, p.277.

²⁶ CAB 24/229, CID 1082-B, *Annual Review for 1932 by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee*, 17 March 1932.

²⁷ PRO 30/69/496, *Suggested Lines of Policy at the Disarmament Conference*, circulated by Simon on 19 March 1932.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, para.5.

³⁰ CAB 24/229, C.P. 110(32), Update by Londonderry and Simon, *Disarmament Conference*, 21 March 1932.

³¹ *Ibid.*

would remain troublesome.³² By the end of May, these issues had not improved drawing the Foreign Office to conclude that ‘even the most optimistic observer cannot maintain either that past progress has been rapid or that future prospects are bright’.³³ There was therefore a requirement to expedite the work of the Conference so that ‘Governments should be – at least temporarily – freed from the endless complexities of the disarmament problem’ in order to concentrate on economic recovery.³⁴ The proposals for the ‘total abolition of military aircraft and the international control of civil aviation’ would ‘if adopted... furnish the tangible result’ required and would ‘constitute an impressive success’ for the Conference.³⁵ From the Foreign Office perspective, therefore, significant progress on the abolition of military aviation would offset the bureaucratic difficulties and demonstrate that Britain was in the forefront of the progress of humanising warfare.

The strategic leadership challenges facing Londonderry and his CAS actually went deeper than this inter-departmental policy tussle. The fear of the ‘knock-out blow’, delivered from the air, from which the victim nation could not recover was widespread. A previous Secretary of State for Air, Sir Samuel Hoare (then Secretary of State for India) strongly advocated to his Cabinet colleagues that a restriction ‘of military bombing aeroplanes’, especially in metropolitan air forces, could reduce the chances of success of a first strike and thereby reduce the prospect of it being attempted.³⁶ The longer standing

³² Ibid., paras.20, 26 and 25 respectively.

³³ CAB 24/230, C.P.164(32), Enclosure II to a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 26 May 1932.

³⁴ Ibid., para.3.

³⁵ Ibid., para.4.

³⁶ CAB 24/227, C.P. 44(32) *Disarmament: A Note on the Knock-out Blow*, dated 25 January 1932.

concern was exacerbated by events in Manchuria and the Japanese use of air power at Shanghai in particular.³⁷

In Cabinet on 4 May 1932, the Prime Minister (Ramsay MacDonald) pointed out to his colleagues that ‘nearly every nation had made proposals’ on the subject of air warfare and the absence of a statement on the United Kingdom position was very likely to be remarked upon.³⁸ Various suggestions, including the introduction of a new law of war prohibiting ‘bomb-dropping on the territory and shipping of another Sovereign Signatory State’, and the abolition of heavy bombers, had been raised, but subject to much criticism.³⁹ Baldwin took matters considerably further with the radical, but heartfelt, suggestion that if nations were really serious, they

ought to agree to scrap all military and naval aviation. Civil aviation also would have to be dealt with, possibly by abolishing the costly subsidies devoted to this purpose.⁴⁰

He went on to acknowledge that his views were unlikely to find favour, either with colleagues, or internationally. But Baldwin stressed that if his ideas were feasible the abolition would ‘remove one of the main elements of that fear that was the disturbing feature in the international situation’ [emphasis in the original].⁴¹ The Cabinet were reported to be ‘impressed’ by the proposal and no objection of principle was raised.⁴² A more pragmatic note crept in with the acknowledgement of likely rejection and the

³⁷ Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.727 in which Baldwin describes Shanghai as ‘a nightmare’.

³⁸ CAB 23/71, Cabinet Conclusions 26(32), 4 May 1932, p.3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.5.

concomitant requirement to have policy at hand to cope with the many other proposals tabled.⁴³

This Cabinet level sanction, and the need for stimulating real progress in Geneva discussed above, resulted in the Foreign Office producing ‘Draft Proposals for Air Disarmament’ which was circulated by Simon on 26 May 1932.⁴⁴ Baldwin’s words were turned into official policy language onto which was added the desirability that these measures should be ‘accompanied by the conclusion of an International Convention to prohibit bombing from the air as a method of warfare’.⁴⁵ Furthermore, HMG considered that this Convention would be unlikely to be effective unless it was part of an overall and ‘comprehensive plan of air disarmament’. These measures would also bring financial relief to all States represented at Geneva!⁴⁶ In a prophetic paragraph, the Foreign Office drafter outlined the legitimate military objectives of the draft 1923 Hague convention, but pointed out that the impact of national and industrial mobilisation that would inevitably be part of ‘defensive preparations’ in most nations and that civilian populations could not escape ‘casualties, terror and suffering in the event of a bombardment’ [emphasis added].⁴⁷ The draft acknowledged that alternatives did exist to such an extreme measure, including limitations on size and weight; prohibition of bombing civilians; or the abolition of bombers alone.⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ CAB 24/230, C.P. 164(32), *Draft Proposals for Air Disarmament*, Enclosure I to a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 26 May 1932, para.3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., para.4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., para.5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., paras.9-13.

Baldwin's realisation that a total abolition of military aviation was unlikely to find favour was quickly realised. The Prime Minister raised the issue informally with the French who 'would have none of it'.⁴⁹ The Air Ministry response was inevitably hostile, both to the impracticality of both abolishing all air forces and imposing control over civil aviation.⁵⁰ The former point was eventually acknowledged by the Cabinet which agreed that other methods would be required.⁵¹ Nor was the Air Ministry convinced that a prohibition of bombing would result in a meaningful reduction in the threat to world peace. The CAS stated in a letter to Londonderry that, in the event of war, reliance on a written pact would have little chance of observance, not least because war was supposed already to have been renounced by just such a pact.⁵² Furthermore any country at risk of aggression would use 'every weapon it could lay its hands on'.⁵³ Finally, Salmond pointed out that reliance on a 'paper pact' would be dangerous for the protection of 'military objectives in this country, including those in London' and that this point had been accepted by the Cabinet sub-committee chaired by Baldwin.⁵⁴ A complete abolition of bombing also required qualification to allow its limited use in air policing in India, Aden and Iraq as had been tentatively acknowledged by Leeper and featured in most Air Ministry submissions.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ This was reported by Cadogan (a Counsellor in the Foreign Office, and subsequently Permanent Secretary) to his counterparts in Geneva; a copy of the letter was then slipped 'confidentially' to CAS by Wg. Cdr Hodsoll (Deputy Secretary to the CID) on 18 June 1932; AIR 8/151. For a broader discussion see, Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*, p.281 with the implication that MacDonald was lukewarm at best to the proposal.

⁵⁰ CAB 24/230, C.P. 181(32) dated 31 May and C.P. 183(32) dated 3 June 1932. See also AIR 8/151 for the staff papers.

⁵¹ See CAB 21/379, Ministerial Policy Committee Conclusions dated 7 March 1933 for a very clear acknowledgment.

⁵² AIR 8/140, CAS to SofS (in Geneva) dated 8 July 1932.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* See also AIR 8/140 Minute from Gp. Capt. Portal to CAS dated 1 September 1932 emphasising this point. The Sub-Committee reported at C.P. 152(32) and the Cabinet endorsed the Conclusions at CAB 23/71, Cabinet Conclusions 27 (32) dated 11 May 1932.

⁵⁵ PRO 30/69/496, *Suggested Lines of Policy at the Disarmament Conference*, para.5. See also CAB 24/228, C.P. 82 (32), *Air Disarmament and the Abolition of Bombing Aircraft*, Part II, Memorandum date 17 February 1932.

The strategic leaders in the Air Ministry therefore preferred there to be a strict convention on the circumstances under which bombing from the air could be considered acceptable. They were totally content to see an ‘entire prohibition of all air attack upon the civilian population’ and restrictions in numbers and weights.⁵⁶ The Air Staff files show the depth of the debate on these issues with advice being forwarded from J.M. Spaight, to the highest levels of leadership within the Air Ministry, on what had already been covered during the discussions on the Hague Rules in 1923.⁵⁷ These suggestions varied from a requirement for all potential military targets to be situated a specified distance from civilian populations through to an acknowledgement that a general prohibition of bombing was not considered legally workable. The essence of the Air Ministry thinking was that a complete abolition would render rules nugatory meaning that once conflict commenced, bombing would be unrestricted; it would be better to acknowledge the probability of bombing being used, but to circumscribe its use by clear rules.⁵⁸ In the Second Edition of *Air Power and War Rights*, J.M. Spaight wrote:

It seems to be unsafe to disregard the verdict which history has pronounced from the Second Lateran Council onwards, upon such attempts to ban completely the use of new and more scientific weapons of war. Such attempts are foredoomed. Rules regulating and restricting bombing, but not prohibiting it absolutely, are likely in the writer’s opinion, to be honourably observed by civilised states.⁵⁹

These debates continued throughout the life of the Conference in a manner that was described by a Foreign Office official, who quoted the French delegation as saying that ‘the Disarmament Conference was like a merry-go-around – the same old wooden horse kept coming round and round again’, but that he was afraid ‘that it is the French

⁵⁶ See CAB 24/232, C.P. 272(32), Note by the SofS for Air on *Air Disarmament Policy*, dated 30 July 1932.

⁵⁷ AIR 8/151 with minutes to CAS and DCAS forwarding notes by Spaight (who was the Director of Accounts for the Ministry but still an authority on International Law) dated 18 April and 12 May 1932.

⁵⁸ AIR 8/151: Letter from CAS to Sir John Simon dated 16 February 1932.

⁵⁹ J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights* (London: Longmans, 2nd edition, 1933), p.250.

themselves who supply the motive gyratory power'.⁶⁰ Germany withdrew from the Conference in mid-September 1932, not to return until January 1933.⁶¹ Hitler's accession to the Chancellorship on 30 January 1933 ensured that the demands for parity of treatment would grow along with French concerns over security.⁶² Germany finally walked out of the Conference chamber on 14 October 1933 and subsequently resigned from the League of Nations, effectively bringing matters to an end (even though the delegations remained in Geneva for some months further).⁶³

It is clear from the Cabinet Discussions, and side meetings in Geneva, that the Foreign Office and the Air Ministry had major differences in their agendas and these have been covered above. But there are also significant differences in the organisational culture of the two organisations and the approaches taken which reflected on the leadership styles exhibited. The Foreign Office took a very clear line that it owned the policy lead for the Conference and 'such questions of policy were outside the scope of the Experts in the Service Departments'.⁶⁴ It is significant that this view was not challenged by the strategic leaders in the Air Ministry; Londonderry proceeded to take on the detail as he and his CAS had done throughout. Beyond this, however, Londonderry was concerned, not for the first time, that the Foreign Office was taking policy beyond what had been agreed in Cabinet.⁶⁵ Simon's response was that the Cabinet had also insisted that Britain should not be isolated at the Conference by the stance taken on a particular issue (in this case total prohibition of

⁶⁰ AIR 8/151, Cadogan to Howard Smith letter dated 15 June 1932.

⁶¹ Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*, pp.283-287 and Temperley, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe*, pp.215 and 233

⁶² See Temperley, *op.cit.*, pp.277 and 279.

⁶³ Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*, p.295. Temperley, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe*, p.258.

⁶⁴ AIR 8/140, *Notes of a Meeting held at the Hotel Beau-Rivage, Geneva, at 10.30.a.m. on Monday, 18th July 1932*, p.3. Meeting attended by Simon and Londonderry.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1. See also AIR 8/157, Letter from CAS to SofS for Air dated 2 February 1933 quoting 'another instance of the Foreign Office departing from the spirit of a previous Cabinet decision'.

bombing) with the implication that diplomatic tactics took precedence over the principles at stake.⁶⁶ Londonderry subsequently complained that the whole Conference was ‘overshadowed by political constraints’.⁶⁷ This brief interchange is illustrative of the Air Ministry taking a less than strategic approach and accepting a subservient role. Temperley queried whether Londonderry’s loyalty to the Air Ministry might have been at odds with his political and personal convictions.⁶⁸ If so, the doubts of conscience do not appear in the files or in *Wings of Destiny*; in fact the reverse may be true, for example, when he insisted in having his dissent formally recorded following a serious disagreement at a Ministerial Policy Committee.⁶⁹

From the documents, and the Cabinet Memoranda in particular, it could be argued that the Air Ministry consistently advocated a more strategic approach to the Conference, emphasising the challenges to the security of London and the wider Empire. But it could also be argued that it did so in a pedantic and dogmatic way with little appreciation of the subtleties of diplomacy. This would suggest a linear approach to a complex, or wicked, problem and not what would be ideal from a strategic leadership perspective. This view does not appear to have been appreciated during Salmond’s tenure, but is evident immediately afterwards. In a minute to Ellington (just after his appointment as CAS), his

⁶⁶ AIR 8/140, *Notes of a Meeting held at the Hotel Beau-Rivage, Geneva, at 10.30.a.m. on Monday, 18th July 1932*, p.3.

⁶⁷ See AIR 8/140, Letter from SofS for Air to CAS dated 18 July 1932. Much of the controversy at this time revolved around the so-called Benes Resolution which the Foreign Office advocated supporting for diplomatic reasons even though its tenets ran counter to agreed Cabinet Policy.

⁶⁸ Temperley, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe*, p181. To put this in context, Temperley disagreed with Sir John Simon’s ‘detractors’ who accused him of being a ‘careerist’ who always spoke from a brief, and actually believed him to be a ‘great lawyer’ and without challenge in terms of intellect: *ibid.*, pp. 219-219. The detractor in question was almost certainly Londonderry; see *Wings of Destiny*, pp.96-97. Londonderry considered that Simon saw the RAF as a ‘nuisance’.

⁶⁹ CAB 21/379, dated 7 March 1933. See also CAB 24/232, C.P. 272(32), *Air Disarmament Policy*, dated 30 July 1932. See also AIR 8/103 and the insistence in the Note (para.13) that retention of bombing aircraft was essential for defence.

deputy (DCAS -Ludlow Hewitt) lamented ‘the well-worn path of direct attack’ which ‘up to the present has led nowhere’.⁷⁰ The DCAS went on to surmise that this approach had caused exasperation with Ministers and probably done damage to other causes and interests of the Service. But he also acknowledged that, for much of the time, direct attack was the only option.⁷¹ Whether this admission stemmed from pragmatism, a lack of intellectual capacity, or an institutional (partly cultural) inability to think at the genuinely strategic level is not clear; but it is typical of the dialogue in the minutes. Given that an abolition of military aviation, or even prohibition of bombing aircraft, would have led to the demise of the RAF, it is hardly surprising that Londonderry and Salmond fought as they did. Both were certainly conscious of the deleterious effect the Conference was having on Service morale.⁷²

The ‘Interlude at Geneva’ with its focus on the abolition of bombing from the air, inextricably reinforced the survival and future growth of the Service with this form of warfare.⁷³ Geneva also served to reinforce the creed within RAF circles that the security of London could best be achieved by the deployment of a bomber force that would be able to take the offensive to the enemy. The presence of Portal, and latterly Harris, as Group Captains in the Air Ministry would have had a similar impact on these officers and their staffs, many of whom would later serve in Bomber Command, or back in the Air Ministry responsible for the senior leadership and direction of the strategic air offensive. As Hitler’s power increased the realisation of the extent of German rearmament became more evident: the focus therefore shifted from the frustrating and surreal atmosphere of Geneva.

⁷⁰ AIR 8/151. Minute from DCAS to CAS dated 25 August 1933.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, pp. 65 and pp. 67-68 describing the letters from parents concerned that sending their sons to Cranwell would be foolhardy if the Service was to be disbanded.

⁷³ Title of the chapter in Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*.

The Need for Rearmament

From a simple leadership perspective, it would have been ideal had there been some hard and clear point at which the Service Chiefs, their political masters and the hard-pressed staff officers could have switched from disarmament to remedying the deficiencies that were evident in each of the areas of defence. The reality, unfortunately, was that the issues at stake were ambiguous and complex. The senior leaders had, therefore, to cope with a further period of uncertainty. As has already been stated, the COS Annual Review for 1932 made grim reading.⁷⁴ But its recommendations included, almost as an addendum, ‘That the assumption governing the Estimates of the Defence Services, that from any given date there will be no major war ten years should be cancelled’ – in short, the cancellation of the ‘ten year-rule’.⁷⁵ In their subsequent discussion on the Review on 23 March 1932, the Cabinet accepted the recommendation but

recognised, however, that this must not be taken to justify an expanding expenditure by the Defence Services without regard to the very serious financial and economic situation that still obtains. The Cabinet felt, also, that the whole subject, which was closely connected with the question of Disarmament, required further exploration.⁷⁶

Some 20 months later, the Cabinet Minutes of the meeting on 15 November 1933 ran to 7 pages on Disarmament compared to a side and a half on 1933 COS Annual Review.⁷⁷ The Cabinet did, however, accept a number of key assumptions that should guide the COS Sub-Committee in preparing ‘a programme for meeting our worst deficiencies for transmission to the Cabinet.’ The assumptions included priority for expenditure on: ‘the Defence of our possessions and interests in the Far East; European Commitments; the Defence of India’;

⁷⁴ CAB 24/229, CID 1082-B, *Annual Review for 1932 by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee*, 17 March 1932.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, para.40(a).

⁷⁶ CAB 23/70, Cabinet 19 (32) dated 23 March 1932, para.2.

⁷⁷ CAB 23/77, Cabinet 62(33) dated 15 November 1933, para.5.

but there should be no expenditure on the basis of defence against attack by ‘the United States, France or Italy’.⁷⁸ The ensuing Report was circulated on 5 March 1934 and reiterated the Cabinet’s tasking and assumptions.⁷⁹ But by this stage the Report considered that there would be ‘an ultimate policy of accommodation and friendship with Japan’, but this should be balanced with a ‘provisional policy of “showing a tooth” for the purpose of recovering the standing which we have sacrificed of recent years’.⁸⁰ The Report considered Germany to be ‘the ultimate potential enemy against whom our “long range” policy must be directed.’⁸¹ For the RAF, the most immediate priority was the building of the Home (or Metropolitan) air force to 52 Squadrons, which had been an aspiration since 1923.⁸² By July 1934, the planned number of squadrons had increased to 75 due to the ‘international situation and the trend of public opinion in this country’.⁸³ The Committee further considered that the announcement of this proposed increase

would act as a deterrent to Germany and inspire confidence at home. To this we attach the utmost importance.⁸⁴

This emphasis, in what subsequently became known as ‘Expansion Scheme A’, on Home Defence and public opinion reflected the concerns over the need to defend against the potential bomber threat from Germany that had been experienced in the First World War; this remained a constant refrain as it became increasingly evident that Germany was

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ CAB 24/247, C.P.64(34) dated 5 March 1934 covering CID Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Report D.R.C. 14 dated 28 February 1934.

⁸⁰ Ibid, para.12.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See AIR 41/39, p.24 et seq. Historiographical Note: This TNA PRO Reference is for Volume 1 of the Air Historical Branch Narrative, *The RAF in the Bomber Offensive against Germany: Pre-War Evolution of Bomber Command*. It was written, from selected Air Ministry files, by Professor R. B. Wernham. The 7 volumes have been reprinted as facsimiles by MLRS Books from the AHB copies of the Narratives; this has the benefit of authoritative file referencing. For the purposes of consistency, not least with other authors in the field, this thesis will use the AIR 41 series references.

⁸³ CAB 24/250, C.P. 193(34), *Interim Report by the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament dealing with Air Defence* dated 16 July 1934, para.8. It is interesting to note the nomenclature of the Cabinet Committees still reflected disarmament.

⁸⁴ Ibid., para.11.

re-arming in breach of the Versailles Treaty.⁸⁵ That, and the potential cost of the expansion, had resulted in a lengthy series of meetings between the issue of the initial Report in March and the main document in July 1934.⁸⁶ Nor was it fully accepted that rapid rearmament was the only solution; the prospect of legislation against bombing, or specific limitations to air forces raised its head again. Sir John Simon proposed an 'Air Pact' in which the States of Europe should agree never to drop bombs on the territory of another member state; the retribution for non-compliance would be a concerted bombing offensive against the transgressor.⁸⁷ Although discussions on these lines started in May 1934, the idea was effectively dropped in the conclusions of the main Report in July 1934 acknowledging that:

There were great difficulties in putting forward a European Convention against air bombardment in a form which we could recommend either as practicable or acceptable to public opinion in this country.⁸⁸

Notwithstanding the perceived impracticalities of such a scheme it was resurrected in the guise of 'French Air Proposals for a Treaty of Mutual Guarantee' and had arisen from Anglo-French Conversations.⁸⁹ The Chiefs of Staff were, quite reasonably, concerned with the military implications of such a pact, not least because the mutual assistance element of the proposed Pact would, they considered, inevitably draw the UK into wider warfare with the spectre of Britain being required to field a continental army.⁹⁰ The other, inextricably interlinked, item on the agenda was 'Unrestricted Bombing of Civilians and Non-Military

⁸⁵ AIR 41/39, p.75. See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, Appendix 7 for the full table of expansion schemes. The Schemes went from A to M with only approximately one in three being taken beyond the discussion stage.

⁸⁶ AIR 41/39, p.64 details 7 Cabinet meetings and 13 Ministerial committee meetings.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.65.

⁸⁸ CAB 24/253, CID 1162-B, *The Proposed Air Bombing Convention*, Memorandum by Hankey summarising progress dated 14 February 1935.

⁸⁹ CAB 24/253, C.P. 43(35) dated 26 February 1935.

⁹⁰ Ibid. For the concern over a continental commitment, see Bond, *British Military Policy*, ch.8 generally and p.215 for the 'profound and widespread doubt and disquiet'.

Targets'.⁹¹ It is interesting to note that 'for the first time for two years the Chiefs of Staff had found that they were not unanimous'.⁹² The First Sea Lord and the CIGS were agreed that all should be done to 'avoid unrestricted warfare against the civil population' as a stand-alone subject with no real connection to the issue of the air pact. Ellington, on the other hand, stated that he had no real objection 'to any reasonable rules, but felt that to attempt to negotiate such rules in connection with the proposed Air Pact' would cause tremendous delay and might, in fact, mean that no agreement would ever be reached.'⁹³ In a supporting paper produced to counter the Joint Note by the CNS and CIGS, Ellington stressed that he would be 'the first to welcome any practicable agreed regulations', but doubted they would 'stand the test of war' and that the suggested provisions of the Pact would make no difference either way.⁹⁴ Although the concept of the Air Pact eventually stalled on Hitler's unwillingness to accept any paper agreement that would constrain the Luftwaffe, and French insistence on the Pact including binding bilateral arrangements,⁹⁵ it is instructive to note that senior RAF leaders were consistently prepared to do so even though, in their hearts, they did not think that any belligerent would diminish chances of national survival by playing by the rules.⁹⁶

The institutional process of reaching a consensus of views on what some sort of limitations in armaments might look like in the European arena drew increasing official

⁹¹ CAB 24/253, C.P. 43(35) dated 26 February 1935, p.6.

⁹² Ibid., p.7.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ CAB 24/253, CID Paper 1163-B Encl.I for the Joint Note and Encl III for CAS Comments.

⁹⁵ CAB 24/255, C.P.135(35), *Air Pact and Air Limitation Agreement*, dated 2 July 1935.

⁹⁶ CAB 24/253, CID Paper 1163-B Encl.I for the Joint Note and Encl III for CAS Comments. Note the use of a quotation from General Sir George MacDonagh (a former Adjutant-General) who in reviewing the Hague Draft Code acknowledged that 'the value of aerial bombardment as a weapon of offence is so great that it seems impossible to lay down any effective rules'.

attention to the scale of German rearmament.⁹⁷ Not only was the extent of this build up a cause for concern, but the depth of German aspirations and the implications for security highlighted the dilemma for senior decision makers as to whether they should bank on limitations being agreed and adhered to, or go all out for parity (or supremacy) with the inherent risk that this would inexorably lead to war.⁹⁸ It was clear that Ellington and his colleagues did not see Germany accepting anything less than parity with France's Metropolitan air force, with the complicating factor that air assets in North Africa could, with the inherent flexibility of air power, be brought into a European conflict with relative ease.⁹⁹ With distinct echoes of the discussions in Geneva, the potential for limitation would also be complicated by the difficulties in prescribing types of aircraft and in the military potential of civil aircraft.¹⁰⁰

The extent of German rearmament was publically acknowledged in November 1934 and the consequences openly discussed in the Imperial Defence White Paper of March 1935 and the accompanying debates.¹⁰¹ This openly admitted that the Disarmament Conference 'had virtually come to a standstill' and that all major nations except Britain had

⁹⁷ See for example the discussion at CAB 24/253, C.P. 23(35), *Forthcoming Conference with the French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister: Strength of the German Armed Forces*, dated 25 January 1935. From a constitutional point of view it is significant that 'in the absence of the Prime Minister' and with 'the authority of the Lord President of the Council', this was chaired by Hankey himself.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ CAB 24/253, C.P.38(35), *Statement Relating to Defence: Issued in connexion with the House of Commons Debate on March 11 1935*. The extent to which the Cabinet, and senior officials in the various departments of state believed and made use of intelligence, from all sources, in estimating the strength of the German air force is outside the scope of this thesis. It is clear, however, that in addition to the regular secret sources, the previous air attaché to Berlin, Group Captain Christie maintained many sources after his retirement in 1930. His papers are at Churchill College, Cambridge and have been collected into a very useful study: T. P. Conwell-Evans, *None So Blind: A Study of the Crisis Years, 1930-1939 based on the Private Papers of Group Captain M. G. Christie* (London: Harrison, 1947). This was published privately in a limited edition of 100 copies. Christie evidently sent his material (much of it private agent reports) to the Foreign Office including to Sir Robert Vanisittart (Permanent Secretary after 1934), p.x.

been actively increasing their armaments.¹⁰² The White Paper expressed concern over the rate of German rearmament and the impact that this would have on her neighbours; the Paper added that any peaceful sounding statements by the leadership of that country were offset by ‘the spirit in which the population, and especially the youth of the country, are being organised’.¹⁰³ In its sections on each of the forces, the Paper emphasised the principal role of the RAF was to provide for ‘the protection of the United Kingdom and particularly London against air attack’.¹⁰⁴ It went on to confirm that:

Up to now, however, the only deterrent to an armed aggressor has seemed to be the possession of adequate means of counter-attack. In view of the time required to provide the necessary forces, and the obscurities of the international situation, no Government mindful of its responsibilities could neglect to provide such defence as it deemed necessary to secure the safety of the country.¹⁰⁵

The Government’s concerns were exacerbated by the official summons of Military Attaches in Berlin to be told, officially, that Germany already had ‘an air force in being’.¹⁰⁶ This led to Simon and Eden being sent to see Hitler for a series of meetings, at one of which Hitler confirmed that Germany had already reached air parity with Britain and aimed to reach parity with France (including aircraft in North Africa).¹⁰⁷ The Foreign Secretary and his entourage returned to London ‘considerably alarmed’.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, the alarm spread to the British public following a broadcast by the BBC stating that

¹⁰² Ibid. para.8.

¹⁰³ Ibid. para.12.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., para.23.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., para.25. The wording of the final White Paper is stronger than the earlier draft which stated that the only deterrent would ‘be a moral one’: see CAB 24/253, *Draft White Paper*, dated 14 February 1935. It is clear that possession was considered key.

¹⁰⁶ Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, p.124.

¹⁰⁷ CAB 23/81, Cabinet 18(35) and C.P. 69(35), *Notes of Anglo-German Conversations, held at the Chancellor’s Palace, Berlin, on March 25 and 26, 1935*, p.28.

¹⁰⁸ Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, p.128.

‘there was good reason to believe that the German Air Force has now attained equality with our own’.¹⁰⁹

Faced with a leadership dilemma, neither wishing to appear alarmist nor complacent, Londonderry and Ellington replied in measured terms on 15 April 1935.¹¹⁰ The CAS pointed out that the previous year, the Air Staff had provided evidence on German air expansion which had resulted in the Cabinet deciding to increase the size of the RAF to 75 squadrons for Home Defence Force use; this had been based on the assumption that Germany would have 500 ‘first-line aircraft’ by October 1935 and ultimately intended to create a force of three or four times that.¹¹¹ No fresh evidence ‘of a reliable character’ had been received prior to the Hitler/Simon talks.¹¹² Both Londonderry and his CAS considered the claims to be worrying, but gave ‘no grounds whatsoever for anything in the nature of panic’.¹¹³ They pointed that there was more to ‘Air Warfare’ than numbers of machines; it required time to ‘convert a mass of aeroplanes and pilots into a first-class fighting machine such as we possess in the Royal Air Force’.¹¹⁴ Londonderry considered that, in terms of efficiency, the RAF was three years ahead of the Luftwaffe ‘in efficiency’.¹¹⁵ But the CAS went on to express ‘grave concern’ for the future stating that measures authorised thus far were ‘in danger of proving seriously inadequate’.¹¹⁶ In

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.127 and Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy*, pp.333-4. Hyde makes the point that the publicity was fanned by the Rothermere Press after he had visited Hitler and heard the same story on the growth of the Luftwaffe; see also the correspondence between Rothermere and Londonderry in Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, p. 129.

¹¹⁰ CAB 24/254, C.P. 85(35), *German Expansion and its Effects on the Security of this Country: Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff*, dated 15 April 1935.

¹¹¹ Ibid., paras. 1 and 2.

¹¹² Ibid., para.4.

¹¹³ Ibid., para.5 and CAB 24/254, C.P. 85(35), *The German Air Programme and its Bearing on British Air Strength: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air*, which introduced the CAS Memorandum. In his memoirs, Londonderry is somewhat less measured: see Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, pp.127-8.

¹¹⁴ CAB 24/254, C.P. 85(35), *The German Air Programme*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ CAB 24/254, C.P. 85(35), *German Expansion*, para.5.

addition to numerical estimates, Ellington pointed out that the Air Staff was aware that the German industry was organising for mass production of aircraft and engines with a factory output sufficient to make good 50% wastage in war; similar efforts were underway with pilot training in the Air Sports Association.¹¹⁷ To match the likely rate of German expansion, Ellington proposed an expansion of the Metropolitan Force to 119 squadrons (from 75 – this became the short-lived Expansion Scheme B).¹¹⁸

At first sight, after years of fighting for the survival of the Service, it could be thought that the prospect of rapid expansion to meet a clear and relatively quantifiable enemy would be met with unalloyed enthusiasm. But, with a degree of experience and foresight befitting strategic leaders, it is clear that Londonderry and his CAS could see the pitfalls of an overly rapid expansion that could lead to the accumulation of ‘obsolete or obsolescent machines’.¹¹⁹ Londonderry maintained (in his memoir) that it had been really important ‘not to increase our home forces at such a rate that the quality of the training, maintenance, personnel and aircraft would have to be lowered.’¹²⁰ The arguments that both senior leaders adduced in playing down Hitler’s ‘fantastic claim of parity’ consistently emphasised the second and third order factors that went beyond a mere comparison of numbers of airframes.¹²¹ In short, the numbers were less important than the quality of the force as a whole, or its ‘efficiency’ as Londonderry used in shorthand.¹²² But it was clear that these arguments did not weigh with the public, the press (especially the Rothermere

¹¹⁷ Ibid., para.8

¹¹⁸ Ibid., para.17. See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, Appendix 7 for the full table of expansion schemes.

¹¹⁹ Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy*, p.336.

¹²⁰ Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, p.163

¹²¹ Ibid., p.128 and CAB 24/254, C.P. 85(35), *The German Air Programme*.

¹²² Ibid.

faction) or, and arguably more important for Londonderry's own future, with many members of the Government.¹²³

The Cabinet therefore appointed a small committee (Sub-Committee on Air Parity) chaired by Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister (later Viscount Swinton – he succeeded Londonderry as Secretary of State for Air on 7 June 1935) to recommend, ‘in consultation with representatives of the Air Ministry... to implement the policy stated in the House by the Lord President [Baldwin], that in air strength and in air power this Country should not be inferior to any Country within striking distance’.¹²⁴ Its Interim Report, which was produced with commendable speed, tackled the issue of parity arguably from a position of political expediency rather than the more strategic approach adopted by Londonderry and Ellington.¹²⁵ The Report's authors assumed “parity” to mean ‘numerical equality with the total German Air Force’.¹²⁶ The Report acknowledged that as Germany had a much larger army, she would require far more army co-operation aircraft than Britain. It also admitted the contention that ‘the really important consideration is the number of bombing aircraft which Germany could employ against this country’. But the Report effectively considered it impossible to exclude any aircraft unless there were the ‘most absolute and unanswerable reasons for doing so’.¹²⁷ In concert with the Air Ministry, the Sub-Committee concluded that Germany was likely to have the industrial capacity to build an air force of approximately 1500 first-line aircraft by 1 April 1937; this would give parity with the

¹²³ Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy*, p.336, Londonderry, *Wings of Destiny*, p.163. See also Viscount Swinton, *I Remember* (London: Hutchinson, 1948) p.105 in which Londonderry's successor stated that ‘The secret of success in the air is progress and quality, and, second only to these, efficient production in quantity’.

¹²⁴ CAB 24/255, D.C. (M.) (32) 141, *Sub-Committee on Air Parity: Interim Report*, dated 8 May 1935, para.1

¹²⁵ See Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy*, p.339 for the sequence of those interviewed.

¹²⁶ CAB 24/255, D.C. (M.) (32) 141, *Sub-Committee on Air Parity: Interim Report*, dated 8 May 1935, para.13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

French Metropolitan and North African forces.¹²⁸ The Sub-Committee therefore recommended that Londonderry and Ellington's proposed expansion needed to be accelerated, but acknowledged that Germany, by 'taking secret measures for the training of personnel and the reorganisation of their aircraft industry over the past few years and to that extent they have got a start on us'.¹²⁹ In total, orders for some 3800 aircraft, of all types, would need to be placed in order to ensure a front-line strength of 1500 by 1 April 1937 with commensurate increases in personnel, airfields and staff buildings in London.¹³⁰ Interestingly, the Sub-Committee recognised that contracts would have to be altered to allow overtime and night shifts and that competitive tendering would have to be dispensed with.¹³¹ This report and its recommendations formed the basis of Expansion Scheme C.¹³² A second report followed 9 days later and included detail on aircraft types and the balance between heavy and light bombers, the Cabinet not having been satisfied with the potential striking power of the force.¹³³ Importantly, the Sub-Committee recommended that, in the interests of expediency, production be authorised for 'certain types of aircraft' before 'prototypes have been tested'.¹³⁴ The Ministerial Committee on Defence Requirements in their recommendations to Cabinet added a degree of fiscal probity to the recommendations, but did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm for acceleration in the programme of expansion.¹³⁵ The Cabinet gave the go-ahead to the revised expansion scheme on 21 May 1935.¹³⁶

¹²⁸ Ibid., paras.20-26.

¹²⁹ Ibid., paras. 27-29.

¹³⁰ Ibid., para.48.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² See Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy*, p.339.

¹³³ AIR 41/39, p.93. CAB 24/255, D.C.M. (32) 143, *Sub-Committee on Air Parity: Second Interim Report*, dated 17 May 1935.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 'Summary of Conclusions'.

¹³⁵ CAB 24/255, C.P. 106(35), *German Air Programme: Proposed Further Expansion of the Royal Air Force*, dated 20 May 1935.

¹³⁶ CAB 23/81, Cabinet 29(35) dated 21 May 1935.

The end of May also saw Baldwin return as Prime Minister following MacDonald's retirement due to ill-health.¹³⁷ This change in Premiership directly resulted in Londonderry's removal from the Air Ministry; Middlemas and Barnes have commented that Londonderry was 'loyal to his advisers and they to him', but that he had not tried to work on sufficiently good terms with Baldwin to remain in office.¹³⁸ They also make the point that when 'even the most insensitive must have realised the mood of the Cabinet following Hitler's claim to air parity' Londonderry had robustly stuck with Ellington and the Air Ministry analysis.¹³⁹ That MacDonald had had to bring in an external Sub-Committee then certainly left Londonderry exposed and Baldwin duly replaced him with Cunliffe-Lister.¹⁴⁰ Part of the rationale was that Baldwin wanted the Secretary of State for Air to be in the Commons, but a bare six months later elevated him to Lords as Viscount Swinton.¹⁴¹ Inevitably, Chamberlain was able to use this as an excuse in his removal of Swinton in May 1938.¹⁴² In terms of senior leadership, it could be argued that Londonderry, with Salmond, Ellington and their staffs in support, were sound in the disarmament period when their role was essentially one of technical defence of the status quo. But when expansion was the order of the day there appears to have been a distinct lack of capacity, flair, vision or originality.¹⁴³ Swinton later commented that Londonderry 'had had a thankless and impossible task' and that he and 'his professional colleagues deserve credit for having maintained the spirit, the tradition and the training of our small

¹³⁷ See Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy*, p.348; Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.802

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.805.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ See Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy*, p.349.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.350. See also Swinton, *I Remember*, p.104.

¹⁴² See Robert Self, *Chamberlain: A Biography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.302.

¹⁴³ Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.805.

Air Force in those disappointing days'.¹⁴⁴ He also stated that Ellington (and Sir Cyril Newall, his successor) were 'good at selecting a team, and equally good at working in a team'.¹⁴⁵ A direct consequence of the rapid expansion envisaged by Expansion Scheme C was that Ellington, and his team, had to examine whether the existing Metropolitan organisation would be able to cope with the numbers of aircraft, squadrons, personnel, real estate and training tasks; in short was it 'fit for purpose'?

The Formation of Bomber Command

On 5 June 1935, Ellington minuted the DCAS (AVM C. L. Courtney) seeking his views (and those of the Air Member for Supply and Organisation (AMSO)) on a proposal to 'separate the defence part of the organisation from the offensive part'; an ostensibly simple leadership tactic to make the organisation 'fit for purpose'.¹⁴⁶ The DCAS replied some days later stating that grouping the 'bombers, fighters, A.D. [Air Defence] formations and Observer Corps under a single Commander' would result in too many subordinate Commanders.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the imposition of a 'super-C-in-C over the offensive and defensive parts of the organisation' would be too top-heavy and would impinge on the functions of the CAS. The DCAS also anticipated that an over-arching C-in-C would be overstretched with the two roles to contend with, especially if involved in briefing the War Cabinet. He confirmed that the two organisations would, in war, be performing 'quite separate functions':

The one is the defence function pure and simple: the other is endeavouring, by bombardment, to weaken enemy resistance and his power to continue the war, and will be assisting the defence. A separation will allow each Commander to

¹⁴⁴ Swinton, *I Remember*, pp.104-5.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.112.

¹⁴⁶ AIR 2/8875, *Organisation of Home Commands Consequent on Expansion Scheme C*, Minute CAS to DCAS dated 5 June 1935.

¹⁴⁷ AIR 2/8875, Minute DCAS to CAS 11 June 1935, para.1 .

concentrate upon his aim without any preoccupation with another and different operational aim.

The DCAS also made the point that some of the bomber elements could be fighting abroad thus complicating the command and control issues.¹⁴⁸ The DCAS concluded that there should be separate Cs-in-C each responsible directly to the Air Ministry in which the officer responsible for ‘co-ordinating the conflicting claims of the two C-in-Cs’ should be increased to AVM level.¹⁴⁹

The Air Member for Personnel (AMP - Air Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill) agreed the tenor of the DCAS’s arguments, but added that the CAS would become ‘Commander-in-Chief in wartime as far as home defence goes’.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the AMP surmised that the Air Ministry would have to have a co-ordinating function ‘to give the main directions of the campaign’, in ‘spite of the obvious objections’.¹⁵¹ He acknowledged that it would be fatal for the Air Ministry to interfere with ‘the operational control of any of the fighting units’.¹⁵²

In a detailed Memorandum, the Director of Organisation (D of O – Air Commodore W. L. Welsh) concluded that the Air Ministry would have to decentralise the six Bomber Areas onto a separate Bomber Command Headquarters, with its own operations room and Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO) to whom the C-in-C could delegate operations.¹⁵³ In broader terms of the organisation being ‘fit for purpose’, Welsh admitted that the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., paras. 3 and 5.

¹⁵⁰ AIR 2/8875, Minute AMP to CAS dated 18 July 1935, para. 1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, para.3.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ AIR 2/8875, *Memorandum by D.of O. On the Organisation of the Home Commands – 1935 Expansion Scheme C*, dated 19 June 1935.

exigencies of peace had been such that the Air Ministry, and the broader staff organisation, was 'barely adequate for its peace work, and quite incapable of undertaking mobilisation, or of filling the numerous additional appointments which would be necessary immediately on the outbreak of war'.¹⁵⁴ He therefore recommended that staffs in peace should be so established as to have some spare capacity for coping with outbreak of war; the peace and war establishments should be as closely aligned as possible to ensure a smooth transition; and that as much administration as possible should be decentralised.¹⁵⁵ This latter point was endorsed by the AMP who added that each Command should be given its own finance director.¹⁵⁶ This theme was developed further such that routine administration (and authority) would fall on the C-in-C's staff ensuring that there was only one filter between the Air Ministry and stations; Groups would be responsible for operations and training.¹⁵⁷

The chief opposition to the proposals came from Air Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding (Air Member for Research and Development) who argued, in three pages of immaculately hand written prose, that the proposals were flawed, and claimed not to have been informed of them at an early stage.¹⁵⁸ Dowding also believed that confusion would occur between the levels in the new organisation and that it would be impossible to 'find the individuals to man Command and Group staffs for years to come'.¹⁵⁹ Air Marshal Sir Cyril Newall (AMSO) replied acknowledging that this may be the case, but that it was no reason not to proceed; he pointed out that the 'main reason underlying this proposed organisation is the necessity for speeding up the administrative machine, for giving officers responsibility

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., para.2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ AIR 2/8875, Minute AMP to CAS dated 18 July 1935, final para. (not numbered in the original).

¹⁵⁷ AIR 2/8875, enclosure 30A.

¹⁵⁸ AIR 2/8875, Minute from AMRD to CAS and AMSO dated 1 February 1936.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. See also AIR 41/14, *The Growth of Fighter Command 1936 – 1940*, p.22. Also published as T.C.G. James, *The Growth of Fighter Command 1936 – 1940* (London: Cass, 2002).

concomitant with their rank and appointment and to free Commanders of certain details of administration to enable them to devote more time to operational training'.¹⁶⁰ There was also some controversy over the idea that there may have been a Supreme Air Commander, but this was strongly opposed by Dowding and Air Marshal Sir John Steel (C-in-C Bomber Command on its formation in 1936) on the basis that it would hamper their direct access to the CAS; the idea was dropped in 1937 and will therefore not be discussed further.¹⁶¹ Notwithstanding the opposition, the proposals were duly refined and the King was informed of them on 21 April 1936 and an Air Council Letter was issued to the two Cs-in-C on 4 May 1936.¹⁶²

Under the new organisation, the Air Ministry had Fighter, Bomber, Coastal, and Training Commands and retained control directly of the RAF College at Cranwell.¹⁶³ Fighter and Coastal Command had three Groups apiece and Bomber Command six.¹⁶⁴ It all fell into place in July 1936 with further changes to Expansion Schemes to cope with. The uniformed members of the Air Council had shown considerable moral courage in proposing such a seemingly radical departure from the existing single command structure for the Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB). The reality, however, was that the new organisation gave them a natural structure around which to satisfy the ever-present requirements for the air defence of Britain, and London in particular.¹⁶⁵ And it also gave the future commanders of the bomber force the room to prosecute the enemy in the time-

¹⁶⁰ AIR 2/8875, Minute from AMSO to AMRD dated 1 February 1936.

¹⁶¹ AIR 41/14, *The Growth of Fighter Command*, fn.8, p.23.

¹⁶² AIR 2/8875, enclosure 39A.

¹⁶³ AIR 41/14, *The Growth of Fighter Command*, p.22. The system was later expanded to include a Maintenance Command and sufficiently fit for purpose for it to remain in being until the merger of Fighter and Bomber Commands into Strike Command in 1968.

¹⁶⁴ See AIR 41/39, p.110D.

¹⁶⁵ See CAB 24/256, C.P. 144(35), *The Re-Orienting of the Air Defence System of Great Britain: Interim Report* dated 9 July 1935.

honoured manner emphasising the primacy of the offensive. The new structure had also sought to eradicate duplication; give commanders real delegated authority; and build in sufficient spare capacity for the inevitable surge in activity that would accompany the outbreak of hostilities.

The Road to War – Vision and Purpose of the Bomber Force

As the international situation continued to worsen through 1936, the task facing the senior leaders became more urgent. The leadership challenges remained ‘wicked’, complex and any quest for linear solutions would have been wishful thinking. The politicians, the Air Ministry and the new command had to transition from thinking about its role and purpose being inextricably interlinked with the survival of the Service to actually considering how the bomber force would be developed to fight in a war with Germany.¹⁶⁶ Areas of specific concern included the failure of the League of Nations to have any meaningful influence following the Italian aggression in Abyssinia; German re-occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936; the formalisation of the Rome-Berlin axis; and the complicating issues of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁶⁷ In terms of the mercurial chase for ‘parity’, the situation was exacerbated by growing suspicion that Germany actually aimed at achieving numerical parity with the USSR.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, it was clear that industry had failed to make adequate progress on Expansion Scheme C and to meet the growing threat the Air Staff reworked the Expansion Schemes submitting D, E and E¹; none were adopted and the

¹⁶⁶ The general history of the road to war is extensive: see for example J.M. Roberts, *Europe, 1880-1945* (London: Longman, 1967), ch.15, AIR 41/39, p.114 and N.H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. I, (London: HMSO, 1976), ch.VII.

¹⁶⁷ See Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, ch.VI on Italy and the League, ch.VII on the Rhineland. See also Roberts, *Europe*, op cit for the overview. AIR 41/39, p.113.

¹⁶⁸ AIR 41/39, p.115. See also CAB 24/259, C.P.13(36), ‘The German Danger’, dated 17 January 1936. See also Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, p.542, fn. in which Swinton implied to Gibbs in the production of the Official History that ‘parity’ was a ‘concept foreign to the RAF’.

focus transferred to Scheme F which was the limit of what could be done without a radical change to industrial policy.¹⁶⁹

The vision and purpose for the utilisation of the new force had to be predicated on a foundation of sound planning. This work had originally been initiated by the Chiefs of Staff as early as 1934 and the Joint Planning Committee had worked on it intermittently, reporting provisionally in August 1935.¹⁷⁰ The basic appreciation examined a number of courses of action which could have been open to Germany, each of which would have policy implications for each of the Services; to get round the inevitable in-fighting, the Chiefs broadly agreed that a ‘worst case’ situation should be identified and agreed upon.¹⁷¹ Working at the interfaces of a senior leader’s organisation is one of the key tasks of strategic leadership and it is clear from the literature that the ‘Chiefs of Staff do not appear in a very favourable light in their first attempts to grapple with the enormous problems’, and ‘showed no sign of viewing the problem from a common strategic or even tactical viewpoint’.¹⁷² Regrettably, the matter has not been helped from a historiographical point of view by some authors taking partisan positions.¹⁷³

The essence of the ‘worst case scenario’ was that Germany would exploit its relatively high military readiness and attack Belgium and France; from the occupied areas the Luftwaffe would be able to attack Britain from the air ‘with the object of demoralising

¹⁶⁹ AIR 41/39, pp.116-7 and Montgomery Hyde *British Air Policy*, p.364.

¹⁷⁰ AIR 41/39, p.144.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. But see also Montgomery Hyde *British Air Policy*, p.390, Bond, *British Military Policy*, p.210 and J. P. Harris, ‘The British General Staff and the Coming of War, 1933-9’, p.206.

¹⁷² Bond, *op cit*, p.212.

¹⁷³ See for example, Harris’s description of Trenchard’s influence on Chamberlain as ‘baneful’; Harris, ‘The British General Staff and the Coming of War, 1933-9’, p.206.

our people and/or disorganising our food supplies'.¹⁷⁴ The ensuing assumption was that the main weight of effort would fall upon the RAF to hold the initial attack and mount a bomber counter-offensive on the Luftwaffe bases.¹⁷⁵ The signatures on the bottom of the report were those of Captain Tom Philips RN (who subsequently died when HMS *Prince of Wales* was sunk), Colonel Sir Ronald Adam (later Adjutant-General) and Group Captain A.T. Harris.¹⁷⁶ The report acknowledged that an 'organized (sic) air defence system should take a considerable toll of attacking aircraft' with a cumulative effect on German aircrew morale as the losses grew'.¹⁷⁷ The report then went on to state that in the initial stages of the conflict, neither the Navy nor the Army would be in a position 'to impose upon Germany any form of immediate pressure'.¹⁷⁸ In the timescales envisaged (the first few weeks), the only types of air attacks likely to have any impact would be reprisals aimed at demoralising the German people; attacks on vital German interests that cause diversion of assets to their defence; and direct attacks, in the air or on the ground, on the enemy bombers and the maintenance organisation.¹⁷⁹ Bomber forces would also be called upon to support the Navy in maintaining the security of 'shipping approaching our ports'.¹⁸⁰ And thirdly, the bombers would be called upon to support land forces in their attempts to repel the German invasion.¹⁸¹ The literature on this report varies somewhat in tone, but it is clear from all interpretations that much of the work on this appreciation was

¹⁷⁴ CAB 54/3, J.P.C. 155 dated 26 October 1936, 'Appreciation of the situation in the event of a war against Germany in 1939'. Part of this is reprinted in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, pp.88-95.

¹⁷⁵ See CAB 53/4, op cit, para.98 and for discussion AIR 41/39, p.145 and Montgomery Hyde *British Air Policy*, p.391. Hyde describes the paper as 'remarkable'.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ See CAB 53/4, op cit, para.97.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., para. 98.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, para.99.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, paras. 100-101.

executed by the air staff.¹⁸² The appreciation, and its recommendations, were discussed at some length by the Chiefs and their paper of 15 February 1937 entitled 'Planning for a War with Germany' has been regarded as one of the 'most important defence documents of the inter-war years, for it summed up the considered views of the Services upon the character of British Defence Policy and laid down clearly the broad lines which British Strategy was to follow after 1939'.¹⁸³ Webster and Frankland have added that the appreciation and subsequent papers 'led the Chiefs of Staff to order definite plans to be made to carry out the strategy laid down'.¹⁸⁴

By this stage, the Air Ministry and Bomber Command had had some time to agree on a modus operandi by which the two organisations would neither interfere with each others' jurisdiction, nor duplicate staff work. In anticipation of the COS conclusions, the air staff met with representatives from Bomber Command (Air Commodore Evill, SASO) to discuss the preparation 'of a series of plans for air operations' for possible implementation in the event of war.¹⁸⁵ The essence of the proposal was that the air staff would draw up an Intelligence Appreciation which would then feed into a Strategic Appreciation; following consultation with the C-in-C (Steel) who would advise on the practical aspects, the Appreciation would be approved either by CAS or the COS Subcommittee.¹⁸⁶ These plans would then be activated through 'Directifs' (sic) from CAS in the event of war.¹⁸⁷ The C-in-C would then apportion the effort to his Groups.¹⁸⁸ The SASO expressed his C-in-C's preference that 'he should have no dealings with politicians

¹⁸² See AIR 41/39, p.145 and Montgomery Hyde *British Air Policy*, p.391.

¹⁸³ The original paper is at CAB 53/7. Quotation taken from AIR 41/39, p.151. Montgomery Hyde echoes this view, *op cit*, p.392.

¹⁸⁴ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.90-1.

¹⁸⁵ AIR 9/36, Folio 62, Note on a Meeting held on 17 December 1936.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, para.4.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, para.6.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

and that he should receive all orders from the CAS who alone should have to bear the brunt of any attacks directed by the politicians or public opinion against the policy being pursued'.¹⁸⁹ These broad proposals were subsequently refined by the DCAS who believed that formulation of the appreciation allowed the Air Ministry to have a greater degree of control than was desirable.¹⁹⁰ The preference was for 'Aims' to be drawn up in four broad categories: paralyzing the German war effort; co-operation with the Navy; co-operation with the British or French armies; and co-operation with France, say to reduce the impact of an air attack on Paris.¹⁹¹ The detail would be arranged by an Air Targets Sub-Committee.¹⁹² These discussions reflect a genuine desire to balance the efforts of the staffs in each headquarters, but it is interesting to note the C-in-C's desire to remain purely at the operational level; time would show that removal from the political arena would be impossible (especially with Churchill) and arguably not desirable.

The four broad categories were expanded into 13 Western Air Plans (by 1938) which expanded to 16 by the start of the war.¹⁹³ The official historians have made the point that this process, once actually enjoined, brought the planners 'down to earth' because they had no clear idea of how the Command would be equipped and therefore what would be operationally possible.¹⁹⁴ The realisation inside the Air Ministry that, with the assets available to them, they would physically not be able to have the required effect on Germany allowed them more easily to accept the political expedient of giving priority to fighter defence (with radar, the 'Biggin Hill Interception scheme' and new fighters coming

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., para.8.

¹⁹⁰ AIR 9/36, Folio 64, Note on a Meeting held on 22 January 1937.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., para.4.

¹⁹² Ibid. See also Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.93.

¹⁹³ Tabulated in AIR 41/39, pp.179-8 for the earlier list and Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, Appendix 6.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p.91.

on stream this was proving increasingly viable).¹⁹⁵ As the staffs continued their deliberations, the meagre payloads, and the vulnerability of the light and medium bombers, highlighted the need for accelerated development of the heavy bombers.¹⁹⁶ The result of this was that there was a growing realisation that, if war broke out in the 1939 timescale upon which planning had been predicated, Bomber Command would not have the ability to carry out its 'defeat-averting' role.¹⁹⁷ Rather, it would become a 'war-winning' weapon albeit on the later timescales coincident with the arrival of the heavy bombers in 1941-42.¹⁹⁸

Expansion Scheme F, however had provided for 750 medium bombers and 240 heavies.¹⁹⁹ Yet another programme was developed to redress this balance and Scheme J was the result with provision for an 'all-heavy bomber' force of 90 squadrons with 1442 aircraft.²⁰⁰ This would provide a, minimum insurance against the potential enemies of Germany, Italy and Japan, but was dependant on a radical shift in government policy towards bringing industry onto a genuine war footing with the financial consequences.²⁰¹ The Air Staff, however, were unable to convince the Cabinet in general and Sir Thomas Inskip (Minister for Co-ordination of Defence) in particular and it was accordingly rejected.²⁰² More importantly than the need to start grinding away on the staff work for

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. pp.92 and 101. See also AIR 41/39, p.194.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p.197.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p.204.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, Appendix 7 for the full table of expansion schemes.

²⁰¹ AIR 41/39, p.205. See CAB 24/273, C.P.296(37), 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938' dated 3 December 1937. For the contrast with Germany, see Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, p.126 where the point is made that the German air craft industry was a 'product of state initiative, state funding and state direction'.

²⁰² 'Aide-Memoire by Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence. For the Secretary of State for Air, 9 December 1937', reproduced in full at Appendix 5 in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV. For the various disparaging comments on Inskip's appointment see

Scheme K, was that it represented a marked change in policy with the abandonment of the quest for ‘parity’.²⁰³ This was contrary to the Air Ministry’s consistent line of needing to build ‘a striking force not inferior to that of Germany’.²⁰⁴ The German occupation of Austria in March 1938, and the increased likelihood of war, resulted in Cabinet rejecting Scheme K in favour of a more aggressive programme.²⁰⁵ The discussions around Scheme L confirmed that ‘parity’ was not obtainable and that what extra resources that there were should be allocated to fighters.²⁰⁶ While industry increased its capacity to produce aircraft of all types (but heavy bombers in particular), the existing Bomber force would have to be conserved.²⁰⁷ The realisation that, following the German occupation of Austria, Hitler would turn his attention to Czechoslovakia implied that some of assumptions inherent in the planning, specifically that there would be an escalation in the use of air power, and the potential for an attempted knockout blow, led the air staff to question what would be a legitimate target.²⁰⁸

The Legalities and Legitimacy

It has been emphasised previously the importance of senior leaders establishing a just cause – especially in the event of the exact legal situation remaining unclear as it was with

Montgomery Hyde *British Air Policy*, pp. 361-2 in which he cites ‘Cato’ as stating that there had not been such a surprising appointment since Emperor Caligula had made his horse a consul. For the financial aspects see CAB 24/273, C.P. 316(37), ‘Defence Expenditure in Future Years’, dated 15 December 1937.

²⁰³ See Inskip’s wording on the RAF not needing to match Germany, op cit, p.96 and AIR 41/39, p.209. This was contrary to the Air Ministry’s consistent line of needing to build ‘a striking force not inferior to that of Germany’

²⁰⁴ See for example, CAB 24/267, C.P. 18(37), ‘Plan for Further Expansion of First Line Strength of the Royal Air Force’, prepared by Swinton and dated 14 January 1937.

²⁰⁵ AIR 41/39, p.210 and CAB

²⁰⁶ See CAB 23/93, Cabinet 21(38) dated 27 April 1938 and See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, Appendix 7.

²⁰⁷ AIR 41/39, p.213. See also CAB 24/275, C.P. 65(38), ‘Expansion of the Royal Air Force: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air’ dated 12 March 1938 for costs and industrial challenges and CAB 24/276, C.P. 87(38), ‘Proposals for Acceleration of the Air Programme: Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer’ dated 4 April 1938.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p.229.

aerial bombardment. Consistent with much of the legacy from the bombing of London during the First World War, and intervening rhetoric, planning for the forthcoming conflict was heavily influenced by the concern that London would be subject to heavy bombardment by the German air force and that the RAF was not in a position to match blow for blow. It was therefore in British interests for bombing to be restricted to genuinely military targets and for restraint to be shown in regards to the means of production.²⁰⁹ There is therefore something of a contradiction in that there was considerable demand for the bomber force to be expanded, yet its usage would be severely curtailed if the proposals came to fruition. Similarly, approval had been given for the design of heavy bombers even though any likely convention would limit the weight of aircraft and their payloads.²¹⁰ The inherent contradictions also curtailed the lifespan of the Report issued by the Malkin Committee into how to take these proposals forward, including formal revision of the Hague Rules.²¹¹ More importantly, the Sub-Committee on the Limitation of Armaments concluded that ‘conditions had so changed since they were charged with the duty of examining the question of the restriction of air and other armaments as to make the prospect of obtaining any international agreement on these matters extremely remote’.²¹²

²⁰⁹ AIR 41/5, *International Law of the Air 1939-1945*, actually written as an AHB Narrative by J.M. Spaight as a classified addendum to the third edition of *Air Power and War Rights*, Section D, ‘British Bombing Policy’. Not page numbered.

²¹⁰ Ibid. This was consistent with many of the ideas put forward during the Geneva talks. See also Parks, ‘Air War and the Law of War’, p.43.

²¹¹ The Committee was under the chairmanship of Sir William Malkin, legal advisor to the Foreign Office. AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘The Malkin Proposals Dropped’. Parks, ‘Air War and the Law of War’, p.43. Full report at ADM 116/4155, *Sub-Committee on the Humanisation of Aerial Warfare: Report*, dated 15 July 1938.

²¹² AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘The Malkin Proposals Dropped’.

The complexities of the situation were extensively aired in Parliament on 21 June 1938.²¹³ The use of air power in Spain (and in particular against Barcelona in March 1938 where bombardment had been used with the threat that it would be repeated every three hours until the city surrendered) and by the Japanese in China was cited as evidence that ‘the only way to humanise war is to abolish it’.²¹⁴ The Prime Minister (Chamberlain) admitted that the advent of air warfare had introduced ‘new methods, new scope and new horrors which have, in fact materially changed its character’.²¹⁵ He went on to admit that there was ‘no international code of law with respect to aerial warfare which is the subject of international agreement’, but that the underlying principles of the law as it applied to sea and land warfare were applicable to the air ‘and are not only admitted but insisted upon by this Government’. These principles included that it was

against international law to bomb civilians as such, and to make deliberate attacks upon civilian populations.

In the second place, targets which are aimed at from the air must be legitimate military objectives and must be capable of identification.

In the third place, reasonable care must be taken in attacking those military objectives so that by carelessness a civilian population in the neighbourhood is not bombed.²¹⁶

This expression of formal Government policy was reiterated to Bomber Command in response to a query from the C-in-C on 30 August 1938 that in attacking German aircraft factories, a proportion of bombs would fall outside the immediate designated target area causing serious casualties among the civilian population.²¹⁷ The Air Council replied on 15 September 1938 having taken advice from Malkin. The Air Council admitted that

²¹³ HC Deb, 21 June 1938, Vol.337, cc919-1045.

²¹⁴ Mr Noel-Baker, *ibid.* c920.

²¹⁵ The Prime Minister, *ibid.*, c936

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ AIR 20/22, Minute J. B. Abraham to C-in-C Bomber Command dated 15 September 1938. See also AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Air Ministry Instructions of 15 September 1938’.

‘there are certain objectives, particularly among aircraft factories, which it would be impossible to attack, even by day, without causing loss of life to the civilian population in the neighbourhood’. The operational limitations were again acknowledged, but ‘for reasons of policy, however, which the Council feel sure you will readily understand, it is essential that in the opening stages of a war your action should be rigorously restricted to attack on objectives which are manifestly and unmistakably military on the narrowest interpretation of the term; and that even such objectives should not be attacked initially unless they can be clearly identified and attacked with a reasonable expectation of damage being confined to them’.²¹⁸ The policy was based on the need not to alienate neutral opinion (not stated, but presumably America as Roosevelt had appealed for such restraint in the past and was to do so formally on 1 September 1939) and to avoid giving any ‘genuine pretext for retaliatory action’.²¹⁹ Attacks would therefore have to be concentrated on targets such as railways (but not trains unless positively identified as military), formed bodies of troops and concentrations of transport. Newall, in submitting this directive to Swinton for approval concluded that these restrictions were unlikely to last long, stating: ‘but we obviously cannot be the first ‘to take the gloves off’’.²²⁰

Chamberlain’s acknowledgement of the parallel nature of some of the laws of war came into focus in 1939 when the Admiralty raised the question of bombardment of targets on the shore including coastal defence works and docks.²²¹ The CAS wrote to his naval counterpart (Admiral Sir Dudley Pound) suggesting that Malkin chair a meeting with representation from each of the Services to discuss setting rules to prevent loss of civilian

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Roosevelt’s appeal to the belligerents will be covered under the same section in Ch. 5.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Admiralty Proposals 1939’.

life.²²² The meeting went into considerable detail and outlined a two-stage approach with first restricting bombardment to a very narrow interpretation of military objectives and the second allowing a broader approach consistent with the lines agreed with French in Staff Conversations.²²³ The instructions, which Army commanders were to be required to obey in spirit, reiterated the key principles of bombardment of civilians being illegal.²²⁴ In the event, foreign policy issues intervened with Lord Halifax of the opinion that the original ‘Stage One was too restrictive and would alarm our allies’.²²⁵ These were duly issued by the Air Council to Air Officers Commanding at home and overseas on 22 August 1939, followed by a further letter enclosing ‘Air Ministry Instructions and Notes on the Rules to be observed by the Royal Air Force in War’. In setting the foundations for the future direction of war, the Air Ministry letter included the following general statement:

The policy governing the selection of targets for air attack is a matter for decision by the government. This policy will be made known, through the Air Ministry, to Commanders-in-Chief and will be reflected in operation orders’.

The practicalities of who would be allowed to what and when were discussed by the Chiefs of Staff and subsequently in the CID on 1 September 1939. The essence of the discussion was that if Germany initiated unrestricted air attacks at the outset of hostilities, Bomber Command would be used to attack the German oil resources. If, however, Germany was to restrict attacks to military objectives, the RAF would attack the German Fleet at Wilhelmshaven; attack warships at sea when found within range; undertake

²²² Ibid. Group Captain J. C. Slessor forwarded a copy of *Bomber Command Operation Instruction No.2* to Malkin to inform the meeting. ADM 116/4155, Minute dated 9 August 1939. AIR 41/5 inadvertently named the CNS as Sir John Pound!

²²³ AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Interdepartmental Committee. August 1939’.

²²⁴ AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Proposed Permissible Objectives’.

²²⁵ AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Air Council Instructions of 22 August 1939’.

widespread propaganda (leaflet) drops at night; and ‘conserve resources until our hands are freed’.²²⁶

Bomber Command therefore went to war with bombing policy predicated on the foreign policy requirements consistent with President Roosevelt’s message to all potential belligerents that their ‘armed forces shall in no event and under no circumstances undertake bombardment from the air of civilian populations or unfortified cities, upon the understanding that the same rules of warfare shall be scrupulously observed by all their opponents’.²²⁷ The other constraint (imposed by Halifax) was that the rules should not appear overly restrictive lest allies (France in particular) thought that Britain was being overly cautious in the interests of its own defence. But throughout the process, it is clear that the serving officers, at least from Group Captain and above were prepared to follow a restrictive approach. It could be argued that this was a merely mechanical reaction based on the, admittedly high, likelihood that the gloves would indeed have to come off at some stage. But the evidence suggests that if those in the Air Ministry were cynical about the whole issue, they had the sense not confide their doubts to the files destined for the archives! But as Hays Parks has pointed out, even the international lawyers of the day doubted the applicability of the international law of war to the modern means at the disposal of nations on an unprecedented scale.²²⁸ Interestingly, Parks acknowledges the failures in diplomacy, but has hard words for the failure of international lawyers and moral philosophers of the time ‘who failed to adjust international law and moral thinking to major technological changes in society and warfare’.²²⁹ Nor could the scholars claim that

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid. See also AIR 41/39, p.263.

²²⁸ Parks, ‘Air War and the Law of War’, p.50.

²²⁹ Ibid.

the issues had not been raised.²³⁰ That said, neither governments, nor private citizens, had much faith in international agreements providing them with protection.²³¹ The reality of the international experience of the 1930s where Britain had attempted to set the example by unilaterally disarming had been shown to be false logic. International agreements appeared to mean little to the new breed of dictators as events were proving. The ready examples of the use of air power in Abyssinia, Spain and China suggested that the analogy of ‘removing gloves’ was mild in the extreme.

Munich to War

The Munich crisis resulted in yet another decision by the Cabinet to extend and accelerate Scheme L, and to an easing of the financial limits on the Services and on what they could upon industry to produce.²³² The Cabinet were content to order more fighters, and that the Secretary of State for Air (now Kingsley Wood) ‘should give further consideration to the policy of concentrating on the development and construction of the large high performance bomber capable of carrying a very heavy bomb load’.²³³ Furthermore, there should be sufficient orders for bombers ‘to avoid substantial dismissals in the aircraft factories’.²³⁴ Although this hardly appears to be a ringing endorsement of the policy of the offensive having primacy over home defence, it at least provided the foundations for an all heavy bomber force to be achieved by 1942, providing resources could be husbanded.²³⁵

²³⁰ Beyond the works of Spaight, see Philip Landon, ‘Aerial Bombardment & International Law’, *JRUSI*, 77, 1932, p.44.

²³¹ Parks, ‘Air War and the Law of War’, p.49.

²³² CAB 24/279, C.P.218(38), ‘Relative Air Strengths and Proposals for the Improvement of this Country’s Position: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air’ dated 25 October 1938 and CAB 23/96, Conclusions dated 7 November 1938.

²³³ *Ibid*, ‘Air Programme’ conclusion iii.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, conclusion iv.

²³⁵ See AIR 41/39, p.242.

At the operational level of planning, there remained doubt as to where the real balance of authority actually lay.²³⁶ At the root of the problems, at least during the Czechoslovakian crisis, was the deep uncertainty as to how a potential war might develop.²³⁷ The Air Staff, based on discussions in COS, believed that it was still possible that Germany would seek to attempt to remove France and Britain from the war with a knock-out blow, but it was more probable that Germany would utilise its air power in an invasion of Czechoslovakia.²³⁸ This possible eventuality clouded the issue as to what Bomber Command could be used for; accordingly the C-in-C was tasked to investigate what his Command could achieve against the German air force and the German army and its lines of communications, but within the Air Council's constraints on attacking civilians.²³⁹ The complexity and ambiguity of the situation were obviously clear to the CAS, but the tone of the correspondence suggested that although the C-in-C was content for his staff to get on with the planning as tasked, he was uncomfortable with the lack of clear direction and tended to concentrate on the planning processes.²⁴⁰

After Munich, the air staff thought that the pendulum had swung in their favour over target selection in particular with Bomber Command responsible solely for the methods by which they would be attacked.²⁴¹ The C-in-C favoured a more general, or less

²³⁶ Ibid., p.274 and Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.103.

²³⁷ AIR 8/251, Letter CAS to C-in-C Bomber Command dated 19 September 1938; the COS papers were for COS 765.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid. and AIR 20/22, Minute J. B. Abraham to C-in-C Bomber Command dated 15 September 1938.

²⁴⁰ See for example AIR 8/251, Letter C-in-C to CAS dated 30 September 1938 in which Ludlow Hewitt's first paragraph detailed his concerns over the 'absolutely essential' requirement for appropriate staff to be available in the Air Ministry to support his team. See also AIR 8/251, Letter C-in-C to DCAS dated 22 September 1938, para. 3.

²⁴¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.103.

specific, sort of direction allowing him more latitude in the selection of targets.²⁴² For example, at a meeting held in the Air Ministry on 30 November 1938 (chaired by ACAS – AVM Sholto Douglas but with the C-in-C in full attendance), the C-in-C stated

that what he wanted from the Air Ministry was a memorandum rather than a plan. If he could have a reasoned statement showing the best targets to go for and their order of importance, he would then decide which of these it was possible to attack and the best method of execution.²⁴³

On behalf of the Air Ministry the Deputy Director Plans (Slessor) pointed out that even something as general as a memorandum would require a degree of operationally coherent planning if it was to make sense,²⁴⁴ The C-in-C was also very cautious as to how far into Germany he would be prepared to send his crews, lest there be a ‘major disaster’.²⁴⁵ The meeting accordingly decided to base plans on degree of bomber penetration.²⁴⁶ Interestingly, this was overturned by the CAS on the basis that decisions on groups of targets had to be based on the effective contribution to the strategic aim.²⁴⁷ There were also serious issues in devising ‘Restricted’ or ‘legitimate’ versions of the Western Air Plans that would contain sufficient purely military targets that could be attacked without undue risk of civilian casualties. The realities of the situation were that whichever of the element of the plans that were considered in the context of real targets, such as German naval vessels, the practicalities raised by Bomber Command were usually greater than the legitimacy of

²⁴² AIR 41/39, p.275. See also AIR 2/2947, Minutes of a Meeting held on 30 November 1938 in the Air Ministry to discuss the Assumptions Required for War Planning.

²⁴³ Ibid., para.4.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., para.5.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., para.7.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ AIR 20/22, Letter CAS to C-in-C dated 19 January 1939.

the target.²⁴⁸ A similar morass of correspondence ensued over the proposals to use Bomber Command aircraft to drop leaflets over Germany as part of WA14.²⁴⁹

The relationship between Air Ministry staff, some of whom like Slessor, were of the highest calibre, and Bomber Command Headquarters was a leadership challenge that would continue throughout the strategic air offensive. Part of the issue was that Cs-in-C were concerned that they would be called upon to execute plans that were technically impracticable. But, more importantly, there were serious concerns that those at the operational level did not grasp the wider strategic picture, or were unwilling to compromise for greater benefit. The reality was that it took leaders of the highest order to be able recognise the importance of the interfaces and sub-ordinate their internal priorities.

Conclusions

Over the period covered by this chapter, the leadership challenges relating to the forthcoming bomber offensive facing the Secretaries of State (Londonderry, Swinton and Wood), and their CASs (Salmond, Ellington and finally Newall), ranged from maintaining the very survival of military aviation in the face of determined abolitionists through making an organisation fit for the rapid expansion occasioned by the rise of Germany to preparing for war. Throughout the period, the parallel refrains of defence of London were reiterated along with the best form of defence being offensive action. As has been shown, the financial restraints under which they had to operate were relatively strict up until Munich with considerable limitations on industry. Furthermore the timescales for the

²⁴⁸ AIR 41/39, pp.277-284 for the discussions between the RN, Bomber Command and the Air Ministry on these issues.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p.289-299.

development of weapons that would prove capable of realising the rhetoric were such that it would almost certainly take until 1942 before the heavy bombers came into service.

The limitations as to what Bomber Command was likely to be able to accomplish was allied to the continuing debate over what was legitimate for it to attempt. It is to the credit of the senior leadership, admittedly under the unequivocal direction of the Prime Minister, that they endeavoured to adduce a set of rules that would ensure that the targets chosen were genuinely military and there would be no gratuitous bombardment of the civil population. The motivation for the work carried out may well have been a tightrope between Roosevelt's admonition to the prospective belligerents and the expectations of French allies. But the attempts were made nonetheless.

Although serious efforts were made, from the outset, to ensure that the organisational relationship between the Air Ministry and Bomber Command was free from duplication and friction it is clear that there was a marked degree of overlap between the two that would continue throughout the conflict. To some extent this was inevitable as many of the crucial interfaces with other organisations were in London resulting in the centre of gravity tending towards the Air Ministry. But having set up these Commands, and put senior men in charge, it was equally inevitable that they would guard their 'turf'.

Chapter Five

FROM THE OUTBREAK OF WAR TO AREA BOMBING

The expiry of Britain's ultimatum to Germany on 3 September 1939 saw Bomber Command still struggling to shake off the lethargy of the years of disarmament and to build on the opportunity to form a coherent force capable of realising the rhetoric that had characterised the previous era. The senior leaders in the Air Ministry and at the Command Headquarters were aware that Germany had 'a formidable superiority in air strength' and that it would take until 1942 for the RAF to acquire the heavy bombers necessary to carry out a credible offensive.¹ From 1939 through to the time when the Command would have sufficient aircraft, crews and the capability to do serious damage to the German war machine, the leadership challenges were, again, complex and ambiguous with no simple solutions available. The logical way forward, at almost any time in this period, was to conserve aircraft and experienced aircrew until such time as their engagement with the enemy could have the optimum impact. The reality, however, was that the needs of the moment were such that Bomber Command was repeatedly called upon to support the British and French armies in France; help to deter an invasion of the United Kingdom; and support the Battle of the Atlantic. The situation was further complicated by the determination of all concerned not to be seen to be the first to instigate indiscriminate bombing of non-combatant personnel, although all were aware that the gloves would have to come off sooner or later.

¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.134.

This chapter will seek to explore some of the senior leadership challenges of this period. Rather than attempt to present a sequential account of the period, it will examine some of the facets of strategic leadership as they applied to the direction of the bomber offensive. The first of these facets is the interface with other players at the strategic level, particularly potential, and actual, allies. As they are key facets of leadership at the highest levels, the chapter will then look at the vision and purpose of the strategic air offensive, how it developed and how it was directed; it will tackle each of the main phases evident during the period examining the challenges of conservation of effort versus dire need for action. The chapter will then explore the issues of legality and morality surrounding the potential offensive through until the Directive of February 1942 (although wider discussion will finish at the end of 1941); even though the official historians suggested that restraint was more ‘a matter of expediency as much as morality’, this section will show that the situation was altogether more complex.²

Finishing the period in question at the end of 1941 is an artificial convenience. As will become evident, the process of evolution towards area bombing was both gradual and incremental. It could be argued that each successive Directive from the Air Ministry to Bomber Command could have been depicted as a watershed; but these either reflected a swing of the pendulum of war, or another step forward to area bombing without restriction. The German invasion of Russia in June 1941, after which Britain no longer stood alone, could also have marked a watershed; but it had little immediate relevance to the bomber offensive. The entry of the United States into the war as a belligerent could have an even greater claim to the status of being a turning point and closing this chapter at the end of

² Ibid., p.135.

1941 coincides with this. In classic historiographical terms, the arrival of Harris as C-in-C in February 1942 would have been a traditional depiction of the changes in events and fortunes of the Command. But, as will be shown, most of the changes had already been set in train by Portal and it was to be Harris's duty to put into effect the policies that had already been decided upon and with the equipment that was already on stream.³

Relationships with Allies

The United States of America. At the very beginning of the period covered by this chapter, the major strategic input from the United States was a telegram from President Roosevelt imploring all likely belligerents not to bomb civilian targets, and this will be dealt with under the section on legality and morality. For much of the rest of the period, relations between Britain and the USA were limited by neutrality, notwithstanding agreements to train pilots and sell aircraft.⁴ Heavy bombers were included in the quest for aircraft and the American attitude was conditioned by Roosevelt taking as proactive a stance as possible without Congressional reproach.⁵ The situation was further complicated by Roosevelt's electioneering stance during 1940, having promised the electorate that isolationism would continue and that young Americans would not be sent abroad to fight.⁶ Churchill subsequently described Roosevelt's successful re-election as 'an indescribable

³ It is of course true that Harris had an input into these events while he was DCAS from 25 November 1940 to 21 May 1941. For all appointments, see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.493-6.

⁴ See for example the agreements reached by Balfour, *Wings Over Westminster* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p.116 and ch.8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.191.

⁶ Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: The Military Geniuses who led the West to Victory in WWII*, (London: Penguin, 2009 [2008]), p.45. See also Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World 1940-1941* (London: Penguin, 2008 [2007]), p.184.

relief'.⁷ Up until November 1940, Britain had paid for all its purchases in the US from an ever-dwindling supply of dollars.⁸ Lend-lease 'transformed immediately the whole position'.⁹ All elements of the military machine benefited from this process, including the supply of aircraft for Bomber Command. Although the real interface in the direction of the strategic bombing campaign did not commence until after America's entry into the war, Portal was involved in a highly sensitive visit by a group senior American officers who visited Bomber Command in August 1940.¹⁰ The group was visiting Britain nominally to look at the question of 'standardisation of arms' whereas the real purpose was to hold 'staff conversations' and the Prime Minister had authorised all involved 'to be completely frank and withhold nothing from them'.¹¹ The momentum behind staff conversations and reciprocal visits soon started to increase culminating in the major Washington Conference soon after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; this process will be dealt with in a coherent whole in the next chapter.

Poland. Although in May 1939 Britain had made it clear that Polish independence was to be guaranteed, it was equally evident that little could actually be done in the event of a significant land attack.¹² The only means of supporting Poland physically would either be by means of a strategic bombing offensive, or a major Anglo-French land offensive in the west designed to relieve the pressure on Poland.¹³ But given the impracticalities of such an event taking place so early in the conflict, it was not seriously considered. Indeed, Allied

⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1949), Vol. II, p.489.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.493.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.503.

¹⁰ AIR 14/3526, Letter D Plans (Slessor) to C-in-C dated 19 August 1940.

¹¹ *Ibid.* In his autobiography, Slessor played down the importance of these talks; *The Central Blue*, pp.316-7.

¹² For the Prime Minister's speech to the House of Commons stating the HMG would 'lend the Polish Government all support in their power' see HC Deb, 31 May 1939, Vol.345, c.2415. See also Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, pp.697-707 and Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.105.

¹³ See, for example, Richard Overy, *1939: Countdown to War* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), p. 12 and P.M.H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (London: Longman, 1986), pp. 256-7.

unwillingness to ‘remove the gloves’ meant that while Poland was subject to indiscriminate bombing, Bomber Command replied against Germany with little more than leaflets – a response that caused ‘bitter comment’ in Poland.¹⁴ These events did not pass unnoticed in the Air Ministry with the Director of Plans (Air Commodore Slessor) conducting a detailed analysis of the situation to ascertain whether German air action justified the relaxation of the restrictions on aerial bombardment.¹⁵ The Note recommended that the RAF ‘should not be stampeded by Polish appeals into frittering away our air strength on ineffective and uneconomical tasks, merely for the sake of being able to say that we are doing something’.¹⁶

Norway. In the strict sense of operating with allies at the strategic interfaces, air operations during the Norway campaign do not fall within the scope of this thesis. For completeness, it is worth recording that Bomber Command flew sorties against German naval units in Norwegian waters and against airfields in an attempt to reduce German air activity.¹⁷ Operations were severely impeded by the extremity of the ranges at which the aircraft were operating; by very poor weather preventing target identification; and by almost non-existing weather reporting.¹⁸

France. The alignment of objectives at strategic interfaces is, by definition, a key task of the senior leader, and working with the situation following the German invasion was to

¹⁴ AIR 41/40, *AHB Narrative, Vol. II: Restricted Bombing September 1939- May 1941*, p.44.

¹⁵ AIR 14/194, Note on the Question of Relaxing the Bombardment Instructions and Initiating Extended Air Action, D of Plans, dated 7 September 1940. This Note will be discussed again under Legitimacy and Morality.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* See also the commentary on this at Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.135.

¹⁷ AIR 41/40, pp.75-9. See also AIR 41/20, *AHB Narrative: Review of the Campaign in Norway*. Detailed reports and narratives are at AIR 14/666 and AIR 14/2595.

¹⁸ AIR 41/40, p.77.

stretch all involved. The complexities were exacerbated by the requirement to conserve men and equipment countered by the desperate need to support an ally in peril. Anglo-French Staff talks had continued through the last year of peace and the differences between the British viewpoint and that of their continental allies became all the more strained following the outbreak of war.¹⁹ As the AHB Narrative makes very clear, and the official history agrees, the circular arguments were so repetitive, that it was just not worth doing more than summarising them.²⁰ At the root of the problem was that France, which was ‘ill-equipped in the air’, believed that all bomber forces should be used in direct support of the army.²¹ Demonstrating both a lack of understanding of the other potential uses of large bombers, and the unsuitability of these aircraft for that role, the French higher echelons (General Gamelin as Supreme Commander and General Vuilleman for the French Air Force) were unswerving in their military (i.e. army) defensive outlook.²² The British alternative was based initially on the premise that the initiative lay with Germany and the Cabinet paper that AVM Evill took with him to France echoed Slessor’s views that ‘we should not fritter away our striking force on unprofitable objectives in deference to a public clamour for retaliation or public criticism at inaction’.²³ But the paper then went on to confirm that ‘if enemy action against France or ourselves looks like being decisive’ then ‘our striking force must be employed at all costs in the manner which holds out the best hope of obtaining decisive results against Germany’.²⁴ Furthermore, the most profitable use of the force, in the event of indiscriminate German bombing, would be to attack the

¹⁹ Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, ch. XVII and Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.136.

²⁰ AIR 41/40, p.36 and Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.136.

²¹ AIR 41/40, p.36 and Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.136.

²² AIR 2/4474, Telegram Barratt to CAS dated 15 October 1939. Webster and Frankland, *op. cit.*, p.137. For a detailed analysis of the high level French politics involved see Martin S. Alexander, ‘The Fall of France, 1940’ in John Gooch (ed), *Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War* (London: Cass, 1990).

²³ CAB/66/2/36, COS (39)88 *Air Policy* dated 20 October 1939, para,2a and approved by the War Cabinet at CAB/65/1/55 dated 21 October 1939, para 5. Air Ministry instructions to Evill are at AIR 2/4474.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, *Air Policy*, para. 2b.

Ruhr, but that ‘we should not be the first to take the gloves off’.²⁵ The French were strongly opposed to attacks on the Ruhr, as they considered their equivalent industrial areas to be more vulnerable.²⁶ Likewise, the French were extremely reluctant to plan on attacking German road and rail communications for the same reasons: Gamelin was reported to be ‘obsessed with fear of attack on his own road and rail communications’.²⁷

Ironically, it was the misfortunes of war, rather than French opposition, that led to the shelving of the ‘Ruhr Plan’ following severe losses to formations of Wellington aircraft in December 1939.²⁸ A formal conference held in the Air Ministry on 22 February 1940 resulted in the CAS ruling that Bomber Command would only be called upon to attack the Ruhr in the most extreme circumstances; other options would therefore have to be considered.²⁹ The ambiguity of the situation, following the invasion of Denmark and Norway, was immediately evident in the Directive issued by the Air Ministry (from Director of Plans – still Slessor) to the new C-in-C (now Portal).³⁰ The Air Ministry based their thinking on two hypotheses, the first being that authority would be granted for unrestricted air action.³¹ The alternative was that Germany invaded either Belgium and/or Holland.³² Likely targets included troop concentrations, marshalling yards into the Ruhr and oil plants in the Ruhr.³³ To complete the picture of uncertainty, Slessor added a

²⁵ Ibid., para.2d.

²⁶ AIR 14/194 encl.10, Air Staff Commentary on the Interviews between Gamelin and Evill dated 25 October 1939. Notes of the Meeting are at AIR 2/4474, encl.19A.

²⁷ Ibid. and AIR 41/40, p.36. Full text at AIR 2/4474, Telegram Barratt to CAS dated 14 April 1940, encl 48A.

²⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.139.

²⁹ AIR 14/194, Notes of a Meeting held in CAS’s Room to Consider Plans for Air Action against Germany dated 22 February 1940.

³⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8, Directive dated 13 April 1940.

³¹ Ibid., para.2.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., paras. 8, 10 and 11.

manuscript PS reminding the C-in-C that neither set of plans could be implemented without an executive order from the Air Ministry, presumably because War Cabinet approval would be required for whatever course of action was decided upon.³⁴

The German army removed some of the doubt for those contemplating the future direction of the air offensive as they moved into the Low Countries early on the morning of 10 May 1940. The official historians have pointed out that any wishful thinking that the Germans may have applied a more civilised ‘code of morals’ on their western neighbours than on Poland and Czechoslovakia was quickly and cruelly ‘shattered by the mass bombing of Rotterdam’ following which it was clear that the ‘gloves were off’.³⁵ Webster and Frankland bluntly accused the government of acting in a hesitant manner over such a critical period.³⁶ In many ways, this was not surprising, albeit less than desirable. The Chamberlain government was rendered largely ineffective after the vote of censure on 8 May, even though the government actually won the division.³⁷ The period between this vote and Churchill assuming the premiership on 10 May 1940 saw Chamberlain vacillating between trying to soldier on, resign immediately or attempt to form a new administration.³⁸ Chamberlain chaired his last two Cabinet meetings on 10 May following the German invasion.³⁹ At the latter meeting he confirmed that the Labour members would not serve

³⁴ Ibid. AIR 41/40 ascribes this need for War Cabinet approval for the action, p.37.

³⁵ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.144

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For the full debate see HC Deb, 8 May 1940, Vol.360, cc 1251-1366. The classic quotation by Amery of Cromwell’s speech “In the name of God, go”, is at c.1151.

³⁸ This period is widely discussed in the literature. See, for example, John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory* (London: BCA, 1993) p.395, Carlo D’Este, *Warlord: A Life of Churchill at War, 1874-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), pp.423-6. For book length treatment see Graham Stewart, *Burying Caesar: Churchill, Chamberlain and the Battle for the Tory Party* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1999).

³⁹ CAB 65/7/10, W.M. (40) 118, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 10 May 1940 and CAB 65/7/14, W.M. 119 (40), War Cabinet Conclusions dated 10 May 1940.

under him in a coalition and he would tender his resignation to the King that evening.⁴⁰ Bombing policy was discussed at both Cabinet meetings with reports at the earlier one suggesting that German aircraft had bombed targets in ‘open towns’ and that RAF attacks on the Ruhr would be likely to follow; but the decision to go ahead was deferred until the second meeting.⁴¹ At this meeting, there was still doubt as to the scale of German attacks on the civilian population, but the CAS strongly advocated immediate attacks on the Ruhr and emphasised the psychological impact that they were likely to have on Germany.⁴² Again, the decision was deferred.⁴³ The matter was again deferred on May 12, but it was acknowledged that moon conditions would not be favourable for a further 4 days hence urgency in decision-making was not vital.⁴⁴ A further, lengthy, debate took place the following day with the pros and cons discussed in detail and again it was concluded that the decision should be deferred pending developments on the Continent.⁴⁵ A further deferral on 14 May was followed the next day by further bad news from France and gloomy predictions for the prospects of the French holding out.⁴⁶ The CAS briefed on the extensive air operations by both fighters and medium bomber aircraft on the Continent, and on the high loss rates.⁴⁷ The discussion on the deployment of the heavy bombers was again protracted; it was emphasised that they were not suitable for night time use against communications targets in support of land forces, but could be used against both oil refineries and marshalling yards.⁴⁸ At this meeting the Prime Minister (i.e. Churchill)

⁴⁰ Ibid., para.5

⁴¹ CAB 65/7/10, op. cit, para2.

⁴² CAB 65/7/11, op. cit, para.1.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ CAB 65/7/14, W.M. (40) 119C, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 12 May 1940, para.4 and CAB 65/13/6, W.M. (40) 119C, Conclusions, Minute 4.

⁴⁵ CAB 65/13/7, W.M. (40) 120, War Cabinet Conclusions, Minute 2 dated 13 May 1940.

⁴⁶ CAB 65/7/18, W.M. (40) 123, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 15 May 1940

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ CAB 65/13/9, W.M. (40) 123, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 15 May 1940, Minute 2. Douglas wrote to Portal with the detail at AIR 2/4474, Letter DCAS to C-in-C dated 15 May 1940, encl. 54A.

concluded that ‘it was clear that the War Cabinet were united in favour of taking immediate action in delivering a hard blow at Germany’.⁴⁹ The minutes further record that C-in-C Bomber Command had confirmed that a force of 100 aircraft would be available for attacks east of the Rhine that night and authorisation was duly given for the strategic air offensive at last to begin.⁵⁰

The rapid pace of events in France and the Low Countries was such that the British policy for the use of the striking force prevailed over French preferences. Hopes for German restraint proved unfounded, thus French objections based on the fear of reprisals were swept aside. Interestingly, the causal link made by the official historians between the bombing of Rotterdam and authorisation for attacks east of the Rhine is not borne out in the recorded Cabinet discussions on that day.⁵¹ It is also worthy of note that Churchill was altogether more aggressive in his condemnation of the enemy, who, ‘by the many atrocities he had already committed, had given ample justification in the eyes of the world for an attack on the Ruhr.’⁵² He was likewise convinced of the inevitability of an attack on Britain irrespective of any actions (or restraint) shown by the RAF.⁵³ The discussions in the War Cabinet also included the wider debates on the reinforcement of fighters for France and take the historiographical debate beyond the cinematic portrayal of Dowding steadfastly refusing to deplete his Command; in a reply to a direct question from the Prime Minister, the CAS ‘said that he would not, at the moment advise the despatch of any additional fighters to France’ (emphasis in the original).⁵⁴ Although not directly related to the

⁴⁹ CAB 65/13/9, op. cit.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² CAB 65/13/7, op.cit.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ CAB 65/13/9, op.cit.

employment of the heavy bombers these decisions saw the twin themes of offensive action and the defence of the United Kingdom, and London in particular, return to central focus as dominant influences for the strategic decision makers.

Although the War Cabinet had authorised operations over the Ruhr, and elsewhere east of the Rhine, there was no immediate alleviation of the frustrations caused by Bomber Command being pulled in all directions. The problems were caused, in part, by the interface between Bomber Command and the Air Ministry being, in practice, a significant overlap between the operational and strategic levels. On 17 May 1940, Portal wrote to the DCAS which expressed the full range of operational and strategic issues facing his Command.⁵⁵ At the practical level, Portal queried as to whether it would be possible to have a ‘general directif (sic) for the Heavy Bombers, and then be left to get on with it’. Furthermore, he complained about the frequent changes in plan necessitating changes in flying programmes and bomb loads. At the heart of the problem was that the Air Ministry sought to ‘combine the functions of laying down policy and controlling actual operations’ which Portal opined as being a grave mistake.⁵⁶ But at the same time, Portal’s appreciation of the use to which his aircraft were being put was a concise and masterly appreciation of the strategic situation. He pointed out the sterling efforts of the Blenheim Group operating in direct support of the land forces in France, but was clearly not convinced about the use of heavy bombers beyond the two squadrons originally tasked (partly to meet French demands).⁵⁷ Portal detailed the considerable difficulties his crews experienced in attacking lines of communication which were heavily defended and what damage was caused was

⁵⁵ AIR 20/23, Letter C-in-C to DCAS dated 17 May 1940 covering ‘Memorandum by the AOC-in-Chief, Bomber Command’.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Memorandum, para. 1.

relatively easily circumvented.⁵⁸ Instead, Portal advocated heavy attacks on the Ruhr (and elsewhere) which would lead the enemy to withdraw fighters for defence of those vital assets.⁵⁹ Furthermore, retaliatory attacks on Britain by the Luftwaffe would ease the pressure on the land forces in France and allow RAF fighters the chance to destroy them.⁶⁰ A similar argument applied to the almost certain withdrawal of flak.⁶¹ This conceptualisation of the vital battle for control of the air was one to which the senior leaders would return over the course of the war, and in particular in the context of the invasion of North West Europe.

A detailed account of the role of the RAF in France (as with Norway) is beyond the scope of a thesis based on the strategic air offensive and is well covered elsewhere.⁶² It is, however, instructive to acknowledge that whatever agreement may have been made at ‘3-star’ level between Peirse and Portal, the Chiefs of Staff and the politicians beyond them had a say in what actually happened. For example, following a minute from Peirse to Newall on the outcome of an Air Staff conference on 19 May 1940, CAS wrote at the bottom reminding his deputy that ‘on no account must we go back on what we have promised the French’.⁶³ From 10 May onwards, Churchill was ever more prone to involving himself at the tactical level thereby complicating the organisational overlap described above. A classic example of this occurred following his visit to France on 16 May during which he agreed to increased use of heavy bombers against the Meuse

⁵⁸ Ibid., para. 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid., para.3. This situation features in Churchill’s acknowledgement of the need to keep fighters for the defence of London in anticipation of reprisals following the attacks on the Ruhr; see CAB 65/13/10, W.M. (40) 124, War Cabinet Conclusions, Minute 1 dated 16 May 1940.

⁶⁰ AIR 20/23, Memorandum, op.cit, para 3.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² AIR 41/40, pp.87-103 and John Terraine, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-1945* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), Part II. See also AIR 41/21, AHB Narrative, *Review of the Campaign in France and the Low Countries*.

⁶³ AIR 2 4474, Handwritten CAS reply to DCAS dated 19 May 1940, encl. 59A.

crossings and directed the War Cabinet by telegram.⁶⁴ The CAS readily agreed to the use of Bomber Command and saved his ammunition for the continuing debate on whether more fighters should be sent to France.⁶⁵ The AHB Narrative records the difficulty in apportioning exactly the numbers of aircraft attacking specific categories of target, but it is clear that after the peak caused by Churchill's visit when some 50% of the bomber effort was in direct support it decreased markedly thereafter to about 35% on 19 May.⁶⁶ Other targets attacked over the period include road and rail communications at Maastricht, Aachen and Munchen-Gladbach (sic); the coking plant at Hamborn; docks and marshalling yards at Dusseldorf; railway sidings at Hamburg; and the aerodrome at Duisberg.⁶⁷

Inevitably, the situation continued to ebb and flow depending on the tactical situation and the state of the moon. Daylight raids by heavy bombers, and especially the medium bombers, were subject to high loss rates and operations were concentrated at night either against 'self-illuminating targets' such as coking plants, or during the lighter moon phases.⁶⁸ This ambiguity continued throughout the Battle of France and was reflected in the Directives sent by the Air Ministry to Barratt (AOC-in-C British Air Forces in France) copied to Portal on 30 May and again to Portal on 4 June 1940 in which it was 'necessary to give priority to the operations in support of French land forces'.⁶⁹ Beyond this, the latter Directive included attacks on oil as being 'the primary aim' and the German aircraft

⁶⁴ AIR 41/40, p.91 and CAB 65/7/20, W.M. (40) 125, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 16 May 1940.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ AIR 41/40, p.91.

⁶⁷ CAB 65/7/21, W.M. (40) 127, para.2, CAS Report to the War Cabinet, 17 May 1940.

⁶⁸ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to AOC-in-C British Air Forces in France (Barratt) and repeated to Portal dated 30 May 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (ii). AIR 14/775 (Bomber Command file copy).

⁶⁹ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Portal dated 4 June 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (iii). AIR 14/775.

industry as the next most important target set.⁷⁰ A further Prime Ministerial visit to France on 13 June caused another flurry of bomber activity to bolster French morale, but arguably more significantly, the French had reversed their objections against bomber operations against Italy and RAF Servicing Units were to be returned to France.⁷¹ Italy had declared war on 10 June and operations (codenamed Haddock) had been planned against Italian targets from southern France, but were thwarted by the locals in Provence who, fearing reprisals, drove lorries onto the airfields to block the runways.⁷² Following a change of heart, raids were launched against Salon on 15 June and then Milan on 17 June by which time France's request for terms with Germany necessitated their withdrawal.⁷³

USSR. For the few months in the period covered by this chapter when the USSR counted as an ally following the German invasion, the impact of the strategic bomber offensive on Germany and its support to the conflict in the east was minimal. Indeed the Air Staff looked at the issue from their own perspective conducting an appreciation of what the impact of the air war in the east would be on their own operations, with particular emphasis on the withdrawal of fighters.⁷⁴

Vision, Purpose and Direction – Portal and Invasion

No matter what the nature and size of an organisation, it is essential that the senior leadership have a shared vision and understanding of the purpose of their enterprise. This

⁷⁰ Ibid, para. 5

⁷¹ CAB 65/7/60, W.M. (40) 165, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 13 June 1940, para.2.

⁷² AIR 41/40, p.85. An earlier raid of 36 Whitleys had been launched from the UK direct on 11 June 1940. For a more graphic account, see Sholto Douglas, *Years of Command* (London: Collins, 1966), pp.68-9. Douglas was DCAS at the time.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ AIR 2/4475, 'Appreciation on the German Soviet Air War', encls 88 and 89A.

in turn must be communicated to all involved, including those at the strategic interfaces. Following the German attack on Scandinavia, the Chiefs of Staff had reviewed the situation, anticipating either an attack on France or a knock-out blow against Britain.⁷⁵ The Chiefs concluded that if Germany was intent on achieving a decision that year our ‘strategic policy and military preparations, both for offence and defence, should, therefore, be based on this assumption’ with the ‘corollary that ‘we shall have to undertake an air offensive against Germany some time during the coming months’.⁷⁶ In the event, the fall of France produced the worst of all possible scenarios with Germany occupying a coastline from the Arctic Circle down to the Bay of Biscay and able to operate against the United Kingdom with relative impunity.⁷⁷ In concert with Ministry of Economic Warfare, the Chiefs of Staff had completed a subsequent Review in which they came to the view that Germany might be defeated by the bombing of economic and psychological objectives and, along with the economic pressures of a blockade would result in serious economic pressure and widespread revolt against the Nazi regime.⁷⁸ With the benefit of hindsight it could be argued that the Chiefs were grossly optimistic, especially with the resources at their disposal.⁷⁹ But the strategic context at the time gave them little option, other than the unthinkable (under Churchill) of seeking terms with Hitler. Yet, as the official historians acknowledged, the policy outcomes from the review would subsequently be ‘an important factor in the defeat of Germany’.⁸⁰ The prospects for victory were summarised by Churchill on the anniversary of the outbreak of war:

⁷⁵ CAB 66/7/25, W.P. (40) 145, Review of the Strategical (sic) Situation on the Assumption that Germany has decided to seek a Decision in 1940 dated 4 May 1940.

⁷⁶ Ibid., para, 3.

⁷⁷ See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.146.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.147.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

The Navy can lose us the war, but only the Air Force can win it. Therefore our supreme effort must be to gain overwhelming mastery in the Air. The Fighters are our salvation, but the Bombers alone provide the means of victory. We must therefore develop the power to carry an ever-increasing volume of explosives to Germany, so as to pulverise the entire industry and scientific structure on which the war effort and economic life of the enemy depends, while holding him at arm's length in our Island.⁸¹

From this short analysis, and a very clear iteration of the 'supreme commander's' intent, the senior leaders charged with the policy formulation and the execution of the strategic air offensive were left in no doubt as to what was expected of them.

Even without the uncertainty that had been engendered by the need to support land forces in France, the Air Ministry continued to issue Directives to Portal on a regular basis until his promotion to CAS on 4 October 1940. The official historians have taken this as evidence that, judging from their number and form, the Air Staff intended 'to exercise the closest supervision over operations carried out by Bomber Command'.⁸² In fact, Portal himself in his Despatch on the operations in Norway confirmed that:

The control of the operation of my Command was virtually assumed by the Air Ministry. Although my advice was often sought, I was not responsible for the selection of objectives, nor for deciding the effort to be employed against each.⁸³

To some extent, this is not altogether surprising in that the War Cabinet under Churchill, the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Staffs in each of the Service Departments acted as clearing houses for information and requests for support, acting de facto as an operational level headquarters. But their attention to detail was clearly irksome to the Commander-in-Chief.

⁸¹ CAB 66/11/32, W.P. (40) 352, The Munitions Situation: Memorandum by the Prime Minister dated 3 September 1940, para. 1.

⁸² Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p. 149.

⁸³ AIR 14/669, 'Despatch by Air Marshal Sir C F A Portal... on the Operations Undertaken by Bomber Command during the Norwegian Campaign, 4 April to 10 May 1940', Part II, p. 12.

With the task of supporting allied land forces in abeyance for some time to come, there should have been scope for the strategic air offensive to gain real momentum, but again the policy for the employment of the force was mixed. The need to ward off the risk of a German invasion had been thought about as early as 7 May with Portal attending an inter-service conference in the Air Ministry to advise on the most appropriate use of air power.⁸⁴ A further such conference on 19 June resulted in a new Directive being sent to Portal confirming that the ‘primary offensive of the Air Striking Force must be directed towards those objectives which will have the most immediate effect on reducing the scale of air attack on this country’.⁸⁵ Portal was therefore also given a list of potentially profitable targets in the German aircraft industry and key communications targets such as marshalling yards and major canals. But the Command was also required to continue operations laying mines in coastal waters (using Hampdens in a role known as ‘gardening’); attacks on oil targets; and destruction of crops and forests.⁸⁶ As the risk of invasion increased, discussions between the Air Ministry and Portal resulted in yet another Directive this time elevating attacks on shipping to the highest priority with emphasis on Kiel, the *Scharnhorst* and the *Deutschland* and any other capital ships in port there.⁸⁷ Docks at Hamburg (where the *Bismarck* was reported to be), Bremen and Rotterdam along

⁸⁴ AIR 14/266, ‘Notes on a Conference held at the Air Ministry on Tuesday 7 May to Review Plans and Operations for the employment of Air Forces in Connection with the Invasion of this Country’, encl. 12A. Dowding and Portal’s further inputs to this work are at AIR 2/4474, Letters dated 14 May and 15 May respectively, encls. 55B and 58A.

⁸⁵ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Portal dated 20 June 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (iv). AIR 14/775.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*

⁸⁷ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Portal dated 4 July 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (v). AIR 14/775.

with other ports in Holland where there were concentrations of barges and other invasion shipping. ‘Gardening’ operations were also to be increased.⁸⁸

Following this series of re-prioritisations, the Air Staff concluded that operations had hitherto been too dispersed and for the forthcoming period of moonlight, the Command should concentrate its efforts on fewer targets, but with greater weight of effort with ‘a view to complete destruction rather than harassing effect’.⁸⁹ Five aircraft depots and five airframe assembly factories were given the highest priority, complete with the required bomb loads necessary to achieve the destruction desired.⁹⁰ Portal responded with a detailed criticism, pointing out the practical difficulty in getting to these targets as they were at extremes of range and then actually hitting them; he reckoned that only three of the ten could be found by an average crew on a good moonlit night.⁹¹ In what was to become a highly important factor in future bombing policy, Portal went on to say that as almost all of the targets were isolated, the bombs that did not hit directly ‘would do no damage and cause minimum disturbance’; the Air Staff’s response to this was that only real damage had been considered.⁹² What can be seen from this is one of the first steps towards an area bombing policy in which targets were specifically chosen to have significant secondary effects (what today would be called collateral damage).⁹³ Portal also challenged the degree of destruction necessary suggesting that the effect required was to stop the factory working and that the extra effort required to destroy the target completely could have been used

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Portal dated 13 July 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (vi). See also AIR 41/40, p.115. AIR 14/775.

⁹⁰ Directive, 13 July 1940, op. cit.

⁹¹ AIR 2/4474, Letter C-in-C to Air Ministry dated 16 July 1940, encl. 83. See also AIR 41/40, p.116.

⁹² AIR 2/4474, op. cit.

⁹³ See also Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.150.

elsewhere.⁹⁴ In a follow-up letter to the DCAS, Portal reminded the Air Staff that his Command was the ‘one directly offensive weapon in our whole armoury, the one means by which we can undermine the morale of a large part of the enemy people, shake their faith in the Nazi regime, and at the same time and with the very same bombs, dislocate the major part of their heavy industry, much of their chemical industry and a good part of their oil production’.⁹⁵ Portal concluded with his opinion that it ‘was entirely wrong’ to use his Command for bolstering Fighter Command and the other elements of home defence until operationally proven essential.⁹⁶

A Conference in the Air Ministry on 22 July resulted in the issue of a further Directive on 24 July which did little to change the priorities, but greatly expanded the range of targets; the aircraft industry was again highest priority with oil and then communications following on.⁹⁷ The list was further expanded a week later to include more power targets.⁹⁸ This interlude depicts the Air Staff as relishing an operational level role while the C-in-C had clearly grasped the strategic policy necessary to make the best use of the offensive potential of the Air Striking Force. Although Churchill’s words of ‘intent’ quoted at the beginning of this section actually followed this period by some weeks, it is again clear that both senior leaders were in accord. A shared aggressive spirit was also in evidence. On 20 July, Portal spent the night at Chequers and was challenged by Churchill as to what could be done about bombing Berlin by 1 September; Portal’s

⁹⁴ AIR 41/40, p.116.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.117. AIR 14/194, Letter C-in-C to DCAS dated 17 July 1940. Portal finished this letter, having explained why he had written formally about the Directive, asking Douglas to treat this communication as ‘entirely personal’.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Conference Agenda and Notes at AIR 2/4475, encl. 1B. Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Portal dated 24 July 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (vii). AIR 14/775.

⁹⁸ Directive (D of Plans - Slessor) to Portal dated 13 July 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (viii). AIR 14/775.

response was that plans were ready for the heavy bomber force to make such an attack at twelve hours notice at any time after 1 August.⁹⁹ When the Luftwaffe inadvertently bombed central London on 24 August, Bomber Command responded the next night and again the following week.¹⁰⁰ How much this goaded Hitler into launching his all-out attack on London rather than maintaining the pressure on Fighter Command is debatable, but the incidental effect actually met some of Portal's predictions from the days of the Battle of France.

The pattern of responses that had been evident in the First World War, with demands for adequate air defence of London and reprisals against Germany, were then repeated with increasing pressure, not least from Churchill, to retaliate against German cities.¹⁰¹ For example, the CAS briefed the War Cabinet on 10 September 1940 on German air action against London; the Prime Minister expressed the view that the bombing had been indiscriminate and suggested that British aircraft should not bring back their ordnance if they had failed to locate their prescribed target (the direct implication being that bombs could be dropped, to useful effect, anywhere in Germany).¹⁰² Discussion the following day was based on a suggestion that Britain should threaten Germany with reprisals against 'any one of twenty German towns (to be named) if the indiscriminate

⁹⁹ Richards, *Portal*, p.161. See also AIR 14/ 1930, Letter C-in-C to DCAS dated 21 July 1940 and subsequent Memo, DCAS to CAS on the same day starting with 'C-in-C Bomber Command stayed with Prime Minister last night'. See also Letter Churchill to Sinclair and Newall dated 20 July asking the same question; Ian Hunter (ed), *Winston and Archie: The Letters of Sir Archibald Sinclair and Winston S. Churchill 1915-1960* (London: Politico, 2005), p.241. The detailed response followed on 23 July; Hunter, *op.cit*, p.242.

¹⁰⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.152.

¹⁰¹ See AIR 41/40, p.119 and CAB 65/9/16, W.M. (40) 294, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 19 September 1940; at this meeting the War Cabinet authorised the use of mines over Berlin specifically as retaliation for German use of them over central London.

¹⁰² CAB 65/9/8, W.M. (40) 246, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 10 September 1940, item 1.

bombing of London continued'.¹⁰³ It was agreed, however, that the bomber force should be used only on military targets.¹⁰⁴ The preference not to jettison bombs in a haphazard manner over German, or occupied, territory was further emphasised by the Secretary of State for Air (Sinclair) in a letter to Churchill later the same day.¹⁰⁵ Churchill recorded a note sent to General Ismay on 19 September for the Chiefs of Staff to consider floating the idea (and was frustrated that nothing was done about it for over a month following 'one objection after another').¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, the official historians have made the point that Portal suggested the same reprisal of attacking any one of twenty named towns, which they list, to the Air Staff also on 11 September; but they did not make the connection with the Cabinet discussion.¹⁰⁷

Elements within the Air Staff, at this stage, still believed that selective attacks would bring about the required damage to key target sets in general and oil in particular.¹⁰⁸ This was still very evident in the Directive of 21 September which focused on the continuing need for attacks on invasion shipping and new targets within the aircraft industry; operations against the German submarine industry were also instigated.¹⁰⁹ Attacks on Berlin were to be continued 'from time to time' with particular emphasis on gas

¹⁰³ CAB 65/9/9, W.M. (40) 247, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 11 September 1940, item 1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, p.253, Letter dated 11 September 1940.

¹⁰⁶ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. II, p.321.

¹⁰⁷ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.153. The letter is at AIR 14/1925, Letter C-in-C to Air Ministry dated 11 September 1940. Richards, *Portal*, p.165, reports the same letter but does not make the connection either.

¹⁰⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.152 indicated that Pierse as Vice Chief still believed this, but implied (p.153) that the view was not shared by all in the Air Staff.

¹⁰⁹ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Portal dated 21 September 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (ix). AIR 14/775.

and electricity plants in order to dislocate the life of the community; an individual factory manufacturing electric cables was singled out for special priority.¹¹⁰

Portal, in his final days at Bomber Command before taking over as CAS on 4 October 1940, produced a Review of Bombing Policy in which he acknowledged that attacks on industrial targets would ‘produce shortages in things essential to the enemy’s war effort’ such as oil and aircraft.¹¹¹ He added that these attacks would obtain ‘incidentally, a considerable morale effect on all Germans who live near a target’ or on the routes to them. Portal admitted that although these attacks ‘may ultimately be decisive’, they would have no immediate effect. He therefore queried whether there should be a ‘temporary change in our policy, directing our offensive primarily against the will of the German people to continue the war’. Portal went on to advocate ‘very heavy material destruction’ interspersed with light attacks that would produce panic and exaggerated reports. In the face of censorship, rumours would flourish, producing an atmosphere of gloom and uncertainty.¹¹² In a draft letter for the consideration of the Air Council, Portal effectively sought to reverse extant policy, making the enemy will to win the war the primary target and the ‘destruction of his means to win the war as an incremental or indirect task’.¹¹³

Assessment. In the short period that Portal spent as C-in-C, he demonstrated a very clear understanding of the strategic imperatives as well as a masterful grasp of the complete

¹¹⁰ Ibid., para.12.

¹¹¹ AIR 14/194, ‘Review of Bombing Policy – October 1940. Note by Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Bomber Command’ dated 30 September 1940; encl 76C.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ AIR 14/194, ‘Draft Letter to Air Ministry’, encl 76B, dated 24 September 1940, para.13.

range of tactical details.¹¹⁴ It is also clear that his offensive mindedness was in direct concert with the thinking of Churchill who described him as ‘the accepted star of the Air Force’.¹¹⁵ Portal also retained the close patronage of Trenchard.¹¹⁶ From diary references and memoirs, it is clear that Portal also made a considerable impact on his staff. As a Group Captain in the Bomber Command Operations Room, Hugh Lloyd (later AVM Sir Hugh Lloyd) confided to his diary that ‘I like the new C-in-C; (Portal), young friendly, active and makes up his mind quickly’.¹¹⁷ This was in marked contrast to his predecessor (Ludlow-Hewitt) was ‘a hopeless bungler and fuddler; unable to make up his mind and will change it five times in as many minutes’.¹¹⁸ Portal knew his own mind; understood the complexities of senior command; and grasped what the bomber force could and could not do. His emphasis on attacking German morale became fundamental to the following campaign.

Vision and Purpose – The Coming of Area Bombing

The promotion of Portal to CAS (the right man for the job, but for the wrong reasons according to a recent historian) saw Sir Richard Peirse move from VCAS to C-in-C Bomber Command.¹¹⁹ ACM Sir Wilfred Freeman became the new Vice-Chief with effect from 5 November 1940 and was to be a useful sounding board for Portal.¹²⁰ With the

¹¹⁴ For the latter in particular see Richards, *Portal*, p.162.

¹¹⁵ Churchill, *Second World War*, p.19.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Richards, *op. cit.*, p.157.

¹¹⁷ RAF Museum Hendon, AVM Sir H P Lloyd ‘Strictly Personal and Confidential’ diary 15 April 1940 – 20 January 1941. Entry dated 15 April 1940. See also Sir Maurice Dean, *The Royal Air Force and Two World Wars*, (London: Cassell, 1979), pp.267-8.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹¹⁹ For the politics and scheming behind the removal of Newall see Sebastian Ritchie, ‘A Political Intrigue Against the Chief of the Air Staff: The Down fall of Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall’ *War & Society*, 16(1) 1998, pp.83-97. The quotation is Ritchie’s last sentence at p.97.

¹²⁰ For a not wholly impartial biography of Freeman see Anthony Furse, *Wilfred Freeman: The Genius Behind Allied Survival and Air Supremacy 1939-1945*, (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999). See ch.10 for Freeman as VCAS and pp. 159-160 for the nature of the relationship.

threat if imminent invasion receding, it was considered to be an appropriate occasion on which to review bombing policy for the winter months.¹²¹ The new Directive acknowledged that the events had hitherto necessitated a dispersion of Bomber Command effort, but that it would now be appropriate to concentrate on two principal objectives, namely oil and ‘concentrated attacks on ... objectives in large towns and centres of industry with the primary aim of causing very heavy material destruction which will demonstrate to the enemy the power and severity of air bombardment and the hardship and dislocation which will result from it’.¹²² This would be part of a definite attempt ‘to affect the morale of the German people when they can no longer expect an early victory’.¹²³ Berlin should be attacked whenever conditions allowed.¹²⁴ Other towns selected as targets should include those of an appropriate size and containing important objectives; they should be attacked with high explosives, incendiaries and delayed action bombs with sequencing arranged to put the maximum pressure on the emergency service.¹²⁵ So what had started as a C-in-C’s Review of Policy became a formal Directive with Portal imposing his vision in concert with Churchill’s higher intent. The AHB Narrative unequivocally labels this section as the ‘beginning of Area Bombing’.¹²⁶ In the War Cabinet, Churchill explained that objectives should be military targets, but that ‘the civilian population around the target areas must be made to feel the weight of the war.’¹²⁷ He saw this as a ‘broader interpretation of our present policy, and not as any fundamental change’.¹²⁸ As will be discussed below under

¹²¹ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Peirse dated 30 October 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xi). AIR 14/776.

¹²² *Ibid.*, para.3. Oil remained the top priority as was emphasised in a follow-on Directive of 10 November.

¹²³ Directive, 30 October, *op.cit.*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, para.4.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ AIR 41/40, p.144.

¹²⁷ CAB 65/9/42, W.M. (40) 280, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 30 October 1940, item 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* See also the correspondence between Churchill and Sinclair; Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, p.266.

the section on legality, Government policy had been strictly to avoid indiscriminate bombing so Churchill was somewhat stretching the point here.

The new C-in-C was sent a draft copy of the Directive in advance, not least because it did mark a major shift from the tone of the Directives that Peirse had, until recently, been either sending out or sanctioning.¹²⁹ Where for Portal the glass was more than half full, Peirse saw it as least half empty, worrying that the attacks would be beyond the capability of his people and that as few would arrive on targets, the raids would have little more than nuisance value.¹³⁰ Although the Air Staff had little option but to reconsider the Directive, the official historians wryly commented that there was little change in ‘form or emphasis’.¹³¹

The vulnerability of the German economy to its oil reserves continued to act as an irritant to the policy makers, attracting considerable attention from the intelligence specialists and a specific ‘Committee on the German Oil Position’ was set up under the chairmanship of Mr Geoffrey Lloyd MP and under the wider supervision of Lord Hankey who chaired the ‘Committee on Preventing Oil from Reaching Enemy Powers’.¹³² Given the high powered composition of these Committees, the Chiefs of Staff were hardly in a position to challenge the main findings; nevertheless, the Chiefs qualified their recommendations on the subject by stating that their conclusions were based ‘on the

¹²⁹ AIR 2/4475, Letter Douglas to Peirse dated 25 October 1940, encl. 41A. See also Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.156.

¹³⁰ AIR 2/4475, Letter Peirse to Douglas dated 28 October 1940, encl. 42A.

¹³¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.157. AIR 2/4475 Minutes 38 and 39 dated 25 October show that CAS made a few small amendments, but little else.

¹³² AIR 41/40, p.145. See CAB 66/14/25, W.P. (41) 2 dated 2 January 1941 covering P.O.G. (40) 64; these were the sixth and fifth reports respectively.

assumption that that the figures in the Lloyd Report are correct'.¹³³ The recommendation was, however, accepted that air attacks should be concentrated 'mainly on sources of synthetic production of oil in Germany'.¹³⁴ When bombing aircraft with sufficient range became available, the Lloyd Report recommended action should be taken against Danube oil ports, Italy and her allies.¹³⁵ A further paper was submitted by the Foreign Secretary (Eden) on the desirability of bombing Romanian oilfields.¹³⁶ The Chiefs of Staff emphasised the importance of adhering to the aim until it was achieved, but acknowledged that weather and moon conditions would be such that a secondary aim would be appropriate and this was to be 'lowering of enemy morale, particularly in industrial areas'.¹³⁷ This was translated into an appropriate Directive for Bomber Command and issued on 15 January 1941, although Peirse had been informally warned of the impending change by Harris (the new DCAS— brought in by Portal to strengthen the team).¹³⁸

The January 1941 Oil Directive acknowledged, as had the Chiefs of Staff, that weather and visibility conditions would limit the 'occasions when it will be profitable to plan attacks against any of the 17 oil objectives'.¹³⁹ The reality was that by the end of February 1941, Bomber Command had actually only been able to reach oil targets three

¹³³ Ibid., para.4 of W.P. (41) 2. For the full COS Report on Air Bombardment Policy dated 7 January 1941 see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.9. See para.24 for the caveat.

¹³⁴ Ibid., Recommendation (a)

¹³⁵ CAB 66/14/25, op. cit, para.4 of W.P. (41) 2

¹³⁶ CAB 66/14/24, W.P. (41) 1. The Question of Bombing the Roumanian (sic) Oilfields dated 4 January 1941.

¹³⁷ COS Report on Air Bombardment Policy, op.cit, Recommendation (b).

¹³⁸ Directive (VCAS - Freeman) to Peirse dated 15 January 1941, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xiii). AIR 14/776. It was described by the official historians as 'the most pungent' yet; Vol. I, p.162. RAF Museum Hendon: Harris Papers, H112, encl. 38A; Letter Harris to Peirse dated 2 January 1941(also at AIR 14/1930).

¹³⁹ Directive, 15 January, op.cit, para.4

times.¹⁴⁰ The issue was compounded by the growing weight of evidence suggesting that minimal damage was being done to the ‘precision’ targets.¹⁴¹ With growing pressure from the Admiralty, and the increasingly desperate straits in which the convoys were placed, the available weight of effort had to be switched to the Battle of the Atlantic. In a directive written in his role as Minister of Defence, Churchill stated that:

We must take the offensive against the U-boat and the Focke-Wulf wherever we can and whenever we can. The U-boat at sea must be hunted, the U-boat in the building yard, or in dock must be bombed. The Focke-Wulf and other bombers employed against our shipping must be attacked in the air and in their nests.¹⁴²

The Air Ministry Directive of 9 March repeated the Prime Minister’s words and bluntly ascribed the change in policy to Churchill’s ruling.¹⁴³ The list of targets was amended somewhat later in the month by the DCAS.¹⁴⁴ The official historians have pointed out that this interlude in the strategic bombing offensive allowed Bomber Command and the Air Staff the opportunity to rework their high-level thinking on just what the force could achieve: had they continued against oil targets they concluded that ‘it would probably have done a great deal more damage to its prestige than to its targets’.¹⁴⁵ This is borne out in the practical difficulties facing the Command. Loss of crews had resulted in the Prime Minister observing that aircrew were the Command’s limiting factor and should be

¹⁴⁰ AIR 41/40, p.146. See also Letter Sinclair to Churchill dated 9 March 1941, Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, p.293.

¹⁴¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I., p164 describes the evidence of attacks on Gelsenkirchen in December 1940. Other reports had been passed on by allies; see Letter Churchill to Sinclair dated 31 December 1940 quoting a report as being the ‘most serious and precise of the many melancholy reports we are having about our Air bombing’, Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, p.281. Sinclair produced a Cabinet paper on the subject; CAB 66/14/13, W.P. (40) 383, ‘Reports on the Effectiveness of Royal Air Force Bombing Operations’ dated 16 December 1940.

¹⁴² ‘The Battle of the Atlantic: Directive by the Minister of Defence’ dated 6 March 1941, reproduced in full in Churchill, *Second World War*, p.107.

¹⁴³ Directive (VCAS - Freeman) to Peirse dated 9 March 1941, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xiv), paras. 2 and 1 respectively. AIR 14/776.

¹⁴⁴ Directive (DCAS - Harris) to Peirse dated 18 March 1941, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xv). AIR 14/776.

¹⁴⁵ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.165-6.

conserved over the winter months with no undue weather risks being taken.¹⁴⁶ The aircraft fleets were also plagued with problems of unserviceability.¹⁴⁷

Attitudes within the Air Staff towards the use of Bomber Command in support of the Battle of the Atlantic were coloured by the question of ownership and of the parallel ‘trend towards two separate air forces’ with one for the RAF and one for the RN.¹⁴⁸ Although it has to be admitted that some of Harris’s views on the subject verge on the vitriolic, the strength of feeling was widely shared.¹⁴⁹ Harris voiced the opinion of many airmen, both in Whitehall and at Bomber Command, that in supporting the Atlantic campaign they had been forced onto the defensive thus allowing the Germans the advantage.¹⁵⁰ The Air Staff were also of the opinion that effort should be concentrated on lucrative targets such as the core industry and the dockyards, rather than, at the other extreme, ‘these comparatively fruitless Atlantic patrols’.¹⁵¹ But the problem remained, if Bomber Command was to return to the strategic air offensive, how should it be employed without loss of prestige with the resultant starvation of assets?

In the first instance, the Prime Minister directed in March 1941 that Future Operational Planning Section should conduct a comprehensive long-term review; this was

¹⁴⁶ Letter Churchill to Sinclair dated 4 January 1941, Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, p.282. See also Harris Papers H112, Minute DCAS to CAS dated 26 April 1941.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Harris Papers, H112, Minute DCAS to CAS dated 12 March 1941,

¹⁴⁹ Harris Papers, H112, Minute DCAS to CAS dated 28 February 1941 in which he refers to pre-war decision by Inskip as ‘unjustified, arbitrary and ignorant’.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. See also AIR 41/40, Letter Peirse to Portal dated 15 April complaining about the weight of ordnance being dropped into harbours which would be better dropped on Germany.

¹⁵¹ Harris Papers H112, Minute DCAS to DCNS (Philips – addressed unusually as ‘Dear Tom’ - as opposed to the conventional ‘My Dear Phillips’), dated 21 March 1941.

subsequently published in June 1941 as the 'Future Strategy Paper'.¹⁵² The Chiefs of Staff saw this as a valuable background for planning the future conduct of the war and the possible involvement of America.¹⁵³ The Introduction to 'Future Strategy' described the war as being one of economy and morale with each of equal importance and dealt with these 'fronts from both the British and enemy angles'.¹⁵⁴ The paper emphasised the need to maintain a blockade against Germany and noted each of the areas of 'leakage'.¹⁵⁵ But it also acknowledged the unique contribution of the bombing offensive which had to be 'a continuous offensive of attrition, progressive and cumulative as our resources grow'.¹⁵⁶ The 'Future Strategy' analysis on the scope of the bombing offensive to affect the morale of the German people was candid, admitting that the means to have a real impact were not yet available, but it was still a valid objective.¹⁵⁷ The following section on the impact of the offensive on the German economy tackled the usual areas of oil, industry and transportation and recommended the latter as the primary target set.¹⁵⁸

The formal staff work was given considerable impetus by a Memorandum produced by Lord Trenchard on 19 May 1941.¹⁵⁹ Predictably, his thesis was exclusively offensive in nature and that the RAF should 'strike and strike again' at the perceived

¹⁵² AIR 41/41, p.49. FO/954/31A, COS Circulation dated 24 June 1941 covering J.P. (41) 444 'Future Strategy' dated 13 June 1941.

¹⁵³ Ibid, covering note.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 'Future Strategy', op.cit, para.7

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. Section IV.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., para 193.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., paras.203-4.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., para. 205.

¹⁵⁹ 'Memorandum by Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Trenchard on the Present War Situation Mainly in so far as it Relates to Air' dated 19 May 1941, reproduced in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.10 along with comments from each of the Chiefs. It should be remembered that the convention of the day was that Marshals of the RAF did not retire; they remained on the active list and the likes of Trenchard were entitled to make their views known through official routes as well as in the House of Lords. Trenchard even went as far as drafting a Directive to C-in-C Bomber Command which he then had Slessor (then AOC 5 Group) 'wordsmith'; see AIR 20/3360, Letter AOC 5 Group to DCAS (Bottomley) dated 2 October 1941 in which Slessor kept the Air Ministry abreast of the correspondence..

German weak point which Trenchard considered to be the morale of the German people whom he considered to be less stalwart than the British.¹⁶⁰ Trenchard advocated absolute concentration of effort on Germany (which included Vienna) exploiting the fact that the inaccuracy of bombing would have an effect beyond the physical military damage.¹⁶¹ The CNS acknowledged the general thrust albeit that it suffered ‘from the dangers of all over-statement’.¹⁶² He was concerned, however, that if taken literally, neither the Navy nor the Army would get any co-operation; so while it could be agreed in principle, this should be subject to ‘intelligent interpretation.’¹⁶³ The CIGS considered that the Battle of the Atlantic should have over-riding priority, but that subject to this transportation should be the short-term priority and morale the longer term objective.¹⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, the CAS broadly agreed with his predecessor and mentor; he nevertheless acknowledged that some effort would have to be devoted to the Fleet Air Arm and other areas ‘essential for our security’.¹⁶⁵ With the experience of his time at Bomber Command and eight hard months as CAS, Portal cautioned that the ‘relatively small bomber force’ should be concentrated on a limited number of objectives and that attacks should be sustained.¹⁶⁶ In a minute to Churchill, the Chiefs opined that the operations of the Bomber Force should not be conducted ‘hand-to-mouth’, but in accordance with a definite strategic aim.¹⁶⁷ As foreshadowed by the Joint Planning Staffs, and acknowledged by the CIGS, the Chiefs advocated a ‘short-term policy aiming to disrupt the transportation system of Western

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.195.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² ‘Notes by Sir Dudley Pound, Chief of Naval Staff, on Lord Trenchard’s memorandum’, dated 2 June 1941. Webster and Frankland, *op.cit.*, p.198.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Comments by Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff on Lord Trenchard’s memorandum’, dated 2 June 1940, Webster and Frankland, *op.cit.*, pp.198-9.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Notes by Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff, on Lord Trenchard’s memorandum’, dated 2 June 1941, Webster and Frankland, *op.cit.*, p.200.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., para.4.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Minute from Secretary to the Chiefs of Staff to the Prime Minister’, dated 11 June 1941. Webster and Frankland, *op.cit.*, App 11.

Germany and the lowering of morale of the industrial workers of that area.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, targets selected in furtherance of the Battle of the Atlantic should also have lowering German morale as a secondary aim.¹⁶⁹ The Air Staff accordingly produced a new Directive for Bomber Command on 9 July 1941.¹⁷⁰ As the official historians have pointed out, the new Directive followed very closely the work that had been carried out in the Directorate of Bombing Operations in the Air Ministry where the concept of precision attack ‘died hard’.¹⁷¹

The execution of this Directive, and the fulfilment of the ‘Future Strategy’, depended on Bomber Command being equipped with sufficient aircraft and crews to be able to mount the weight of offensive necessary to achieve the desired effect. The need for a huge force was due in part to the difficulties inherent in operating by night, often in poor weather and with no navigational aids.¹⁷² The Prime Minister’s disquiet on Bomber Command’s accuracy led him to commission Professor Lindemann (Viscount Cherwell) ‘to make an investigation’.¹⁷³ The outcome was the report prepared by Mr Butt (a member of the War Cabinet Secretariat) and presented on 18 August 1941.¹⁷⁴ The report confirmed Churchill’s worst suspicions on which he required CAS’s most urgent attention.¹⁷⁵ Although there was inevitably some chafing over the statistics, the Butt Report laid finally

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. para.6.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. para.7.

¹⁷⁰ Directive (DCAS – Bottomley) to Peirse dated 9 July 1941, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xvi). AIR 14/776.

¹⁷¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.171-4.

¹⁷² See for example Letter Sinclair to Churchill, dated 9 September 1941, Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, p.321.

¹⁷³ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol IV, p.250.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Report by Mr Butt to Bomber Command on his Examination of Night Photographs, dated 18 August 1941. Reproduced in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 13. Copy of Cherwell’s covering Minute to Churchill is at AIR 8/440.

¹⁷⁵ AIR 8/440, Minute PM to CAS dated 3 September 1941.

to rest the myth of selective or precision bombing.¹⁷⁶ The Air Staff therefore had to work out what the implications would be in terms of the size of the force necessary to carry out the area attacks necessary.¹⁷⁷ As the drafting process developed, the ‘ideal’ would be to deliver six consecutive attacks on the ‘Coventry scale’; it was acknowledged that these could not be carried over six nights, but they should be carried out over a six month period.¹⁷⁸ The complete destruction of forty-three German towns, most of which had a population of over 100,000, would require a force of 4,000 front line bombers. Notwithstanding the Prime Minister’s well-known dislike of ‘attempts to forecast by arithmetic the prospects of success in our bomber offensive’; Portal duly forwarded the estimates to Churchill on 25 September 1941.¹⁷⁹ Beyond ‘the Prime Minister’s usual vote of no confidence in ‘cut and dried’ calculations’, Churchill’s response two days later was withering.¹⁸⁰ He cast doubt on whether bombing, of itself, could ever be decisive and argued that the effects were often exaggerated; finally the best the Prime Minister could hope for was that the offensive would be ‘a heavy and I trust seriously increasing annoyance’.¹⁸¹

One of the key interfaces that a senior military leader has to manage is that with his political masters. Portal’s subsequent handling of Churchill was a particularly fine demonstration. Portal effectively took Churchill back through his own speeches and minutes extolling the virtues and necessity of the strategic air offensive and specifically

¹⁷⁶ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I p.180.

¹⁷⁷ For the Directorate of Bomber Operations drafts see AIR 20/22 ‘Bombing Policy’, dated 25 August and 22 September 1941.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ AIR 8/258, Minute CAS to Prime Minister dated 25 September 1941.

¹⁸⁰ AIR 8/258, Minute PM to CAS, dated 27 September 1941. The quotation is taken from Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I p.183.

¹⁸¹ AIR 8/258, Minute PM to CAS op.cit.

quoted the Chiefs of Staff Review of Strategy which Churchill had approved.¹⁸² Portal had no scruples in telling the Prime Minister that it was hard to reconcile these ‘facts’ with Churchill’s minute. The CAS also bluntly told the Prime Minister that if he had changed his mind on this then ‘we must produce a new plan’; Portal admitted that there could be other plans, such as ‘a return to the conception of defeating Germany with the Army as the primary offensive weapon’.¹⁸³ Finally, with a leaf from Churchill’s own book, Portal invited him, if the strategic picture had changed ‘since the issue of your original directives I would urge that revised instructions should be given to the Chiefs of Staff without a moments delay’.¹⁸⁴ Having seen the minute, Sinclair wrote in turn to Portal saying

Masterly – audacious! I agree with every word and it is the bold and strong line to take. It might be prudent to see the Prime Minister and talk to him about it, if an opportunity offers before he writes an answering minute.¹⁸⁵

Churchill, inevitably, did respond with, what for him, was a lengthy minute lamenting the ‘unbounded confidence’ of the Air Staff, especially when based on arithmetic.¹⁸⁶ Churchill also reminded the CAS that nothing in warfare was certain and that the ‘only plan was to persevere’.¹⁸⁷ Portal emerged from the contretemps reassured that Churchill ‘completely accepted the primary importance of our bomber operations and of building up the bomber force on the largest possible scale’.¹⁸⁸

Putting the new area bombing concept into practice with the existing force proved onerous and loss rates mounted. On 11 November 1941, Portal briefed the War Cabinet

¹⁸² AIR 8/258, Minute CAS to PM dated 2 October 1941, paras. 1 and 2.

¹⁸³ Ibid., paras. 7 and 8.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., para. 8.

¹⁸⁵ AIR 8/440, Minute SofS to CAS dated 3 September 1941.

¹⁸⁶ Minute PM to CAS dated 7 October 1941, reproduced in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.184-5, paras. 1 and 2.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., para. 4.

¹⁸⁸ AIR 8/440, Minute CAS to PM, dated 13 October 1941.

that 37 out of 400 aircraft despatched to Germany on the night 7/8 November had failed to return.¹⁸⁹ Weather conditions had proved much worse than forecast with significant differences in cloud, wind velocity and in icing conditions.¹⁹⁰ The Prime Minister re-emphasised his instructions that ‘attacks should not be pressed too hard if the weather was unfavourable’ and that ‘clear instructions must be given to the Commanders-in-Chief that in planning operations they should take into account the need to build up our Air Force so as to have a stronger force available in the Spring’.¹⁹¹ The C-in-C had had the opportunity to discuss this with Churchill at Chequers the previous day and failed to convince the Prime Minister that the issue was simple as providing better training for a few pilots.¹⁹² Biddle cites this occasion as probably being crucial in Portal finally losing confidence in Peirse as a C-in-C, setting the stage for the appointment of Harris in February 1942.¹⁹³ The Air Staff followed up Churchill’s orders with a formal Directive spelling out the need to conserve aircraft and crews.¹⁹⁴

Morality and Legality

The overall grand strategy towards the issues of legality and morality at the outbreak of war were conditioned, almost exclusively, by President Roosevelt’s appeal to all belligerents on 1 September 1939.¹⁹⁵ Roosevelt essentially requested that all sides refrain

¹⁸⁹ CAB 65/20/4, W.M. (41) 111, War Cabinet Conclusions dated 11 November 1941, item 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. Churchill followed this with a letter to Sinclair, Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, dated 11 November, 1941, p.332.

¹⁹² AIR 41/41, pp. 34-35.

¹⁹³ Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.197.

¹⁹⁴ Directive (DCAS – Bottomley) to Peirse dated 13 November 1941, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xx). AIR 14/777.

¹⁹⁵ Full text repeated at AIR 41/40, App.A1. See also J.R.M. Butler, *Grand Strategy Vol. II*, (London: HMSO, 1976), pp.567-8.

from ‘the ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centres of population’.¹⁹⁶ Early policy was therefore conditioned on the vital need that, in American eyes, Britain was not seen to initiate indiscriminate bombing.¹⁹⁷ In Cabinet discussions on the scope for assisting the French in 1939, this was the limiting factor in that the Germans had to be the first to undertake indiscriminate air action in Belgium or France.¹⁹⁸ The distinction between what the Luftwaffe had already done on the eastern front versus the importance of the arena immediately proximate to Britain was a moot point.

Within the Air Ministry, the Director of Plans (Slessor), as early as 7 September 1939, carried out a detailed review of German actions in Poland working on the basis that Germany had set the precedent for unrestricted attack.¹⁹⁹ The official historians have pointed out that it was ‘Air Commodore Slessor’s duty to examine this question from every side, and his memorandum should not be taken as an indication that he or the Air Staff were at this time definitely opposed to the policy of restricted bombing’.²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, they added that the policy was as much a matter of expediency as of morality.²⁰¹ This view was directly reflected in the words used by Newall in a telegram to Barratt in France some weeks later in which he said

Owing to German action in Poland, we are no longer bound by restrictions under the instructions governing naval and air bombardment S.46239/S.6 of 22/8 nor by our acceptance of Roosevelt’s appeal. Our action is now governed entirely by expediency i.e. what it suits us to do having regard to (a) the need to conserve our

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.134-5.

¹⁹⁸ CAB 66/2/36, W.P. (39) 86, War Cabinet Air Policy dated 20 October 1939.

¹⁹⁹ AIR 14/194, Paper by D of Plans dated 7 September 1939, ‘Note on the Question of Relaxing the Bombardment Instructions and Initiating Extended Air Attack’.

²⁰⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.135

²⁰¹ Ibid.

resources; (b) probable enemy retaliatory action, and (c) our need still to take into account to some extent influential neutral opinion.²⁰²

At face value, this would appear as if Slessor's appreciation of the situation had been accepted by the CAS and policy had changed formally. The reality, however, was that the strategic air offensive was held in check for many months and prohibition on indiscriminate bombing remained in place until 1942 and explicitly reinforced on a number of occasions as will be covered below. From the wording used by the Air Staff, including in formal Directives, it is clear that while Newall would have liked to change RAF policy, Government policy had not moved at all.²⁰³ Chamberlain clearly believed that the war would 'fizzle out with the collapse of the Nazi regime' and an escalation in the use of air power may have exacerbated the situation.²⁰⁴ He had also seen the bombing force primarily as a deterrent from the beginning of the rearmament phase.²⁰⁵ Chamberlain also fundamentally believed that Britain should have the 'moral right' on her side as it would be a 'tremendous force on our side' and that if bombing started it would be 'worth a lot for us to be able to blame them for it'.²⁰⁶ It is possible that Chamberlain's mindset over the lower relevance of events in countries far away prevented him from agreeing with Slessor's establishment of the precedent.

The question of expediency and morality had to be reviewed, first in the light of the invasion of Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940, and then the Low Countries in May

²⁰² AIR 2/4474, Telegram CAS to Barratt dated 16 October 1939, encl 14A. Dean, who was in the civil directorate S6 at the time agreed that bombing in the west was not carried out because it suited Britain, France and Germany; Dean, *Royal Air Force in Two World Wars*, p.264.

²⁰³ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Portal dated 4 June 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xi). AIR 14/77 in which 'in no circumstances should night bombing degenerate into mere indiscriminate action, which is contrary to the policy of His Majesty's Government'.

²⁰⁴ Self, *Chamberlain*, p.393. See also Robert Self (ed.), *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters, Vol IV; The Downing Street Years, 1934 -1940* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Letter to Ida dated 10 September 1939.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.237.

²⁰⁶ Self, *The Diary Letters*, Letter to Ida dated 10 September 1939.

1940. The German bombing of Rotterdam showed graphically that there was no chance that ‘the Germans might apply a code of morals in the West different from which Poland had experienced’.²⁰⁷ In Cabinet, the Prime Minister (now Churchill) considered that Britain should no longer be ‘bound by our previously held scruples as to initiating “unrestricted” air warfare’ as the Germans had provided ample ‘justification for retaliation’.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, opinion in the ‘United States would not now be averse’.²⁰⁹ The implication from all of this is that whatever Newall had said in 1939, the scruples had remained in place beyond operational expediency.

Following consideration by the Chiefs of Staff, fresh instructions were issued on 4 June 1940 in which the term ‘military’ was to be interpreted in the broadest sense; lines of communication which were useable for military purposes were included.²¹⁰ The formal Directive, however, stated absolutely explicitly that in ‘no circumstances should night bombing be allowed to degenerate into mere indiscriminate action, which is contrary to the policy of His Majesty’s Government’.²¹¹ It is clear from a minute sent by SASO Bomber Command (AVM Bottomley) to the Groups reminding them that the behaviour of aircrews from ‘another Command’ in jettisoning their bombs through cloud without being able to identify the target was not acceptable; the minute concludes unequivocally that ‘Bombs are not to be dropped indiscriminately’.²¹² From this point, however, there was a gradual escalation in what Bomber Command was being asked to carry out, and what it sought

²⁰⁷ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.144.

²⁰⁸ CAB 65/13/6, W.M. (40) 119C Conclusions, Minute 4- Air Policy, dated 12 May 1940.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Bombing Instructions of 4 June 1940’. Directive (DCAS –Douglas) to Portal dated 4 June 1940, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (iii).

²¹¹ Ibid., para.8.

²¹² AIR 14/194, Minute SASO to Groups dated 14 June 1940.

permission to attempt.²¹³ For example, in part in retaliation for the bombing attacks on London, the C-in-C sought permission to attack the ‘middle of Berlin’ citing the German War Office and Air Ministry as appropriate aiming points.²¹⁴ Newall’s response was to substitute ‘Railway Communications’ and not mention the former targets!²¹⁵

The policy of restraint from indiscriminate bombing remained in place formally despite the Prime Minister’s pleas for reprisals.²¹⁶ For example, Douglas wrote to Portal instructing Bomber Command that it would be a useful propaganda exercise to bomb the Leipzig Fair due to be held 25-29 August 1940, but a follow-up letter of 25 August stressed that ‘indiscriminate bombing of the civil population was to be avoided’.²¹⁷ Churchill’s frustration was evident; he complained in the *Second World War*, that a month later he was ‘still pressing for retaliation; but one objection after another, moral and technical, obstructed it’ [emphasis added].²¹⁸ The replacement of Portal for Newall brought a degree of alignment in the perceived need for retaliatory action and this was reflected in the language of the Directive issued to the Command at the end of October 1940.²¹⁹ This included the need to attack the morale of the German people ‘when they can no longer expect an early victory’.²²⁰ In addition to attacks on oil, and aluminium and component factories, there should be raids to cause ‘heavy material destruction in large towns and centres of industry’ as a demonstration ‘to the enemy of the power and severity of air

²¹³ Parks, ‘Air War and the Law of War’, p.47.

²¹⁴ AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Berlin’.

²¹⁵ Ibid. AIR 2/4475 Minute DCAS to CAS dated 18 September 1940 and hand written reply of the same date.

²¹⁶ CAB 65/9/9, W.M. (40) 247, War Cabinet Conclusions, dated 11 September 1940, ‘Air Policy’.

²¹⁷ See AIR 2/4475, Letters DCAS to C-in-C dated 21 August 1940 and 25 August

²¹⁸ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. II, p.322.

²¹⁹ Directive (DCAS – Douglas) to Peirse dated 30 October 1940; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xi). AIR 14/776.

²²⁰ AIR 41/5, Section D, ‘Directive of 30th October 1940’.

bombardment and the hardships and dislocation that will result'.²²¹ These attacks were to include high explosives, incendiaries, delayed action bombs and 'the occasional mine'.²²² Part of the rationale was to impose pressure on the fire services.²²³ These instructions clearly mirrored the experiences of London over the period and again echoed the place of retaliatory action in the culture of the times (which had been present, especially in the Press, since the German Zeppelin raids of the First World War).

After an interlude, which was planned to be about four months, where the Directives focused on anti-submarine activities a 'comprehensive review of the enemy's present political, economic and military situation', disclosed that the weakest points in his armour lie in the morale of the civilian population and in his inland transportation system'.²²⁴ Although barely mentioned in the directive, the aim of the review was to see what could be done to assist Russia.²²⁵ The other important milestone in this directive was the inclusion of '*Targets on water suitable for concentrated and continuous area attacks on moonless nights*' [emphasis in the original]; these targets were 'congested industrial towns where the psychological effect will be the greatest' and included Cologne, Dusseldorf, Duisburg and Duisburg-Ruhrort.²²⁶ The section on Duisburg, almost certainly inadvertently considering the emotive tones it would later carry, included the word 'area'.²²⁷ The gradual process of escalation reached its final point in the Directive of 14 February 1942 (notably to Air Marshal Baldwin who was Acting C-in-C prior to the arrival

²²¹ Ibid. p.129, para, 3(b).

²²² Ibid. p.129, para.4 (ii).

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, p.133 for the former Directive dated 9 March 1941 and p.135 for the latter dated 9 July 1941. See also Vol. II, p.167 et seq for the discussion on the move to area bombing.

²²⁵ AIR 41/5, Section D, 'Help for Russia'.

²²⁶ Directive (DCAS – Bottomley) to Peirse dated 9 July 1941, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xvi), para.3. AIR 14/776.

²²⁷ Ibid.

of Harris) in which his primary object ‘should now be focussed on the morale of the enemy civil population, and in particular of the industrial workers’.²²⁸ The directive acknowledged that this renewal of the offensive ‘on a heavy scale’ would ‘enhearten [sic] and support the Russians’.²²⁹ The gloves had now been removed and uninhibited area bombing introduced.

Throughout the first three years of the war, the legality and morality of the strategic air offensive were inextricably interlinked with what was technically possible. It is clear from Churchill’s frustration over the lack of urgency in carrying out reprisals included an element of moral argument.²³⁰ For much of the period, Britain fought without effective allies with whom a coalition strategy could have offered an alternative to bombing. In efforts to have some real effect on the German war machine, the march towards unrestricted area bombing was inevitable. The unthinkable option of coming to terms with Germany passed and the focus of those charged with the conduct of the war had to come up with strategy that offered a credible way in which to win. W.V. Herbert’s 1898 RUSI lecture had stressed the importance of winning ‘with all of the rest coming a long way after’ was arguably increasingly relevant as the war became ‘more total’.²³¹ In many ways, it was easier for those charged with decision making if the movement (one would hardly call it progress) towards totality in warfare was gradual and the decisions could be taken incrementally rather than in a single step.²³²

²²⁸ Directive (DCAS – Bottomley) to Baldwin dated 14 February 1942, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xxii), para.5. AIR 14/777.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.144, para.4(ii).

²³⁰ Churchill, *op. cit.*

²³¹ W.V. Herbert, ‘The Ethics of Warfare’, p.1029.

²³² The world of experimental psychology emphasises this with the work of Stanley Milgram in particular. In his now infamous experiment (and now considered highly unethical) Milgram demonstrated that under the guidance and authority of a scientist, the subject would eventually apply lethal electric shocks to the victim (a stooge) but the incremental nature made the whole possible. The same is said to apply to the persecution of

Concluding Comments.

The end of 1941 saw the legal and moral constraints on the strategic air offensive gradually removed with the stage set for area bombing without restriction in early 1942. For the winter, the policy of conservation remained in place along with serious questions about the efficacy of the strategic air offensive. Its leaders could, with reason, explain away the lack of impact on Germany away on a number of grounds, despite the scale of the losses.²³³ Bomber Command had been lower in the priority for build up of forces at the beginning of the war, in favour of Fighter Command.²³⁴ Furthermore, the needs of both Coastal and Middle East Commands had been met at their expense. They could also claim that the efforts of the Command had been diverted to other roles in Norway, France and in support of the Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic. The optimists would also look forward to the advent of the heavy bombers in increasing numbers, the innovative solutions to navigation and increased bomb loads.²³⁵

The early years of the war had seen the organisations, and the relationships between them, settle down to a degree of normality. For better, or worse, this involved a degree of overlap at the strategic level with the Command frustrated that their colleagues in the Air Ministry were usurping their role. The role of Churchill, especially as Minister of Defence, was such that this situation had been accentuated. Equally, he was not averse to dealing directly with his more junior subordinates, many of whom had their own views of what should take place at the strategic level. It could be argued that this made for an

the Jews in Nazi Germany. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (London: Tavistock, 1974)

²³³ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.318-9.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid., p.320.

organisation that was not 'fit for purpose', but it is also hard to contemplate an alternative model working for Churchill. In essence, the pattern was set for the rest of the war.

The more strategically minded among the senior leaders, at all levels, would increasingly be in a position to contemplate the prospects of a combined offensive with America with the full potential of the industrial machine across the Atlantic. Finally, as Portal consolidated his position with his own team of subordinates, who shared his vision and offensive spirit, the stage was set for him, Harris and the rest to prove the potential of the inter-war years without the excuses.

Chapter Six

THE STRATEGIC AND GRAND STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS 1942-45

Introduction – The Strategic Level

The previous chapters have identified that there was an irreducible overlap between the senior leadership functions of the CAS on one side, and his colleagues on the Air Staff and the C-in-C and the staff at Bomber Command Headquarters. There was no distinct stratification between the grand strategic, political strategic, military strategic and operational levels of war. Sometimes this was due to the Air Staff meddling in the tactical detail, such as Portal's complaint in his Report on the Norway campaign. At other times, the capacity afforded the C-in-C by not having to run the 'Whitehall war', allowed him to take a more reasoned and higher level view. This was also true of Portal's experience at the very end of his tenure at Bomber Command.

To some extent, this merging of the boundaries was inevitable given the personality of the Prime Minister. Churchill's penchant for ranging in his thinking and quest for action, from the lowest tactical levels to highest regions of the grand strategic is well known. Churchill, in his role as Minister of Defence was confident in the logic of sharing thinking at the strategic level with his Chiefs of Staff.¹ But he was also distrustful of the staffs of their Ministries; Air Ministry arithmetic was a particular *bête noire*.² Churchill also genuinely believed that his prodding improved the performance of the respective departments, even up to Secretary of State level.³ It is also clear that Churchill had no

¹ See, for example, Geoffrey Best, *Churchill and War* (London: Hambledon, 2005), p.171.

² Minute PM to CAS dated 7 October 1941, reproduced in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.184-5, paras. 1 and 2.

³ The best example is the pungent treatment of Sinclair; see for example the minute leading to the raid on Dresden in Hunter, *Winston and Archie* dated 26 January 1945, p.411. See also Best, *Churchill and War*,

qualms about whom he invited to Chequers to discuss events, invariably leaving it to the subordinates to square the circle with their superiors.⁴

As the war progressed, senior leaders also interchanged jobs between the Air Ministry and the Commands. For example, Peirse moved to C-in-C from VCAS in October 1940 and Harris had previously been DCAS. Officers also moved from Bomber Command into the Air Ministry with Bottomley moving at 2 Star level from SASO to DCAS in May 1941.⁵ Often, this was a deliberate policy to bring front-line experience into the strategic Headquarters, albeit at a cost to the front-line and occasionally with negative consequences.⁶ In his formal *Despatch on War Operations*, Harris gave vent to his frustration describing the Air Ministry insistence on forming the Pathfinder force as ‘yet another occasion when a Commander in the field was over-ruled at the dictation of junior staff officers in the Air Ministry’.⁷

For the purposes of the last two substantive chapters, this thesis will accept this overlap as a reality and treat, where appropriate, the challenges facing the senior leaders as applying across the whole. Rather than run through a straight narrative of events from 1942, Chapter six will examine the leadership challenges at the strategic level looking up

p.172. See also Martin Gilbert, *Continue to Pester, Nag and Bite: Churchill's War Leadership* (London: Pimlico, 2004), p.49.

⁴ The visit of Peirse to Chequers in November 1941 to discuss high loss rates was a classic example. Had successive Cs-in-C not been meticulous in back-briefing Portal, there would have been serious scope for meddling and mischief-making.

⁵ For a full list of appointments and dates see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.493 et seq.

⁶ As C-in-C, Harris had a degree of difficulty with Group Captain Sydney Bufton who, as an experienced station commander had been brought into the Air Ministry for exactly those reasons. See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.419. Bufton's enthusiastic advocacy of the Pathfinder concept was just one source of friction; see Cox, ‘Sir Arthur Harris and the Air Ministry’, p.218.

⁷ Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, *Despatch on War Operations 23 February 1942 to 8 May 1945* (London: Cass, 1995), p.11 of the Despatch which is reprinted as a facsimile.

across the political and grand strategic levels. It will therefore concentrate heavily on the formulation of combined strategy with the Americans. Chapter seven will look at the view from the military strategic level over the operational interface, and in particular, examine the controversies over targeting.

Prelude to the Combined Bombing Offensive

Following the sensitive ‘staff conversations’ of 1940 involving Portal at Bomber Command discussed in the last chapter, the need for liaison between Britain and America continued to grow. From the American perspective, national policy ‘was very difficult to define’.⁸ The general American approach, before Pearl Harbor, was altogether more conservative than the view taken by Roosevelt that America would have to intervene at some stage, and especially if Britain was to collapse. Most American citizens were content to support material aid for Britain, but were not in favour of deeper intervention; Roosevelt ‘had had to retreat from semi-belligerent policies on several occasions when it was clear that the bulk of the American people were not willing to go that far’.⁹ Thinking on the possible future uses of American air power, including the role of strategic bombing nurtured by the Air Corps Tactical School, had to be done in this policy vacuum.¹⁰ Much of the detailed liaison between American staff and the Air Ministry had been conducted through liaison officers in Washington, and through reciprocal visits. For example, Slessor visited Washington in autumn 1940 to explain the intricacies of RAF expansion schemes and explain how vital American support would be used.¹¹ Part of the benefit of these talks

⁸ Haywood S. Hansell, *The Air Plan that Defeated Hitler* (Atlanta GA: Higgins-MacArthur, 1972), p.55.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.56. See also Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force 1907-1960*, (Maxwell Ala: Air University Press, 1989), p.105.

¹¹ Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.320. See also AIR 75/63, Slessor Papers, ‘ABC Conversations with US 1940-41’.

was to place British demands in the context of likely American needs, especially for heavy bombers.¹² Reciprocal visits included mid-ranking USAAF officers who would become senior leaders during the Combined Bombing Offensive and, in addition to the detail discussed, important relationships were made.¹³ One example was Colonel Carl Spaatz (later to head the USAAF bomber force in Britain) whose trip in 1940 gave him first-hand experience of the Battle of Britain and the practical difficulties of fighter escorts for bombers; he also appreciated the need for long-range heavy bombers based on RAF experience of the inadequacy of the light or medium aircraft.¹⁴ Similarly, General ‘Hap’ Arnold (commander of the USAAF which although not an independent service, was treated as such by Marshall) visited the UK in April 1941 to discuss issues with the supply of aircraft.¹⁵

A more formal approach was taken at the beginning of 1941 with the American-British conversations conducted in Washington.¹⁶ The RAF delegation was headed by Slessor (whom Portal ordered to remain in Washington for this purpose) who described the talks as being of ‘great historical interest’ and said because the ‘general strategic concept then agreed – while it became at times a bit frayed at the edges – did continue to govern our combined action throughout the war’.¹⁷ In America, the talks were justified as being

¹² Slessor, *Central Blue*, p.327. For an American perspective on the likely numbers involved see Futrell, *Ideas*, p.101.

¹³ See, for example, David R. Mets, *Master of Air Power: General Carl A. Spaatz* (Novato CA: Presidio, 1988), p.111.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Futrell, *Ideas*, p.99.

¹⁵ Richards, *Portal*, p.215. Dik Daso, *Hap Arnold and the Evolution of American Air Power* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 2000), pp. 165-167; this visit included Portal sharing the news of the development of Whittle’s jet engine.

¹⁶ Known colloquially as ABC-1. See Futrell, *Ideas*, p.108; Slessor, *Central Blue*, ch. XIII.

¹⁷ Slessor, *Central Blue*, p.343. Slessor had been visiting Washington to provide an Air Staff input to the lengthy negotiations on aircraft supply: see AIR 8/446 for the correspondence, including the inevitable clashes with Beaverbrook over which Department, between the Ministry of Aircraft Production and the Air Ministry, was in the lead in the negotiations.

necessary to set down the principles of co-operation should ‘the United States be compelled to resort to war’.¹⁸ Although conducted at Colonel to 2-star level, these talks had clear strategic importance and were the forerunner to the Combined Chiefs of Staff organisation.¹⁹ Furthermore, from an organisational perspective, genuine agreements made at this level would ensure that subsequent negotiations at higher levels were less likely to be unravelled by ‘the Indians with one feather’, the ‘scores of conscientious colonels who in the American system seem to keep such a vigilantly protective eye upon the policy of their seniors’.²⁰ A considerable amount of the discussion in Washington centred on the provision of American aircraft and the balance of allocation between the expanding US forces versus supporting the RAF; firm decisions were either hard to reach, or subsequently overturned due to the immature state of American planning and the understandable uncertainty over if, and when, America would enter the war.²¹ Notwithstanding the ambiguities of the situation, Slessor identified, at this very early stage, the potential for ‘very strenuous opposition on the part of certain naval members of the committee’; in this he was referring to the United States Navy whose future Chief (King) was a staunch advocate of primacy for the war in the Pacific.²²

Notwithstanding the importance of the talks about aircraft supply, the grand strategic level discussions were vital. The first and ‘most important feature’ of the ABC-1 talks was the establishment of the principle that operations would be aimed at defeating Germany first and then Japan; it was also agreed that removal of Italy from the war would

¹⁸ Futrell, *Ideas*, p.108.

¹⁹ Slessor conducted the 1941 talks as an Air Commodore and was promoted for the later rounds to AVM.

²⁰ Slessor, *Central Blue*, p.330; the quotation on the Indians came from Slessor’s discussions with Mr Tom Finletter who subsequently became Secretary of the Air Force.

²¹ AIR 8/446, AIR 8/447 and PREM 3/488/2; see especially PREM 3/488/2, Telegram, Slessor to Portal dated 30 March 1941.

²² *Ibid.*

be a useful step in that direction.²³ The meeting also endorsed the strategic priorities of maintaining economic pressure on Germany (by blockade) and ‘a mounting offensive from the air’.²⁴ An eventual land offensive against Germany was also agreed in principle when the necessary force was available and the need for air support to land and sea operations was acknowledged. But the priority had to be given to ‘achieving as quickly as possible superiority in air strength over the enemy, particularly in long-range striking forces’.²⁵

The American planning staffs subsequently incorporated the output from ABC-1 into their own work.²⁶ The air mission in Europe was based on identified key nodes which required the disruption of Germany’s electrical power system; its transportation; destruction of oil and petrol resources; and the undermining of morale ‘by attack on civilian concentrations’.²⁷ ‘Intermediate’ objectives required the ‘neutralisation’ of German air forces by attacks on the means of production, including aircraft factories and magnesium and aluminium plants.²⁸ Finally, attacks would also be required against maritime targets such as submarine bases and invasion ports. It is worthy of note that American planners did not advocate city, or area, bombing; they believed that the heavy bombers could rely on speed, massed formations, defensive firepower and armour and operating at high altitude to allow them to ‘make deep penetrations of German defences in daylight hours’. They also identified the need to develop a suitable fighter escort to accompany the bombers.²⁹

²³ Slessor, *Central Blue*, p.344.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.345.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Futrell, *Ideas*, p.109. See also Hansell, *Air Plan*, p.59. The actual document was the Air War Plans Division – 1 (AWPD-1) – the plan that was reflected in the title of Hansell’s book. He was on the planning staff as a major. The plan was published on 12 August 1941.

²⁷ Futrell, *Ideas*, p.109.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Another critically important output from ABC-1 was the ‘establishment of high level military Missions’ to be set up in each other’s capitals.³⁰ This machinery was intended to facilitate the staff conversations that would be increasingly necessary and eventually ‘ensure a smooth transition to the full wartime system if and when the U.S. was involved in the war’.³¹ Harris became the first Head of the Air Mission on 1 June 1941.³² This structure eventually led to the Combined Chiefs of Staff which worked under the Prime Minister and President.

The momentum was subsequently maintained when Churchill met secretly with Roosevelt off the Newfoundland coast in HMS *Prince of Wales* on 9 August 1941.³³ The two leaders agreed at the outset to produce a joint declaration of ‘broad principles which should guide our policies along the same road’.³⁴ The principal grand strategic outcome was the ‘Atlantic Charter’.³⁵ But there were also wide-ranging discussions on the Far East in which the Prime Minister and the President proposed ‘parallel communications’ with Japan warning against aggression.³⁶ Similar high-level discussions took place over basing policy on the Atlantic Islands and the so-called ‘Western Hemisphere Defence Plan No.4’ which provided for US Navy support in the Battle of the Atlantic, an agreement which

³⁰ Slessor, *Central Blue*, p.351.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.496. He was succeeded by Evill on 24 January 1942.

³³ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. III, p.380.

³⁴ Ibid., p.385

³⁵ Ibid. The telegrams between Churchill, his War Cabinet and the Dominions are at CAB 66/18/26, W.P. (41) 203, Conference Between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States, dated 18 August 1941. The full text of the Charter and Churchill’s report to the Cabinet is at CAB 66/18/25, W.P. (41) 202, Memorandum dated 20 August 1941. For an account of life on the receiving end of Churchill’s telegrams see Lord Ismay, *The Memoirs of General the Lord Ismay* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p.221.

³⁶ CAB 66/18/25, p.4

Churchill described as an ‘unparalleled gesture of friendship by a neutral power’.³⁷ This was Churchill operating at the genuine grand strategic level.

At the military strategic level, the Chiefs of Staff had equally fruitful discussions with their American opposite numbers.³⁸ This was an ideal opportunity for the senior military leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to start to build the personal relationships fundamental to any joint enterprise; the talks were described as ‘frank and friendly’.³⁹ Although his US opposite number, General ‘Hap’ Arnold, was going to be present, Portal had been left behind in London to ‘mind the shop’ along with Ismay (Churchill’s Chief of Staff).⁴⁰ The American forces were ‘far from being prepared for active operations on a war footing’ with the air corps described as being ‘still in embryo’.⁴¹ Much of the discussion was therefore on questions of supply and organisation.⁴² The air issues were largely centred on ‘the production and allocation of heavy bombers’ and the British delegation was concerned that the Americans intended to keep a greater proportion of these for their own use.⁴³ The Chiefs of Staff had prepared a strategy paper to share with their American colleagues; the review restated the role of the bomber with the emphasis on the destruction of ‘German economic life and morale’.⁴⁴ The British report on the talks anticipated that the Americans would feel that too much importance had been attached to the bombing offensive, but the Americans themselves ‘had only vague ideas as to the employment of

³⁷ Ibid., p.7.

³⁸ Ibid., Annex III, British-American Chiefs of Staff Discussions.

³⁹ Ibid., p.10.

⁴⁰ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. III, p.380 and Richards, *Portal*, p.247. Daso, *Hap Arnold*, p.169. See also, Mets, *Spaatz*, p. 114. Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.221.

⁴¹ CAB 66/18/25, p.10.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p.13.

⁴⁴ AIR 41/41, AHB Narrative, *The RAF in the Bombing Offensive against Germany: Vol. III Area Bombing and the Makeshift Force, June 1941 – February 1942*, p.85.

their forces if they came into the war'.⁴⁵ Subsequently, the United States Joint Board (the equivalent of the COS) reported that they did not consider that the destruction of morale was a military objective in its own right and that the bombing offensive should be concentrated on objectives that had an immediate relation to German military power.⁴⁶ This assessment was directly in concert with the thinking of the American air planners in APWD-1.

Although not widely discussed in the literature on the strategic air offensive, the ABC talks set the foundations for virtually all of the subsequent discussions at the grand strategic level and in the routine working levels amongst those dealing with the Missions. For the planning of the Combined Bomber Offensive, the insistence on the high priority for heavy, long-range strike aircraft was of paramount importance and, establishing this as early as March 1941, gave an invaluable lead time for American industry to start producing the vital machines with which to prosecute the offensive when the time came. The thinking behind the planning in AWPD-1 was so broad that there was scope to justify almost any course of action on its wording. This was a flaw that was to carry through into the Casablanca Directive and eventually, the planning for *Overlord*.

Planning the Offensive – Washington to Casablanca

Churchill heard the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on his radio at Chequers on the evening of Sunday 7 December 1941 and immediately telephoned Roosevelt.⁴⁷ On the following day he sought permission from the King to visit Washington, this time taking Portal with him, but again leaving Ismay and also Brooke (who was in the process of

⁴⁵ CAB 66/18/25, p.10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.86-7.

⁴⁷ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. III, p.537.

taking over from Dill as CIGS) to ‘mind the shop’.⁴⁸ This visit allowed Portal the opportunity to build on the relationship that he had established with Arnold during the latter’s visit to Britain in April 1941.⁴⁹ Notwithstanding the optimism, in British minds at least, inspired by America no longer having to act as a non-belligerent, the senior leaders still had major strategic issues with which to contend.⁵⁰ The context of America’s entry into the war emphasised the strain under which the Allied navies would be placed with the potential areas of operation now world-wide. The situation in mainland Eurasia was inevitably complex; emerging strategy would have to attempt to provide assistance to the USSR, either directly or indirectly through increasing the pressure on the German economy. The leaders also had to wrestle with practicalities of deciding when to attack Germany with land forces in mainland Europe. There was considerable American pressure for early action.⁵¹ Not only would this help the Russian front, but a successful conclusion would allow America then to concentrate on Japan, a course of action for which there was considerable domestic demand.⁵² In the event, the Washington Conference (*Arcadia*) confirmed the primacy of defeating Germany with ‘only a minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theatres’.⁵³ The issue of when to return to the Continent was more troublesome with President and the Prime Minister keen that this should happen in 1942 and the British Chiefs of Staff determined that this should not be attempted until 1943.⁵⁴ From the air perspective, it was agreed that there should be ‘an ever increasing air bombardment of Germany’, in conjunction with tightening the blockade and

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.540 and 555, See also Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.243 and Alanbrooke, *Diaries*, p.209.

⁴⁹ Richards, *Portal*, p.215 for the earlier visit and p.239 for the Washington Conference.

⁵⁰ Had he not been ‘in a public place’ (the Carlton Hotel grill room) when he heard the news of Pearl Harbor, Ismay would have ‘shouted for joy’; Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.241.

⁵¹ AIR 41/42, *The RAF in the Bombing Offensive Against Germany: Vol. IV. A Period of Expansion and Experiment (March 1942 – January 1943)*, p.114.

⁵² Butler, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. III, p.563.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Brooke in particular considered that the Germans would be able to deal easily with any force that the Allies could land in 1942. See for example, Alanbrooke, *Diaries*, p.275.

organising ‘subversive movements’.⁵⁵ At the highest level of military strategic command and control, the Washington Conference endorsed the setting up of a Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee, which necessitated the Americans bringing their internal system approximately into line with the British system.⁵⁶ It also established that there should be one supreme commander for each relevant theatre.⁵⁷

Having set the stage for the conduct of the war at the grand strategic level, it was immediately evident that both Portal and Arnold were at one on the potential of the bomber as an independent weapon.⁵⁸ As the official historians have pointed out, the critical leadership challenge would be to decide on a credible ‘policy by which that strategy might be realised’.⁵⁹ The technical, and tactical, arguments over the adoption of unescorted, and then escorted, daylight raids against Germany have been well covered in the literature; this thesis will therefore concentrate on the leadership aspects in general, and the need to balance maintenance of the relationships with actually achieving the aims at the operational level of war.⁶⁰ The literature on leadership is unequivocal on the need for senior leaders to build and maintain relationships; failure to do so has always been one of the prime causes for derailment or failure.⁶¹ In debriefing the War Cabinet on the outcomes from Washington, Churchill confirmed that

⁵⁵ AIR 41/42, p.114.

⁵⁶ Ibid. and Futrell, *Ideas*, p.129.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.364. See also Daso, *Arnold*, p.171.

⁵⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.364.

⁶⁰ For the literature, see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.364 et seq.; Futrell, *Ideas*, p.129 and Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, ch.5.

⁶¹ Michael J. Najjar, Brent D. Holland and Christina R. Van Landuyt, ‘Individual Differences in Leadership Derailment’, Conference Paper at the 19th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, April 2004 accessed 30 September 2009:

<http://www.hoganassessments.com/hoganweb/documents/IndividualDifferencesInLeadershipDerailment.pdf>. See also M.W. McCall and M.M. Lombardo, ‘What Makes a Top Executive’, *Psychology Today*, 1983 (17), 2, pp.26-31.

There was little risk of the Americans abandoning the conventional principles of war. They were not above learning from us, provided that we did not set out to teach them.⁶²

This was to prove to be problematic. The British leaders had gained, from painful experience, an idea of what was achievable by bomber formations over Germany by day and night. But as Biddle has pointed out, the US commanders were determined to achieve organisational independence and were therefore not going to follow their allies without trying out their own theories in which they had a ‘genuine and unshaken conviction’, and found ‘elegant, straightforward and promising’.⁶³ Furthermore, the option of daylight attacks, using the latest bombsight technology, gave the American airmen a possible defence against charges of unethical or indiscriminate bombing.⁶⁴

In the event, the American build-up (codenamed *Sickle*) was slow with the first raid not taking place until 17 August 1942 with delays occurring due to poor weather.⁶⁵ In addition, the diversion of aircraft and crews to the Pacific added to the frustrations on all sides with Spaatz (commanding the Eighth Air Force in Britain) writing to Arnold reiterating the importance of the US making a significant contribution to the combined bomber offensive.⁶⁶ On the basis of these early forays into France, with extensive fighter escort and only in good weather, the American planners concluded that practice justified theory and provided the foundations for the combined offensive; not surprisingly, this met

⁶² CAB 65/25/8, W.M. (42) 8, Minute 1, dated 17 January 1941, p.1.

⁶³ Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.209.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, see also W. Hays Parks, “Precision” and “Area” Bombing; Who Did Which, and When?, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 18 (1995), pp.145-74 for a detailed analysis of what was actually achieved.

⁶⁵ Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.211. and Mets, *Spaatz*, p.134. See also AIR 41/43, AHB Narrative *The RAF in the Bombing Offensive Against Germany: Vol.V. The Full Offensive (February 1943 - February 1944)*, ch.1 for the balance between *Sickle* and *Bolero* which was the build-up of American land forces in Britain.

⁶⁶ Quoted in detail in Mets, *Spaatz*, pp.134-5.

with considerable British scepticism.⁶⁷ This reached the surface the following month with Churchill writing to Roosevelt on 16 September to express concern over the slow aircraft delivery rates and highlighting the need for greater numbers of aircraft ‘to saturate and disperse the defences’.⁶⁸ This was followed by a confidential note to Harry Hopkins (Roosevelt’s special assistant) in which the Prime Minister wrote

I must also say to you for your eye alone and only to be used by you in your high discretion that the very accurate results so far achieved in the daylight bombing of France by your Fortresses under the most numerous Fighter escort mainly British, does not give our experts the same confidence as yours in the power of the day bomber to operate far into Germany. We do not think the claims of the Fighters shot down by the Fortresses are correct though made with complete sincerity, and the dangers of daylight bombing will increase terribly once outside Fighter protection and as the range lengthens’.⁶⁹

Within the national corridors of power the debate was even more intense. Slessor (now ACAS Policy) was probably the most sympathetic of the senior leadership team to the American conviction that daylight bombing was feasible albeit with caveat that success would be dependent on ‘really adequate numbers’.⁷⁰ The numbers involved in the USAAF plan, which Slessor had seen during his time in America, were in the order of 2000 heavy bombers supported by 1000 medium bombers; the first target set would be the Germany fighter industry.⁷¹ Portal did not share this optimism. Although he acknowledged that a systematic destruction of critical targets would have war-winning potential, he did not believe that the USAAF would ever achieve this. Furthermore, Portal considered that

⁶⁷ Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy: Volume IV, August 1942-September 1943* (London: HMSO, 1970), p.27.

⁶⁸ AIR 8/711, Telegram, PM to President dated 16 September 1942.

⁶⁹ AIR 8/711, Telegram, PM to Hopkins dated 16 October 1942. Interestingly, Howard, quotes this as being dated 16 September, op.cit. p.27. Biddle has confirmed that the claims subsequently proved exaggerated, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.211.

⁷⁰ AIR 8/711, Minute, Slessor to Sinclair, dated 26 September 1942. Slessor admitted in his minute that this was very much his personal opinion and asked the Director of Bomber Operations to run his eye over the work.

⁷¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.358.

under heavy German fighter attack, the American bomber formations would suffer heavy losses – despite their faith in self-defending bomber formations. In his minute to Sinclair he predicted that

The Americans will eventually be able to get as far as the Ruhr, suffering very much heavier casualties than we now suffer by night, and going much more rarely. They will in effect do area bombing with the advantage of the absence of decoys. If it can be kept up in the face of the losses (and I don't think that it will be) this will of course be a valuable contribution to the war, but it will certainly not result in the elimination of the enemy fighter force and so open the way to the free bombing of the rest of Germany.⁷²

The enduring Air Ministry preference was for the USAAF to apply their weight of numbers and effort to a concerted night offensive; Portal, in particular, believed that it was a relatively simple task to turn a fully trained night force into day bombers, but if the Americans were to become competent by night they needed to start working up immediately.⁷³ If their aircrew were trained to British standards, Portal considered that the combined offensive 'could pulverise almost the whole of the industrial and economic power of Germany within a year, besides utterly destroying the morale of the German people'.⁷⁴ The official historians have pointed out that the vast majority of Portal's conclusions were both 'weighty' and 'wise', but acknowledged the irony of his continuing lack of confidence in the development of a long range fighter escort (the Mustang).⁷⁵

Churchill was not convinced that the Americans would be able to contribute to the bomber campaign and wanted to advocate their use in maritime work. If he had done so, he would have seriously risked alliance solidarity. The official historians have described his

⁷² AIR 8/711, Minute Portal to Sinclair dated 27 September 1942.

⁷³ AIR 8/711, Note by Portal dated 26 September 1942.

⁷⁴ AIR 8/711, Minute Portal to Sinclair dated 27 September 1942.

⁷⁵ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.359. The American insistence on pressing with the concept of escort fighters made their offensive workable in the first instance and the Mustang was instrumental in the achievement of air superiority over Germany before *Overlord*.

proposals as a ‘kind of Coastal Command’ with the American bombers attacking targets at sea (blockade runners and U-boats) and in the Bay of Biscay in support of ‘*Torch*’.⁷⁶ Sinclair’s strategic appreciation of the situation was both eloquent and far-sighted. He reminded Churchill of the situation in America in which opinion remained divided as to whether the priority should be Germany or the Pacific and the Prime Minister had it in his power ‘to crystallise American opinion and to unite it behind those schools of thought which want to attack Germany and want to do it by building up an overwhelming force of bombers in this country’. He also warned the Prime Minister of the risks of throwing ‘these forces into confusion and impotency if you set yourself against their cherished policy of daylight penetration’.⁷⁷ Notwithstanding Portal’s pessimism, Sinclair chose to use Slessor’s more upbeat tone in advocating the potential war-winning benefits of a massive bomber offensive. Churchill subsequently denied having raised ‘with any American authority the question of whether the “daylight penetration” of Germany is a sound operation’. This statement was somewhat at variance with his memorandum to Hopkins discussed above.⁷⁸ In this minute, addressed to both Sinclair and Portal (and copied to Harris), Churchill challenged the ‘soundness of the Secretary of State’s minute’ both on the ‘merits of “daylight penetration” policy’ and ‘the tactics we should pursue towards the Americans’. Although he finished by saying that there was no need ‘to discuss that now’, the matter inevitably did not rest there.⁷⁹ Sinclair warned the Prime Minister in a further minute ‘most seriously against decrying the American plan for the daylight attack of Germany, and in particular not to try to persuade them to divert their attention to sea work

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.360. See Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, minute from Churchill to Sinclair and Portal dated 26 October 1942. *Torch* was the code name for the allied invasion of French North Africa.

⁷⁷ Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, Minute Sinclair to Churchill dated 23 October 1942.

⁷⁸ Hunter, op. cit., minute Churchill to Sinclair and Portal dated 26 October.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

(such as anti-submarine work).⁸⁰ Churchill returned to the fray, again commenting that the 'USAF [sic] plan and method for bombing Germany by "daylight penetration" required searching thought' as did 'our official attitude to the United States Air Force [sic] and Government about it.'⁸¹ Portal highlighted the dilemma facing the senior leaders, pointing out that he thought 'that premature opposition to their plan may well lead their high authorities to seek other theatres where the virtues of day bombing might be better appreciated'.⁸² The reality of this challenge was confirmed by Slessor in a telegram from Washington in which he stated that Arnold was 'engaged in stiff uphill fight with his colleagues especially with King'.⁸³ In a meeting discussing the build up of forces in Britain, King had 'openly said bombing of Germany useless and US heavy bombers should go to Pacific'.⁸⁴ Portal duly replied warning that Churchill was still in a critical mood with 'our position... weakened by inability of Arnold to bomb Germany now when fighter defences are weaker than ever'.⁸⁵

As a classic example of the complexities and ambiguity of senior leadership, Sinclair and Portal, in the words of the official historians, had been 'placed in an extremely delicate position'.⁸⁶ If the combined offensive was gain the momentum necessary to have the desired impact on German industry and morale, they would have to support the policy of daylight attacks notwithstanding his scepticism over its chances of success. So, like Churchill, Portal had deep concerns over the allied strategy, but chose to suppress them in what amounted to a strategic conspiracy of silence. A more pragmatic interpretation would

⁸⁰ AIR 8/711, Minute Sinclair to Churchill dated 28 October 1942.

⁸¹ AIR 8/711, Minute Churchill to Portal, Dated 2 November 1942

⁸² AIR 8/711, Minute Portal to Churchill dated 7 November 1942.

⁸³ AIR 8/711, Telegram Slessor to Portal dated 20 November 1942.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ AIR 8/711, Telegram Portal to Slessor dated 21 November 1942.

⁸⁶ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.361.

be that the CAS had elected to allow the policy to stand the test of operations rather than allow the whole concept of the bomber offensive to unravel in favour of operations in the Pacific.⁸⁷ It was therefore with considerable uncertainty as to what were the prospects of success of the combined bomber offensive that Roosevelt, Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff prepared for the next major conference in Casablanca in January 1943.

Casablanca (*Symbol*)

One of the critical roles of the truly strategic leader is the ability to look above and beyond the traditional silos in which they had spent their formative years. For Brooke and Portal, this challenge was all the greater in having to deal with Churchill. A key facet of the challenge was to place the routine administration of their Service Departments in the wider context of the grand strategic setting. Churchill had visited Moscow in August 1942 at a time when Russian forces were under considerable pressure from the German army.⁸⁸ Stalin was barely mollified by the Allied plans for North Africa (*Torch*) and pressed for a second front in Europe to relieve the pressure. But as Howard has stated, the Prime Minister ‘laid up trouble for the future by his emphatic assurances that *Roundup* [the cross-channel invasion] would be launched in 1943 – assurances of a kind that his military advisers would have been quite unable to endorse’.⁸⁹ Churchill had also promised British (and Canadian) support for a further foray into Norway co-ordinated with the Soviets (which the latter did not favour).⁹⁰ To some extent, the potential difficulties at the Conference in Casablanca in January 1943 were eased by Stalin’s decision not to attend.⁹¹ The ‘wickedness’ of the problems facing the senior leaders in Casablanca were, however,

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.364.

⁸⁸ Howard, *Grand Strategy*, p.31.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.33.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.34.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.240.

made all the greater because there was considerable diversity of opinion within the British and American staffs over which potential course of action should be followed.⁹² In a preliminary meeting on 13 January, Dill briefed his British colleagues on the apparent divisions, and contradictions, within the American military establishment. Key issues included suspicions that British interest in the Pacific would wane after victory in Europe and over the relatively conservative policy of attacking Europe through the Mediterranean. These were complicated by the logistical reality that the US Navy controlled the bulk of the landing craft and were reluctant to prioritise these for theatres other than the Pacific.⁹³

On entering the negotiations, the British position had been encapsulated in a Chiefs of Staff report which clearly outlined the conflicting strategic priorities, alternatives and constraints.⁹⁴ The report advocated the defeat of the ‘U-boat menace’; the expansion of the Anglo-American bomber offensive; exploitation of the Mediterranean, maintenance of supplies to Russia; limited operations in the Pacific; operations to re-open the Burma Road; and ‘subject to the claims of the above, the greatest possible concentration of forces in the United Kingdom with a view to re-entry on to the Continent in August or September 1943, should conditions hold out a good prospect of success’ [emphasis added].⁹⁵ In short, the Chiefs, and Brooke in particular, were adamant that a cross-channel attack should not be contemplated until Germany had been considerably weakened by bombing, blockade, subversion and through efforts of the Red army.⁹⁶ The discussions on the purpose and scope of the bomber offensive had therefore to be seen in the light of these factors. As the

⁹² Ibid., p.242. See also Ismay, *Memoirs*, pp.285-6.

⁹³ Ibid. See, for example, the lengthy discussion in CAB 88/2, C.C.S. 60th Meeting 18 January 1943.

⁹⁴ COS (42) 466 (O). Final. Dated 31 December 1942. ‘American-British strategy in 1943’. Reproduced in full at Howard, *Grand Strategy*, App. III (A).

⁹⁵ Ibid., para.17.

⁹⁶ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.11. See also David Fraser, *Alanbrooke* (London; HarperCollins, [1982] 1997), p.283.

official historians have pointed out, those, on both sides of the Atlantic, who harboured notions that air power alone could bring about the end of war had to be wary not to say as much at Casablanca.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the Chiefs had concluded that the bomber offensive was ‘susceptible of great development and holds out most promising prospects’.⁹⁸ Part of this promise was grounded in the improvements in aircraft, crew training and navigational aids.⁹⁹ But the Chiefs also acknowledged that there was still ‘an open question’ on American air forces’ ability to penetrate Germany by day without prohibitive losses.¹⁰⁰ From a strategic awareness point of view, and American scepticism over its veracity, it is interesting that the Chiefs expressly did not claim

*that the bomber offensive will at once shatter the enemy’s morale. It is claimed that it already has an appreciable, and will have an increasing effect, on the enemy’s distribution system and industrial potential – an effect that the German High Command and German people will fear more and more.*¹⁰¹ [Emphasis in the original.]

Portal’s biographer has noted that for Brooke to endorse the COS paper, after incessant demands through 1942 for aircraft to be assigned to army support rather than to Bomber Command, ‘was a remarkable development’ which could be ascribed to ‘his own sense of the strategically possible’.¹⁰²

The Combined Chiefs of Staff met 15 times in all, with three additional meetings under the joint chairmanship of the President and the Prime Minister.¹⁰³ As Churchill’s Chief of Staff, Ismay, recorded some issues were easily decided such as primacy of defeating the U-boats and that the ‘German homeland was to be intensively bombarded by

⁹⁷ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.10.

⁹⁸ COS (42) 466 (O), para.12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, para.19.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, para.21.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, para.25.

¹⁰² Richards, *Portal*, p.255.

¹⁰³ Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.286.

day as well as night as soon as the American fortress bombers were ready'.¹⁰⁴ It is clear from all accounts that Portal 'enjoyed something of a triumph at Casablanca'.¹⁰⁵ By not sticking to a narrow and dogmatic viewpoint, he was able to achieve the agreements on both air power issues and assist in wider priorities. Furthermore, it would appear that some of his (and Sinclair's) pragmatism appears to have rubbed off on Churchill who had a lengthy discussion with General Eaker (Commander of American Air Forces in Britain) during which the Prime Minister 'decided to back Eaker and his theme, and I turned round completely and withdrew all my opposition to the daylight bombing by the Fortresses'.¹⁰⁶ Eaker subsequently thanked Churchill for 'saving' the Fortresses from abandonment by the US; Churchill stated that if this was true he had done so 'by leaving off opposing them'.¹⁰⁷

Once Churchill had removed his veto for the air plan, the way was then theoretically left clear for the staffs to eradicate the divisions that existed within, and between, the air forces. As the official historians have pointed out, however, if a rigorous solution had been sought, it is probable that there have been no directive at all.¹⁰⁸ Such a 'linear solution to a wicked problem' would not have worked and it is to the credit of those involved that they did not attempt to do so. The corollary, however, was that the Directive which was ultimately agreed upon contained something for everyone, which again would

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Richards, *Portal*, p.256; one would expect such a biographer to say such things but the evidence is also available elsewhere. See Danchev and Todman, *Alanbrooke's Diaries*, p.361; Roberts, *Masters and Commanders*, pp. 321, 332. See also Max Hastings, *Finest Years: Churchill as War Lord 1940-45* (London: Harper 2009), p.482. Brooke seems consistently to have 'grated' on the Americans. Without getting involved in a complex textual analysis, it is noticeable that many amendments to the text of statements and documents were minuted as Portal's suggestion with King readily agreeing; see for example, CAB 88/2 C.C.S. 65th Meeting dated 21 January 1943.

¹⁰⁶ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. IV, p.609.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.12.

store up trouble for those charged with its interpretation.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, Portal actually warned his colleagues on the Combined Chiefs that ‘too literal an interpretation’ of the priorities could be detrimental to the exercise of the broader priorities of the offensive.¹¹⁰

One of the significant outputs from Casablanca was the appointment of Portal as senior person responsible for the ‘strategical direction’ [sic] of the combined offensive.¹¹¹ Significantly, this included the proviso that the American ‘Commanding General will decide upon technique and method to be employed’ ‘under this general direction’.¹¹² As foreshadowed by the Report on *Symbol*, the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved the ‘Directive for the Bomber Offensive from the United Kingdom’ on 21 January 1943.¹¹³ It stated that the two Commands had as their primary object ‘the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened’. The Directive went on to list the priorities within the higher level intent as being:

- a) German submarine construction yards.
- b) The German aircraft industry.
- c) Transportation
- d) Oil Plants
- e) Other targets in enemy war industry

¹⁰⁹ This interpretation is consistent with the official history, *ibid.* See also Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.215. Interestingly the AHB author recorded that ‘the differences which had manifested themselves in the previous months as to future strategy were there discussed and eliminated’; AIR 41/43, p.5.

¹¹⁰ CAB 88/2, C.C.S. 68th Meeting dated 23 January 1943.

¹¹¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.13. See C.C.S. 170/2 dated 23 January 1943, ‘*Symbol*: Report by the Combined Chiefs of Staff as approved by the President and Prime Minister’. Reproduced in full as Appendix III(F) in Howard, *Grand Strategy*. Original in CAB 88/2.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, para.4.

¹¹³ C.C.S. 166/1 dated 21 January 1943. Reproduced in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8, (xxviii). See AIR 14/778 for the Bomber Command file copy with annotations. This was issued by Bottomley to the Command on 4 February 1943 and its interpretation will be dealt with in the next chapter. The actual directive will be subsequently referred to, as is the common practice, as the Casablanca Directive.

The Directive acknowledged that actual targeting would be subject to the ‘exigencies of weather and of tactical feasibility’ and that the order of priority would be varied depending on changes in the strategic situation.¹¹⁴

Assessment. The Casablanca Directive may well be construed as a classic example of pragmatic compromise at the strategic level. Indeed, if Slessor’s account is anything to go by, the Combined Chiefs could have ended up parting in acrimony.¹¹⁵ The converse argument is that the Directive did not actually direct anyone to do anything specific; in short it was barely a directive in any military sense of the term. The combination between the appointment of Portal with only powers of general direction over the combined offensive and the ‘a la carte’ language of the main directive would subsequently allow the operational commanders scope to interpret from this menu almost as they wished. On the other hand, and without dealing in counter-factual history, the consequences of failing to reach agreement could have spelled the end of the combined enterprise as indicated by Eaker’s gratitude to Churchill described above. It could also have led to the unravelling of the Washington (*Arcadia*) agreement on ‘Germany first’. Given the ambiguity that ensued, it would be a further test for the senior leadership team either to develop further, or to direct, the agreed upon offensive.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Slessor was ACAS (Policy) at the time and Portal had taken him along to provide background ‘interpretation’. Slessor effectively drafted the Directive in a little pocket notebook over lunch on the roof top in ANFA Camp where they were staying. The original pages are at AIR 75/11, Slessor Papers, ‘Casablanca’ dated 18 January 1943.

Washington and Pointblank

In his memoirs, Ismay described 1943 as the 'Conference Year'.¹¹⁶ High level meetings with either the Prime Minister, or Foreign Ministers were held throughout the year with Casablanca followed by Washington (*Trident*) in May; Quebec and Washington (*Quadrant*) in August and September; Moscow (Foreign Ministers only); Cairo (*Sextant*) in November and December; and Teheran (*Eureka*) in November and into December'.¹¹⁷ The Chiefs attended all of these conferences except Moscow.¹¹⁸ But 1943 also saw the Commanders of the Bomber forces attempt to turn the strategy from Casablanca into reality over Germany. In simplistic terms, for Harris this just meant more of the same as Bomber Command had been steadily improving over the previous year and continued to do so.¹¹⁹ But for Eaker, and the USAAF, their task was altogether more serious in that they had to ensure that the build-up of aircraft and crews accelerated to the point where they had sufficient assets actually to make their plan of daylight bombing work. Both Commanders were faced by an implacable enemy whose air defences were improving, by day and night, markedly.¹²⁰ The AHB Narrative makes the point that the intelligence analysts had greatly underestimated the German aircraft industry capacity and the advent of Speer increased its efficiency; this latter point is, however, more contentious in recent literature.¹²¹ The importance of reducing this threat was vital both for the effectiveness of the bomber

¹¹⁶ Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.283.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. *Sextant* commenced on 22 November 1943 and continued until 26 November and included a substantial Chinese delegation. *Eureka* then took place between 28 November and 1 December with the Russians in Teheran. *Sextant* then resumed from 3-7 December. See John Erhman, *Grand Strategy Vol. V*, ch. IV.

¹¹⁸ See the descriptions in both Richards, *Portal* and Danchev and Todman, *Alanbrooke's Diaries*.

¹¹⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.32.

¹²⁰ AIR 41/43, p.71.

¹²¹ Ibid. See also Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, p.556 for Speer and pp.577-84 for the aircraft industry.

offensives and for the longer term achievement of air superiority in advance of *Overlord*.¹²²

The plan for the combined bomber offensive, known colloquially as the ‘Eaker’ plan, was drawn up largely by the American staffs, albeit with operational and intelligence input from the British.¹²³ Portal accepted the plan and had ‘assured Arnold that it commanded his full support’; Harris ‘had expressed no fundamental objections’.¹²⁴ Whether this was a continuation of Portal’s pragmatic approach to seeing the theory tested in operational conditions or full endorsement is not clear, but it is evident that whatever debate was needed could again be tackled in the detail of the wording in order to ensure that all lines of operation remained open to the respective Commanders. Agreement at all levels of the command chain was relatively easily achieved and the *Pointblank* plan was adopted by the Combined Chiefs, the Prime Minister and the President during the Washington talks in May 1943.¹²⁵

A draft Directive in support of *Pointblank* was sent to the operational Commanders on 3 June 1943 for their comment.¹²⁶ The official historians have described this as ‘a most significant document’ in that it made it ‘abundantly clear’ that attacking the German fighter force was to be ‘the most urgent aim’ of the USAAF Eighth Air Force and Bomber

¹²² Casablanca had seen the establishment of COSSAC under General Morgan to begin the planning for the projected allied invasion of France; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.31. See CAB 88/2, C.C.S. 67th Meeting dated 22 January 1943.

¹²³ AIR 41/43, p.68. See also Hansell, *Air Plan*, pp.168-71.

¹²⁴ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.22.

¹²⁵ CAB 88/2, C.C.S. Meeting 18 May 1943 and C.C.S. Memorandum dated 25 May 1943.

¹²⁶ Reproduced in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8, (xxx). Draft Directive, Bottomley to Harris dated 3 June 1943. AIR 14/778 for the Bomber Command file copy.

Command.¹²⁷ As suggested above, it is evident in comparing the draft with the *Pointblank* Directive as actually issued on 10 June, that there had been considerable staff action.¹²⁸ A significant difference between the two documents was the restitution of the wording from the Casablanca Directive stating that the ‘primary object’ remained ‘the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened’.¹²⁹ The Bomber Command file copy of this Directive shows heavy side-scoring of this passage in green pencil – presumably by Harris given the Service custom for use of this colour to be reserved for the senior commander (his deputy, Saundby, used red).¹³⁰ The Directive then allocated the Eighth Air Force, alone, an ‘intermediary objective’ of the German Fighter strength and then the familiar list of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ objectives.¹³¹ As if to emphasise the separate functions of the Eighth Air Force and Bomber Command the paragraph the goes on to state that while ‘the force of Bomber Command will be employed in accordance with their main aim in the general disorganisation of German industry their action will be designed as far as practicable to be complementary to the operations of the Eighth Air Force. [Emphasis added].¹³² The Directive as written is an oxymoron; it gave no clear direction with its muddle of adjectives describing the respective priorities, aims and objectives. This again allowed the operational commanders the latitude to adopt their own courses of action. In terms of modern leadership theory, this could be interpreted as an ideal form of ‘mission

¹²⁷ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.28.

¹²⁸ Staff action included a Cs-in-C level conference scheduled for 7 June 1943 which the official historians assumed went ahead, but could find no reference to; Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.29, fn.1. Directive at Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8, (xxxii). Directive, Bottomley to Harris dated 10 June 1943. AIR 14/778 for the Bomber Command copy.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, para.5.

¹³⁰ AIR 14/779; the same applies to the wording in the Casablanca Directive in AIR 14/779.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, para.6.

¹³² *Ibid.*

command'. But the reality was that the Directive should have given a clear statement of the commander's intent (in this case the President, Prime Minister and the Combined Chiefs) and as shown was anything but that. Furthermore, mission command relies on the subordinate commanders being given the resources with which to complete the task. With the merits of the different approaches still to be contested in the face of the enemy, it is evident that the senior British leaders had adopted the age-old leadership approach of 'consent and evade'; Harris' approach will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.¹³³

As the official historians have noted, the *Pointblank* Directive as issued actually brought the plan closer to the original that had been approved by the Combined Chiefs in Washington.¹³⁴ Furthermore, the separation of the objectives for the two operational Commands represented a clear acknowledgement that the British efforts should be allowed to continue where the Eighth Air Force had permission to prove its case, which, in any event, was still dependent on the provision of resources. Over the following six months, Portal and Eaker reported the progress of the bomber offensive to the Combined Chiefs at the major conferences. At *Quadrant* in August, Portal reported that the expansion of the German fighter force had continued and expressed his concern that diversions of forces from the Eighth Air Force could prejudice the achievement of air superiority for *Overlord*.¹³⁵ This theme was repeated in December 1943 at the *Sextant* Conference where Portal and Eaker reiterated the challenge of coping with increased German production at a time when the Eighth Air Force was only receiving some two thirds of the required

¹³³ This is well known to practitioners of leadership at all levels, but is strangely absent from the contemporary literature.

¹³⁴ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.30.

¹³⁵ AIR 41/43, p.72.

aircraft.¹³⁶ The direction from the Combined Chiefs was that Eaker should continue to the limit of what could be achieved ‘without seriously outrunning aircraft and crews’.¹³⁷ By early 1944, the Eighth Air Force was able to mount raids approaching the scale of those launched by Bomber Command. But by this stage, the American staffs began to appreciate that their problems were not just ensuring numbers of aircraft in theatre, but their survival rates in the face of German fighters.¹³⁸ The fight against the German Air Force, and its supporting industry, was then further complicated by the overarching demands of providing air support for the impending invasion of North West Europe.

Strategic Assets for *Overlord* – Command and Control

The complex series of grand strategic discussions in November and December 1943 set the stage for most of the major engagements of the remainder of the war with substantive negotiations with both the Soviets (with Stalin in Teheran) and China (Chiang Kai-Shek in the first phase in Cairo).¹³⁹ Erhman described *Sextant* and *Eureka* together as a most exceptional conference and ‘one whose complexities and length could scarcely have been avoided’ despite the frustrations of those involved.¹⁴⁰ But the Conference outcomes also saw confirmation of the absolute primacy of *Overlord* and the appointment of Eisenhower as its Supreme Commander. This signalled ‘general post’ for the structure and high level appointments which followed.¹⁴¹ In accordance with what had become established procedure, an American Supreme Commander would have a British deputy. Tedder was appointed to that crucial role, not least because of his experience in co-ordinating allied air

¹³⁶ Ibid. See Appendix 15 for a copy of the full report.

¹³⁷ AIR 41/43, p.75.

¹³⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.73-5.

¹³⁹ Erhman, *Grand Strategy V*, pp.155-83.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.201.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. See also Churchill, *Second World War Vol. V - Closing the Ring*, p.370.

efforts in a truly joint and combined arena.¹⁴² The next most critical air command position, in practical terms, if not in terms of the Combined Command structure was the appointment of Spaatz as commanding general of the United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USStAFE) (Eaker was moved from the Eighth Air Force to the Mediterranean and was succeeded by Major-General James Doolittle).¹⁴³ Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay was appointed as the naval commander and Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory as the commander of allied air forces.¹⁴⁴ This latter move was to cause its own share of controversy so close to the pinnacle of the senior leadership team, because of Leigh-Mallory's abrasive personality and the subordination of air arms to him.¹⁴⁵ To complete the picture, Montgomery and Bradley were appointed as the British and American land commanders.¹⁴⁶ Each of these seven appointments had a degree of controversy attached, as did many of those that cascaded down from them. But for the purposes of this thesis, the challenges for the senior leaders were all the greater as they had to agree the command structures, and the functional relationships, that would be required to make a success of an enterprise which could not be allowed to fail.

At the heart of the problem was the familiar challenge to strategic leaders in formulating the vision and purpose of their organisation. The critical problem, however, was the remaining ambiguity in defining the 'organisation'; it could be argued that the President, Prime Minister and Combined Chiefs had been obliged to set the threshold of

¹⁴² Erhman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. V, p.204. See also Lord Tedder, *With Prejudice: The War Memories of MRAF Lord Tedder* (London: Cassell, 1966), p.490.

¹⁴³ Erhman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. V, pp.204-5. See also Mets, *Master of Airpower*, p.180 over the controversy which ensued; Eaker saw his move, even though technically a move upwards in that he became deputy commander to General Wilson in the Mediterranean, as a slight.

¹⁴⁴ Erhman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. V, p.204. Leigh-Mallory was appointed C-in-C Allied Expeditionary Air Force at the Quebec conference which was 'to afford the necessary tactical support to *Overlord*'; see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.15.

¹⁴⁵ See for example, Tedder, *With Prejudice*, pp. 499-502.

¹⁴⁶ Erhman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. V, p.204.

the new entity at too low a level in making Eisenhower Supreme Commander of just the invasion of north-west Europe; the geographical limitation to the operational theatre had important consequences for the role of the strategic bombers. This problem in deciding who was going to command what had originated in the period immediately prior to the Cairo/Teheran conferences when it was generally expected that Marshall would be appointed as Supreme Commander for *Overlord* and, critically, also remain Chairman of the Combined Chiefs.¹⁴⁷ This led to confusion, and ugly rumours, in Washington, including speculation that Marshall had fallen victim of someone in the American political constellation and had effectively been sacked (and on which German propaganda had a field day). A possible solution emerged in which Marshall would become a Supreme Commander of all forces in Europe other than the Red Army.¹⁴⁸ But this ran counter to what the British considered as urgently necessary in setting up a Supreme Commander for the Mediterranean; and, in their view, it would have fundamentally shaken the constitutionally sound Combined Chiefs of Staff system and placed a lot of power in the hands of one man.¹⁴⁹ The resulting limited scope of the Supreme Command was below the threshold necessary to justify Marshall's appointment as he was considered by Roosevelt to be too valuable in Washington. But the *Overlord* command was therefore limited in its span as it excluded the strategic air arms, both of which had far wider European dimensions and priorities.

As has been discussed above, from Casablanca onwards, many of the issues surrounding conflicting priorities, and interpretations of directives, had been either

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.119.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.120-1. See also Keith Sainsbury, *The Turning Point: Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill and Chiang-Kai-Shek, 1943, The Moscow, Cairo and Teheran Conferences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.168.

deliberately obfuscated or avoided. It was therefore inevitable, given the scale and priority of the military requirements for *Overlord*, that the controversies over the contradictions would become all the more acute. The potentially huge risks and gains for both individuals, and their aspirations for their services, raised the leadership stakes further. For Harris and Spaatz, as the strategic air commanders, the possibility of the diversion of air assets from the *Pointblank* offensive against the German air force and wider industry came at the time when the years of unfulfilled potential actually came close to success with the scale of attacks then possible.¹⁵⁰ But the other senior leaders, both political and military, charged with the detailed direction, supervision and planning of *Overlord*, expected nothing short of a massive ‘campaign of direct air preparation’.¹⁵¹ The essence of the problem in this should have been relatively simple with the issue of a directive to Leigh-Mallory and appropriate forces either put under his command or allocated to him. In reality this became what the official historians have described as ‘one of the most complicated and confusing command problems of the war’.¹⁵²

In theory, the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces were to comprise the Second Tactical Air Force from the RAF and the Ninth Air Force from the USAAF. Both should have had light (or tactical) bombers and fighters. Command and control issues, over both American and British forces, remained confused with debate between Washington and London over just what was meant by ‘administrative control’ in the case of the Ninth.¹⁵³ Following his appointment as Supreme Commander, Eisenhower (along with Bedell

¹⁵⁰ See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.4. Harris’s views were explained in no uncertain terms to Tedder (whom he addressed as ‘Dear Tirpitz’); see AIR 37/1011, E15A, Letter Harris to Tedder dated 2 March 1944.

¹⁵¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III., p.5.

¹⁵² Ibid, p.15. Leigh-Mallory was given his first Directive by COSSAC on 16 November 1943, but it stated that there would have to be further directives to cover the control of the strategic air forces.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Smith, his Chief of Staff) expressed their concern to Churchill over the prospect of there being two tactical air forces under Leigh-Mallory. In a note to Sinclair, Churchill wrote that Leigh-Mallory had

apparently let it be known that he intends to be a real Commander-in-Chief of the Air. But that is not what is meant at all. I do not consider Leigh Mallory [sic] is the equal of Sholto Douglas who so unfortunately got side-tracked, and in any case Tedder with his unique experience and close relation as Deputy to the Supreme Commander ought to be in fact and in form the complete master of all air operations. Everything is then quite simple. There need only be one Tactical Air Force which Leigh Mallory can command, Spaatz will come directly under Eisenhower as his senior officer and can be told to obey Tedder. There will be no difficulty in arranging between Tedder and Harris'.¹⁵⁴

Sinclair responded the next day telling Churchill that the AEF were 'larger and more complex' than the Prime Minister had implied not least because the forces included the Air Defence of Great Britain (as Fighter Command had become) and that Leigh-Mallory would have a major task co-ordinating the disparate elements of the air forces.¹⁵⁵ He would also have to integrate into the *Overlord* air operations those 'heavy bombers from the commands of Harris and Spaatz as are placed at his disposal from time to time by the Chiefs of Staff'. Sinclair reminded Churchill that he was personally responsible for Leigh-Mallory's appointment (at *Quadrant*) and that he was a 'thoroughly competent officer'. Sinclair went on to predict the probable role of Tedder in ensuring the smooth liaison between the Supreme Command, the Air Staff, Bomber Command and, he hoped, Spaatz. He also expressed his view that Portal should retain his position representing the Combined Chiefs over Harris and Spaatz rather than Eisenhower taking this role. Churchill wrote on the telegram that these arrangements would have to be reviewed when

¹⁵⁴ Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, Telegram from PM to Sinclair and COS dated 6 January 1944. Douglas replaced Slessor at Coastal Command, announced in the same minute which begs the question of why the succession planning had not been fully thought through. Churchill was still in Cairo at the time. For the genesis of Churchill's comments on Leigh-Mallory wanting to be a real air supremo see AIR 41/66, AHB Narrative, *The Liberation of North West Europe, Vol 1, Planning and Preparation*, pp. 40-1, Letter Leigh-Mallory to Portal dated 1 November 1943 in which he stated that he should command all forces, including the strategic bombers, on behalf of the Supreme Commander.

¹⁵⁵ Hunter, *op.cit.*, Telegram Sinclair to PM dated 7 January 1944.

Eisenhower was in post but that he certainly did ‘not subscribe to them as at present informed’.¹⁵⁶ It is clear from a memorandum from Eisenhower to Tedder that Churchill was not going to allow Leigh-Mallory ‘command the Strat’ (sic).¹⁵⁷

As Tedder himself has commented, the situation in mid-February 1944 in London ‘was confused, to say the least’.¹⁵⁸ In a letter to Portal, Tedder pointed out that Spaatz had ‘made it abundantly clear that he will not accept orders, or even co-ordination from Leigh-Mallory, and the only sign of activity from Harris’s representatives has been a series of adjustments to the records of their past bombing statistics’; the latter was designed to show that Bomber Command should not be used for precision targets leaving the Command free to prosecute area bombing in Germany.¹⁵⁹ The leadership challenge in this sort of situation has been likened to ‘herding cats’ and while it is unlikely that Sinclair or Portal would have used the expression, they would have recognised the symptoms.¹⁶⁰ The tussle for power over the disparate air elements was eventually resolved by Portal after discussions with Eisenhower; they concluded that Tedder should be responsible for the co-ordination of operations in the execution of the Strategic Air Plan once it had been approved, on behalf of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, by the Supreme Commander and himself.¹⁶¹ Leigh-Mallory would be responsible for the Tactical Air Plan, which would include the strategic bombers, but under Tedder’s supervision. Churchill described this as ‘very satisfactory’

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ AIR 37/1011, Memorandum Eisenhower to Tedder dated 29 February 1944. See also Richard G. Davis ‘Pointblank versus Overlord: Strategic Bombing and the Normandy Invasion’, *Air Power History*, 41(2) 1994, p6.

¹⁵⁸ Tedder, *With Prejudice*, p.507

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.508. See also AIR 37/1011, Letter Portal to Tedder dated 18 February 1944 in which the difficulties of ‘blending’ the requirements for pre-*Overlord* and *Pointblank* are discussed and Letter Tedder to Portal, E11A, dated 22 February 1944.

¹⁶⁰ See Warren G. Bennis, *Managing People is like Herding Cats* (London: Kogan Page 1998).

¹⁶¹ AIR 41/56, AHB Narrative, *The RAF in the Bombing Offensive Against Germany: Vol. VI. The Final Phase (March 1944 - May 1945)*, pp.20-21. See AIR37/1011, Minute CAS to PM dated 10 March 1944. The draft of this was discussed with Tedder and Eisenhower on 5 March.

and the whole was passed to the Combined Chiefs for approval.¹⁶² The Americans demurred over the term ‘supervision’, preferring ‘command’.¹⁶³ The potential for a serious rift over what was seen as British determination to divide the Supreme Command was fixed by the use of the word ‘direction’ to define Eisenhower’s authority over the strategic bombers.¹⁶⁴ This was formalised on 22 March 1944 and came into effect on 14 April 1944.¹⁶⁵

The importance of establishing, and then maintaining, personal relationships at the senior leadership level has already been covered in this chapter and it is again clear from this episode just how detrimental it can be to an enterprise when these relationships do not work. It is clear from both American and British accounts that one of the major stumbling blocks was a profound reluctance to take orders from Leigh-Mallory.¹⁶⁶ As a close colleague, Douglas has described Leigh-Mallory’s attitude as uncompromising and even aggressive in a manner likely ‘to rub the Americans the wrong way’; it is likely that he was being comparatively generous in these comments as they feature on the same pages as his report of Leigh-Mallory’s untimely death later that year.¹⁶⁷ Orange, in his biography of Tedder, quoted with characteristic glee an early appraisal by his subject of Leigh-Mallory as being ‘incredibly pompous, unapproachable by his own staff and I’m sure very

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.20. AIR 37/1011, E34A, Signal dated 20 March 1944.

¹⁶⁴ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.20. See also Hansell, *Air Plan*, p.189.

¹⁶⁵ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.20. AIR 37/1011, E37A, COS (W) 1225 dated 22 March 1944 and Telegram Marshall to Eisenhower dated 25 March 1944.

¹⁶⁶ See Hansell, *Air Plan*, p.189. See AIR 37/1011, E11A, Letter Tedder to Portal dated 22 February 1944. For a wider appreciation, albeit rather partisan, see Solly Zuckerman, *From Apes to Warlords, An Autobiography, 1904-1946* (London: Collins, 1988), p.230.

¹⁶⁷ Douglas, *Years of Command*, pp.254-5

ambitious'.¹⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that Leigh-Mallory, who presumably must have had Portal's confidence, is not mentioned at all by Richards in his biography. Although the obstacle presented by Leigh-Mallory's position in planning air operations had to some extent been solved, real issues remained over the use to which the air assets would be directed.

Strategic Assets for *Overlord* – Targeting Policy

The phrase 'targeting policy' actually masks the scale of the issues to be resolved in deciding on the purpose of the bomber forces. The situation was exacerbated by the addition of Tedder as a commander and a 'protagonist' in the debates in his own right.¹⁶⁹ Notwithstanding the uncertainty over the role and extent of the participation of the strategic bombers, the AEAFF had commenced planning at the beginning of 1944.¹⁷⁰ AEAFF planners, in their broadest sense, totally accepted the primary importance of securing and then maintaining control of the air. They considered that the real land battle would take place in Normandy after enemy reinforcements had arrived. Furthermore, some targets, such as coastal batteries, could only be attacked in the immediate run up to the landings to preserve surprise. Beyond that, they believed that considerable reserves of air power had to be kept available for contingency use. This meant that a close second priority in the preparation for D-Day had to be given to a systematic dislocation of enemy communications to prevent reinforcement; this became the AEAFF Transportation Plan.¹⁷¹ A draft of this plan was discussed at a meeting of the AEAFF Bombing Committee held on

¹⁶⁸ Orange, *Tedder*, p.250

¹⁶⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.21.

¹⁷⁰ AIR 41/56, p.6. Their Bombing Committee was chaired by Air Commodore Kingston-McCloughry and included Professor Solly Zuckerman and Mr E.D. Brant from the Railway Research Service¹⁷⁰ See E. J. Kingston McCloughry, *The Direction of War: A Critique of the Political Direction and High Command in War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), ch.VIII.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

15 February 1945 with Portal, Tedder, Harris and Spaatz in attendance.¹⁷² Neither Tedder nor Portal was completely convinced at this stage. Both of the strategic bomber commanders condemned the plan for a range of reasons including the unsuitability of their forces to this work and the perceived unnecessary diversion from the real business of attacking Germany. But as the official historians have pointed out, the two bomber commanders were not united by common ground in their disagreement with the plan.¹⁷³ To Harris, this plan brought together the quest for precision targets to be attacked and was a further development of the thinking of the ‘panacea mongers’. Spaatz, however, objected on the grounds that firstly, the transportation attacks would have no impact on the war for air superiority other than the diversion of his assets. Secondly, and arguably more importantly from the bomber perspective, was that adherence to the transportation plan would divert assets thereby diluting the long-cherished ideal of German capitulation in the face of the offensive. His third consideration was that, if Germany did not collapse, the planning should be designed to offer as much assistance as possible to achieving success on the land. Spaatz did not see the AEF plan achieving any of these outcomes; only attacks on German oil could satisfy all three.¹⁷⁴

Spaatz considered that his force was on the brink of achieving the intermediate objective of *Pointblank* by destroying the German air force and ball-bearing production.¹⁷⁵ Turning the emphasis to the German petroleum industry, with a special emphasis on oil would force the German air force to defend these vital interests at all costs; the German High Command would not be able to husband resources with so much at stake. If the

¹⁷² Ibid., p.10. See also Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, pp.232-3.

¹⁷³ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.23.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ AIR 41/56, p.12.

German air force was therefore forced to fight, the Americans fighters could further the quest for air supremacy. Spaatz believed that this plan should be immediately implemented and attention to *Overlord* only increased close to D-Day. Spaatz considered this to be the best use of his strategic bombers to ensure the success of *Overlord*.¹⁷⁶ The arguments inevitably showed all the signs of ‘going round in circles’; Portal therefore invited Eisenhower, Tedder, Leigh-Mallory, Spaatz and Harris to a conference on 25 March 1944. Tedder circulated his paper the day before.¹⁷⁷ He opened by confirming that

The primary role of the Air Forces is to secure and maintain air superiority during the assault and subsequent land operations. The maximum possible direct air assistance is also required in support of the actual assault, and against enemy movements and concentrations after the assault.

He went on to state the Army view of the role of Allied air power as being to destroy the enemy air forces and ‘destroy and disrupt communications so as to impose delay on enemy movement towards the lodgement area’. Tedder then outlined the two competing plans, concluding that the Transportation plan was the ‘only plan offering a reasonable prospect of disorganising enemy movement and supply in the time available’. He went on to recommend that the *Pointblank* directive be replaced by a combined *Pointblank/Overlord* directive which should be agreed between Eisenhower and Portal and then issued by the latter ‘under whose direction all Allied Air forces concerned will operate’.¹⁷⁸ At the meeting, both Spaatz and Harris put forward their opposing views.¹⁷⁹ Harris doubted the overall effectiveness of the plan and his ability to strike the range of targets in the given timescale; he also suggested that his city bombing would have a similar effect in any

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.13. His paper is reproduced in full at AIR 41/56, App. 3, ‘Plan for the Completion of the Combined Bomber Offensive’ dated 5 March 1944.

¹⁷⁷ AIR 41/56, App. 5, ‘Employment of Allied Air Forces in Support of ‘*Overlord*’ dated 14 March 1944. Spaatz’s comments are at AIR 37/1011, E38A, dated 24 March 1944.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ AIR37/1011, E42A, ‘Final Minutes of a Meeting Held on Saturday March 25th to Discuss the Bombing Policy in the Period before *Overlord*’.

event.¹⁸⁰ Spaatz adamantly maintained that attacks on oil installations would both force the German Air Force to rally in their defence (hence offering target opportunities for his fighters) and serve to bring the German war machine to a halt.¹⁸¹ Each of the senior leaders had his own vision for their part of the organisation and were certainly not lacking in the passion necessary to pursue it. But coherence of effort was essential and Eisenhower's support for the Transportation Plan, on the basis that it would produce the most measurable results, along with Portal's support ensured its adoption. The British Chiefs accepted the Plan and it was referred to Churchill and then to the War Cabinet. Churchill, however, was not prepared to accept the civilian casualties anticipated in the French cities where the key nodal points had been identified.

In his final comments at the meeting on 25 March, Portal had reminded his colleagues that as many of the targets were in built-up areas, there would almost certainly be very large numbers of French civilian casualties and that this was likely to be of concern to the British Government.¹⁸² The perennial challenge of senior leaders in interfacing with the political and allied levels was again borne out as this became a protracted saga with five discussions in the Defence Committee and three in the War Cabinet.¹⁸³ Churchill was very much the prime mover in the discussions and consistently requested revised casualty figures; only those targets well clear of built-up areas were authorised.¹⁸⁴ As experience grew, it became evident that Bomber Command was capable of attacking these targets

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Harris's doubts were expressed in the face of very positive early experience following the raid on Trappes on 6 March 1944: see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.151.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. See also W.W. Rostow, *Pre-Invasion Strategy: General Eisenhower's Decision of March 2, 1944* (Aldershot: Gower, 1981), p.4.

¹⁸² AIR 19/218 op.cit.

¹⁸³ See CAB 69/5 for the Defence Committee meetings on 5, 13, 19 and 26 April and then on 3 May. The War Cabinet Minutes are in Confidential Annexes at CAB 65/46/1 for 3 April, CAB 65/46/6 for 27 April and CAB 65/46/7 for 2 May 1944.

¹⁸⁴ See AIR 41/56 pp.16-18.

accurately and with lower bomb loads; the estimates for collateral damage decreased further.¹⁸⁵ Portal submitted one such estimate to the Defence Committee on 13 April 1944 and a ‘grudging approval’ was given for the attacks to continue.¹⁸⁶ With the judicious inclusion of an extra paragraph stating that the ‘political aspects of this plan, as affecting the French, will be kept under continuous supervision, with especial reference to the casualties to the civilian populations involved’, the formal directive was issued to the two commanders on 17 April 1944.¹⁸⁷

Churchill, however, was still not satisfied, particularly when it transpired that, by late April, the Eighth Air Force had only attacked one target and the Fifteenth had not attacked any. The Defence Committee was therefore concerned that the Americans were deliberately allowing Bomber Command to shoulder the blame for killing friendly civilians.¹⁸⁸ Eisenhower confirmed to Churchill that political considerations had been realised throughout and attacks against the most densely populated areas had been deferred until immediately prior to D-Day.¹⁸⁹ Eisenhower emphasised the importance of the Transportation Plan to the success of *Overlord* and in this was supported by Brooke (who had initially been an opponent) who stated that the ‘whole concept of *Overlord* was based on making full use of the terrific air power at our disposal’ and that the whole enterprise

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ See AIR 41/56, p.17 and CAB 69/5, D.O. (44) 6th Meeting dated 13 April 1944.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Directive by the Supreme Commander to U.S.St.A.F and Bomber Command for Support of ‘*Overlord*’ during the preparatory period’ dated 17 April 1944, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV App.8 (xxxviii).

¹⁸⁸ CAB 69/5, D.O. (44) 8th Meeting dated 26 April 1944. For a wider discussion on the American determination to maintain their rhetoric on not causing indiscriminate civilian casualties see Ronald Schaffer, ‘American Military Ethics in World War II: The Bombing of German Civilians’, *The Journal of American History*, 67 (2) 1980, pp.318-334. The realities of what was achieved are at Parks, ‘Precision and Area Bombing’; where the author describes in considerable detail just how much area bombing the Americans actually conducted.

¹⁸⁹ CAB 65/46/7, W.M. (44) 61st Conclusions, Confidential Annex dated 2 May 1944.

would not have been undertaken if the use of air power had been going to be restricted.¹⁹⁰ The difference in attitudes was interesting in that Churchill clearly had an eye on the post-war possibilities of having to live with charges of fratricide where Eisenhower saw the French people as ‘slaves’ who could only be liberated by the success of *Overlord*, and that their suffering was an extension of the collapse of 1940.¹⁹¹ Churchill sought reassurance (and attempted to share the responsibility) by sending a telegram to Roosevelt who replied that he was content to leave the matters in the hands of the military commanders.¹⁹² As Churchill concluded, ‘this was decisive’.¹⁹³ Even so, he harked back to the subject regularly including a characteristically terse note to Tedder asking ‘How many Frenchmen did you kill?’ on 10 July 1944.¹⁹⁴

From a leadership perspective, Eisenhower’s views, that the Transportation Plan would have measurable results in support of *Overlord*, along with the stated Army priorities, apparently left little alternative but acceptance, grudging or otherwise. During the meeting, Portal had confirmed the importance of Spaatz’s aircraft taking their share of the targets, but the latter said that this had not been worked out. In the event, as Davis has pointed out there is always someone who will not accept the final decision as being just that.¹⁹⁵ Spaatz ‘resorted to subterfuge’ attacking oil plants in Romania under the guise of supposedly bombing railway targets and it was to be some weeks before he tackled any

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ See AIR 37/1011, E56A, Letter Eisenhower to Churchill dated 5 April 1944.

¹⁹² Ibid. See also Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol.V, pp. 466-8; Telegram Churchill to Roosevelt dated 7 May 1941 and response on 11 May. See also Tedder, *With Prejudice*, pp.531-2.

¹⁹³ Churchill, op.cit., p.468. For an assessment of the factors involved, and the impact on the French, see Lindsey Dodd and Andrew Knapp, ‘How Many Frenchmen Did You Kill?’ British Bombing Policy Towards France (1940-1945), *French History*, 22(4), pp.469-492.

¹⁹⁴ AIR 37/1012, E98A, Letter Churchill to Tedder dated 10 July 1944; this gave the title quote for Dodd and Knapp, op.cit.

¹⁹⁵ Richard G. Davis, ‘Gen Carl Spaatz and D Day’, *Airpower Journal*, Winter 1997. Available at <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj97/win97/davis.html> accessed 16 October 2009.

real transportation targets.¹⁹⁶ Harris, on the other hand, was pleasantly surprised by what his Command had achieved against these targets and Leigh-Mallory was able to confirm on 3 June 1944 that the Transportation Plan was complete and that the heavy bombers would not be used again unless there was evidence of increased enemy activity.¹⁹⁷ In his memoirs, Harris commented that the period when he served under the leadership of Eisenhower and Tedder was ‘absolutely the only time during the whole of my command when I was able to proceed with a campaign without being harassed by confused and conflicting directives’.¹⁹⁸ This theme will be developed in the next chapter.

D-Day to Dresden

Following the successful invasion of Normandy, the senior leaders had two main courses of action open to them for the employment of the strategic bomber forces; they could either return to bombing targets in Germany, or attack targets which would (theoretically) provide direct benefit to the Expeditionary Force.¹⁹⁹ With the benefit of hindsight, it could be argued that the requirement for a resumption of attacks on Germany was neither necessary from a strategic point of view, nor desirable from the ethical standpoint as an alternative, in the form of the land offensive, had proved viable. It could also be argued that the very nature of the fighting made the distinctions between strategic and tactical bombing less relevant.²⁰⁰ But as the official historians have pointed out, there was still a perceived need to continue to take the fight to the heart of Germany and the ‘sources rather than the manifestations of her armed strength’; as such the final offensive was ‘not only the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ AIR 41/56, p.42. See also Harris, *Despatch on War Operations*, p.24.

¹⁹⁸ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.214.

¹⁹⁹ AIR 41/56, p.51.

²⁰⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.42.

continuation but the consummation of the strategic air offensive against Germany'.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the success of the invasion had been a unique blend of land, sea and air power all of which would continue to be needed to overcome a very stubborn enemy.

A week after D-Day, the Germans launched the first of the V-weapons against Britain and air assets subsequently had to be diverted to countering this threat.²⁰² The degree of priority to be given to the *Crossbow* targets (attacks on V weapon launching sites) brought the inevitable responses from the senior leaders with Harris and Doolittle (Eighth Air Force) who both emphasised the importance of attacking targets in Germany.²⁰³ Leigh-Mallory's priorities were to the provision of close support to the land forces, but Eisenhower and Tedder saw the potential threat to the invasion.²⁰⁴ Eisenhower was adamant that *Crossbow* targets should have the highest priority, but a combination of poor weather over the targets and dubious intelligence convinced his Deputy that air power could reduce, but not eliminate the threat.²⁰⁵ After considerable discussion over both the merits and the practicalities of the operation, a Joint *Crossbow* Target Priorities Committee was set up under the supervision of Tedder.²⁰⁶

As the Allied forces continued to progress through France, Eisenhower moved his headquarters to France on 1 September 1944. This was part of Portal's rationale in persuading first the British and then the Combined Chiefs of Staff of the desirability of

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Operations against V-weapon launching sites were named *Crossbow* and those against V-weapon production were under *Bodyline*.

²⁰³ AIR 41/56, pp.63-8 for the details of the debates.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.63 and Tedder, *With Prejudice*, pp.580-5.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.581.

²⁰⁶ AIR 41/56, p.65.

taking the Combined Bomber Offensive back under their direct control.²⁰⁷ The *Octagon* Directive was, after American insistence, sent to Spaatz and Bottomley as the direct representatives of Arnold and Portal in whom ‘executive responsibility for the control of the strategic bomber forces in Europe’ was now vested.²⁰⁸ The Directives, like their predecessors, were hardly models of clarity or precise in their direction.²⁰⁹ The resumption of direction at this higher level brought the debates over the real purpose of the strategic bomber forces back into formal play, in comparison to the workmanlike informal nature of the relationship between Tedder and Harris on the one hand and Eisenhower and Spaatz on the other.²¹⁰

The continuing need to provide heavy bomber support for the land forces was acknowledged as having to be met; there was, however, debate as to the nature of the need with Portal and Tedder likening the army dependence on air power as being ‘drugged on bombs’.²¹¹ Beyond this ‘malaise’, the old debates re-surfaced over priorities between oil and/or transportation targets in Germany, military industrial potential and fielded forces.²¹² The Air Ministry had become convinced of the vulnerability of the German oil and petroleum situation and therefore advocated the virtues of attacking these targets.²¹³ The

²⁰⁷ See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, pp.60-3 for the full discussions. CAB 88/4, C.C.S. 172nd Meeting dated 12 September 1944 for the main discussion and C.C.S. 174th Meeting dated 14 September 1944 for the approval of the Directive.

²⁰⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xxxix), Directive Portal and Arnold to Bottomley and Spaatz dated 14 September 1944. *Octagon* was the Second Quebec Conference. See also Webster and Frankland op.cit., App.8 (xl and xli) for the subsequent Directive from Bottomley to Harris and his covering letter in which the new command and control arrangements were explained.

²⁰⁹ See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III., p.62.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.60.

²¹¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.69. AIR 37/1013, E68A, Letter Portal to Tedder dated 22 October 1944 and E70A, Letter Tedder to Portal dated 25 October 1944.

²¹² See AIR 41/56, p.112 and the text of the Directives, op.cit.

²¹³ AIR 41/56, p.118. For supporting intelligence material see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.26, ‘Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee on the Effects of Allied Attacks on the Enemy Oil Situation in Europe, 30 October 1944.

newly-formed Combined Strategic Target Committee consistently listed oil and petroleum targets. Harris continued to object to them, which led to one of the most controversial arguments of the offensive; this will be dealt with in the next chapter. At the heart of the debates was the argument over which target system was most likely to bring the war to an early end. Harris continued to believe that industrial area targets would prove decisive.²¹⁴ Marshall complicated the plot by suggesting that an all-out dedication of the strategic bomber forces to the land campaign could see the war end by the end of the year.²¹⁵ Tedder on the other hand, likened the existing pattern of operations to a ‘patchwork quilt’²¹⁶ He warned against learning the wrong lessons from the transportation attacks in France and Belgium advocating that all losses of traffic in Germany had a direct impact on their war effort.²¹⁷ If the strategic bombers were to work in conjunction with (rather than be subordinated to) the land forces, the best target system would be the railway centres, oil targets, canals and population centres of the Ruhr as this was the primary focus of Eisenhower’s offensive.²¹⁸ Tedder expanded on this theme at a conference in Versailles on 27 October which was attended by Bottomley and Spatz, but not Harris.²¹⁹ An appropriate Directive followed on 1 November 1944 designed to set the agenda for the winter and to ensure that conditions were set for an early victory.²²⁰

The reality did not reach expectations and the senior leaders were not only faced with evidence of resilience in both the German oil and manufacturing industries (with the

²¹⁴ AIR 41/56, p.146.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.145.

²¹⁶ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 25, Note, Tedder to Portal on ‘Air Policy to be adopted with a View to Rapid Defeat of Germany’ dated 25 October 1944.

²¹⁷ Ibid., para.8.

²¹⁸ Ibid., para.9.

²¹⁹ AIR 41/56, pp.149-151.

²²⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 8 (xliii (a) for the covering letter on which Harris wrote ‘Here we go round the Mulberry bush’ and (b) for the actual Directive), Directive, Bottomley to Harris dated 1 November 1944.

production of jet aircraft particularly worrying), but also had to contend with the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes.²²¹ This resulted in yet another Directive.²²² Coincident with this work, the Prime Minister showed his typical close interest in events, and in the eastern front in particular.²²³ With the next major Allied Conference due in Yalta, Churchill was keen to be able to show Stalin what was being done to support his front.²²⁴ An operation, codenamed *Thunderclap*, had been muted from as early as August 1944 as a means of hastening the collapse of Germany by attacking the morale of the people in major cities in the east of Germany, including Berlin. Portal, and his Air Staff colleagues, remained sceptical about the prospects of *Thunderclap*.²²⁵ Nevertheless, Churchill pressed Sinclair hard over what was going to be done about ‘harrying the German retreat from Breslau’ and the Secretary of State replied on 26 January 1945.²²⁶ Churchill responded the same day with his fateful minute:

I did not ask you last night about plans for harrying the German retreat from Breslau. On the contrary, I asked whether Berlin, and no doubt other large cities in East Germany, should not now be considered especially attractive targets. I am glad that this is “under examination”. Pray report to me to-morrow what is going to be done.²²⁷

Sinclair confirmed the next day that, subject to overriding claims for the bombers to attack oil targets or other ‘approved systems’, available effort should be directed against Berlin, Dresden, Chemnitz and Leipzig or against other cities where severe bombing would not only destroy communications vital to the evacuation from the East but would also hamper the movement of troops from the West.²²⁸ As the official historians have pointed out, the

²²¹ AIR 41/56, p.195.

²²² Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 8 (xliv (a) and (b)), Directive, Bottomley to Harris dated 15 January 1945.

²²³ AIR 41/56, p.200.

²²⁴ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.101.

²²⁵ AIR 41/56, p.199 and Webster and Frankland, *op.cit.*

²²⁶ Hunter, *Winston and Archie*, Minute Sinclair to Churchill dated 26 January 1945.

²²⁷ Hunter, *op.cit.*, Minute Churchill to Sinclair dated 26 January 1945.

²²⁸ Hunter, *op.cit.*, Minute Sinclair to Churchill dated 27 January 1945.

urgency of the initiative was evident from Churchill's tone and his actual words.²²⁹ The broad thrust of this was endorsed by the Russians during *Argonaut* although the debate would subsequently become contentious during the Cold War furore over Dresden.²³⁰ The actual attacks on Dresden, and Chemnitz and Berlin, duly took place in February 1945 with the attacks by Bomber Command and the Eighth Air Force on Dresden achieving notoriety.²³¹

The debate on Dresden, and the wider issues on Churchill's attempts to distance himself from the likely post-war odium, have been widely discussed in the literature. From a leadership perspective, however, the debate that took place at the time had some logic as was clear from Churchill's final minute which was approved by the Chiefs of Staff on 4 April 1945.²³² The Prime Minister essentially questioned the wisdom of continuing to bomb a desolated country in which the Allies would have to live in occupation. The decision that had to be made was part ethical, and part practical. But the other side of the coin, which is acknowledged by the official historians, but not by Churchill, was the potential cost to Allied lives if a premature decision was taken to end the strategic offensive.²³³

²²⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.103.

²³⁰ See Webster and Franland, *op.cit.*, p.105 and Probert, *Harris*, p.319. The official records only quoted Berlin and Leizig, but Probert unearthed evidence from the British translator at Yalta who confirmed the inclusion of Dresden, albeit too late to contribute to the Cold War debate.

²³¹ The extensive literature on Dresden has been discussed above.

²³² Quoted in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.117.

²³³ *Ibid.* See Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. VI, p.471 which acknowledges the CoS Instruction to Bomber Command dated 6 April 1945 effectively ending the offensive, but the index entries relating to Dresden are all to do with communications and land forces.

Conclusions

One of the greatest challenges for a strategic leader, whether political or military, is to be able to span the area from the interface with the operational sphere to the grand strategic. At the very highest levels, it is inevitable that the challenge will be complicated by the requirement to work with allies whose culture may be very different, and whose priorities may conflict. Attitudes to casualties, to methods of warfare, eventual outcomes and secondary agendas all make the task more complex. The American airmen, for example, fervently wanted to prove the viability of a future independent USAF, and strategic bombing gave them the means through which to make their case. Nations are often reluctant to place their forces under the command of an allied colleague. The establishment of the principle of having a single commander was a major achievement. But it had to be the right person otherwise the organisation risks unravelling, as was demonstrated by the appointment of Leigh-Mallory. Furthermore, subordination of the strategic bomber forces under the full command of one person was a step too far when there was still so much controversy over what their primary purpose should be. Hence the system of 'direction' and 'oversight' was introduced to try and produce some degree of unity of purpose. Leaders of the calibre of Portal and Tedder were clearly content to function in this complex and ambiguous arena.

Chapter Seven

THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL INTERFACE 1942-45

Introduction – The Interface between the Politicians, the Air Ministry and Bomber Command

The previous chapter discussed the direction and leadership of the strategic bombing offensive at the grand strategic level as it made the transition into the Combined Bomber Offensive and then *Overlord*. This chapter will look at the interface, and indeed the overlap, between the strategic levels within the RAF. Rather than attempt to abbreviate the official history, or the AHB Narratives, this chapter will examine thematically the areas of the interface where the leadership challenges were most significant. The interfaces are critical in almost all organisational situations because most are effectively open systems in which external factors have substantive influence.¹ At the higher levels in an organisation, the tasks become increasingly complex and the more senior leaders must have the cognitive capacity to deal with the issues.² But, in the ideal world, the more difficult, or complex an organisation has become, the greater the need for clear lines of authority and accountability; but as will be demonstrated, this was far from the case in terms of the relationship between the Air Ministry and Bomber Command.³ A senior leader will attach a degree of importance to an issue based on a number of factors including its complexity or its contentiousness. If there is a source of inter-personal friction in the topic, it will almost inevitably increase the time spent on it. This scope for debilitating strife will be exacerbated by differences in ‘role culture’ in which, for example, functions or procedures

¹ See, for example, Hunt, *Leadership: A New Synthesis*, p.15.

² Ibid.

³ Kakabadse, *Essence of Leadership*, p.33.

are significantly different in the organisations that face each other across the interface.⁴ Kakabadse has stated that, in role culture, ‘the formal definition of tasks and roles is considered to be of paramount importance’ and that there must be ‘suitable cross-over points’ at which arbitration and decision-making can take place.⁵ If some of the agents responsible for facilitating this ‘cross-over’ are themselves sources of inter-personal friction (as was the case of the relationship between Harris and Bufton where the cultural complications of rank and status were a source of irritation to the C-in-C) then the higher leadership challenge will be greater.⁶ This again will be compounded at each interface, especially when the political dimension is added.

This chapter will therefore examine some of the areas over which there was friction, even conflict, between the politicians, the Air Ministry, and Harris and his staff at Bomber Command. These will include the debate over what was understood by the area bombing and interpretations of the nature of German morale. Harris was almost constantly frustrated by the diversions of his Command to tasks other than the systematic destruction of German cities, and these episodes will be outlined. *Overlord* has been discussed in the grand strategic consequence, so the Bomber Command involvement will then be examined. The chapter will also look at the debate over nodal target systems, or what Harris consistently referred to as ‘panaceas’ and finally examine the contentious debates between Portal and Harris over oil targeting. Technical debates over the development of navigational aids and types of weapon will not be discussed in this thesis as, arguably,

⁴ Ibid., p.73.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bufton rose to become Director of Bomber Operations and was something of a *bête noire* for Harris: see Cox, ‘Sir Arthur Harris and the Air Ministry’, p.218. For in-depth treatment see Cording, *The Other Bomber Battle*.

these were at the interface between the operational and tactical level notwithstanding the high degree of Air Ministry interest.

In a wider context it is worth acknowledging that, over the period covered by this chapter, Bomber Command became increasingly capable in terms of range, accuracy and bomb load. In short, its offensive power grew considerably. At the start of the period, paradoxically, when it was relatively weak, Bomber Command was still in great demand because it provided British leaders, at the true strategic level, with one of the few offensive tools at their disposal. Not surprisingly, therefore, this demand was bound to increase as the potency of the Command grew. At the heart of the problem, as Cox has pointed out, was that the inherent reach and flexibility of air power increased the demands for it to be employed in, and across, theatres.⁷ One of the most fundamental military requirements is for the leader, or commander, to have the resources with which to carry out the allotted tasks. The period when Bomber Command started to reach its real potential was therefore bound to have many frustrations owing to the calls on the resources for other tasking.

Churchill and his Bomber Barons

Churchill's direction of the war has been widely described in the literature. Various analogies have been used including Churchill as the conductor of an orchestra.⁸ It could, however, be argued that the use of such expressions to describe Churchill's role risks deflecting attention from the actual methods that he deployed in practice. Churchill was keen to avoid a repetition of Lloyd George's inability to control the military in the latter years of the First World War and therefore made himself Minister of Defence as well as

⁷ Cox, *op.cit.*, p.211.

⁸ See for example Best, *Churchill and War*, ch.10. See Biddle, 'Churchill and Portal', p.178 for the example.

Prime Minister. It is in this former role that he wielded most power in the direction of the war. On taking office and setting up this new constitutional arrangement, Churchill himself commented that the ‘fundamental changes in the machinery of war direction were more real than apparent’.⁹ He had been careful neither to define his responsibilities, nor his rights and had not sought special powers. The key change was that he took over the direction and supervision of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and therefore had, with the Chiefs, ‘full control over the conduct of the war and the armed forces’.¹⁰ Again as Churchill went to state, the key change for the Secretaries of State (including the First Lord of the Admiralty) was that they ‘rapidly and almost imperceptibly ceased to be responsible for the formulation of strategic plans and the day-to-day conduct of operations’.¹¹ Although Sinclair was still responsible to Parliament for the running of his Department, the reality was that it was Portal who was responsible to Churchill for the fighting power of the Royal Air Force. Although Churchill did not say it so bluntly, Sinclair’s role was to perform in the House of Commons on air matters when it suited Churchill for him to do so. Any examination of the relationship between the Minister of Defence and his senior military commanders must be conducted in that light. It is, however, further complicated by the reality that Churchill also frequently behaved as if he was supreme commander in addition to being a politician.¹²

For the purposes of this discussion, the relationship between Portal and Churchill was reasonably straightforward. Tedder, having watched the Chiefs at work with Churchill

⁹ Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. II, p.15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp15-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p16.

¹² See for example Best’s description of Churchill’s insistence on sharing ‘consideration of major strategic and operational matters’ in *Churchill and War*, p.170. Although outside the scope of this thesis there is an interesting comparison with the role of Kitchener in the First World War.

in the run up to *Overlord*, commented that the CAS ‘provided the real brains’ and quoted Churchill as saying ‘Portal has everything’.¹³ Portal could indeed write well without relying on drafts to be produced for him, was able to persuade the Prime Minister without confrontation and had the analytical skills to be able to identify workarounds without compromising key principles.¹⁴

The more interesting relationship is that between Churchill and Harris. The Bomber Command Headquarters at High Wycombe was only a short drive from Chequers and Harris was a frequent visitor, especially in 1942-3, although much less so thereafter.¹⁵ Probert’s description of the relationship is worthy of examination.¹⁶ He argued that both men shared a ‘single-minded tenacity’ and an almost fervent belief in the spirit of the offensive; Churchill also empathised with Harris’s willingness to speak out. Probert also suggested that ‘Churchill observed in Harris qualities that matched his own; here was the kind of high commander he needed in those dark days, a man who shared his convictions about the nature of the war they were fighting and the hard things that had to be done to win it’.¹⁷ Given that both Sinclair and Portal were strongly supportive of the bomber offensive, there was little risk of Harris causing trouble with his direct access to the Prime Minister; indeed it had the potential to be turned to advantage. Churchill encouraged Harris to write to him direct on various issues to do with the Command and the C-in-C found that doing so was a useful way of getting a message through, provided the paper was short and to the point.¹⁸ An exception to this was a longer paper produced, at the Prime

¹³ Tedder, *With Prejudice*, pp. 532-3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.151 and Probert, *Bomber Harris*, p.133, for the qualification.

¹⁶ See Probert, *Bomber Harris*, p.134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.152.

Minister's request, entitled 'A Note on the Role and Work of Bomber Command'; Churchill subsequently asked for this to be formally printed up and distributed.¹⁹ The file correspondence on this paper has provided an interesting insight into the working relationships because it is evident that Harris had kept Portal fully aware at every stage in the process.²⁰ Interestingly, Sinclair's personal staff asked that its circulation be delayed until the 'Prime Minister is well on the way home in case any question should be raised by other Ministers as to the reason why a paper has been circulated for which the Air Ministry do not accept responsibility'.²¹

It should not, however, be assumed that Churchill was fully signed up to the bomber offensive with the single minded determination evidenced by Harris. Following a further paper submitted by Harris in September 1942, Churchill warned the C-in-C that he

must be careful not to spoil a good case by overstating. I am doing all I can to expand Bomber Command, and I set a high value on your action against Germany. I do not however think that Air bombing is going to bring the war to an end by itself, and still less that anything that could be done with our existing resources could produce decisive results in the next twelve months.²²

In terms of Churchill giving clear and unambiguous 'intent' this minute cannot be challenged. It is, however, symptomatic of Harris's stubbornness (as opposed to admirable determination) that he was not prepared to modify his attitudes. A similar warning shot came from Churchill following Harris sending a copy of a paper prepared by Arnold which the Prime Minister thought 'a very weak and sloppy survey of the war'.²³ In his final paragraph, Churchill commented that Arnold did 'not approve of the important Operation

¹⁹ PREM 3/19, 'A Note on the Role and Work of Bomber Command' dated 28 June 1942.

²⁰ PREM 3/19. Minutes from Churchill to his outer office dated 8 July 1942 and the response.

²¹ Ibid., Minute dated 12 August 1942.

²² PREM 3/19, Minute Churchill to Harris dated 13 September 1942.

²³ PREM 3/19, Minute Churchill to Harris dated 18 September 1942.

which is pending, which certainly shows him lacking in strategic and political sense...'.²⁴ The Prime Minister did not add a postscript to the C-in-C counselling him not to fall into the same trap, but any senior commander with a degree of high level political awareness would have at least reflected upon those words.

It is clear that Churchill built up a degree of respect for both Portal and Harris, but he was certainly not blind to Harris's obvious predilection for overstating the bombing case. As the war progressed, Harris's views on the war being won by the bomber alone had decreasing relevance to Churchill who had other genuinely strategic options becoming available. Unfortunately, Harris did not see the importance of this and therefore harness his Command more willingly to the realities of the way in which the war was progressing. This was not for want of explanation from Portal, as will become evident as this chapter develops. Nor was it for want of advice and direction from the Air Staff: paradoxically that may have been partly responsible for Harris's intransigence.

The Relationship between the Air Ministry and Bomber Command

Most senior leaders and commanders would prefer to be issued with the broadest of directives, be given the resources necessary and the widest possible latitude with to execute the higher level intent. But unless the operational level headquarters is collocated with the wider interfaces at the strategic, or policy, level there will be friction; this was certainly true in 1942 with the Air Ministry interacting with the War Cabinet, the Foreign Office, the Intelligence Services, the Ministries of Aircraft Production and Economic Warfare (MAP and MEW). The advent of overseas operational headquarters with conflicting demands

²⁴ Ibid

and priorities exacerbated the situation. The reality was that advice from the various Ministries would be relayed to the operational level second hand. For the changes in direction (through directives) to be palatable to the operational commander required an organisation that was fit for purpose in the Air Ministry and good relations between the two levels, especially at the interface. Harris, in what is one of the greatest ironies of the relationship, had recognised this when he was DCAS in 1940 when he set up the Directorate of Bomber Operations.²⁵ Portal, when he was C-in-C had felt many frustrations and had written to the VCAS complaining about the continuous flow of minor instructions from the Air Ministry.²⁶ Harris likewise was soon to complain about the 'ever increasing dispersion of our bombing effort by piecemeal instructions'.²⁷

There followed regular complaints about the frequency of the directives, their content, the veracity of the analysis upon which they were based and the tactical unfeasibility of what did not suit the C-in-C. Had these missives been framed constructively, or even just in a civil manner, Portal and his senior colleagues would have been able more easily to smooth the passage at the interfaces. As it was Portal had frequent cause to remonstrate with Harris; in reference to one such letter, Portal wrote

I feel bound to tell you frankly that I do not regard it as either a credit to your intelligence or a contribution to the winning of the war. It is in my opinion wrong in both tone and substance and calculated to promote unnecessary and useless friction between your Headquarters, the Air Ministry, and Headquarters Middle East.²⁸

²⁵ RAF Museum Hendon, Harris Papers, H112, Minute DCAS to VCAS dated 10 December 1940.

²⁶ AIR 14/669 , 'Despatch by Air Marshal Sir C F A Portal... on the Operations Undertaken by Bomber Command during the Norwegian Campaign, 4 April to 10 May 1940', Part II, p.12.

²⁷ Portal Papers, Folder 9, E66, Letter Harris to Portal dated 21 October 1942.

²⁸ Portal Papers, Folder 9, E63, Letter Portal to Portal dated 10 October 1942.

Portal concluded by telling Harris ‘that great benefit would be gained if you could manage to take a rather broader view of the problems and difficulties confronting the Air Ministry and the other Commands’.²⁹ The demi-official correspondence shows the themes of tone, substance and narrowness of view to be recurring. A minute from Portal to his deputy in 1943 sheds real light on just how far Portal was prepared to tolerate Harris. This was in the context of Bomber Command staff indicating that there was a chance of attacking a target system ‘if they waited for the right weather’; Portal wrote that he ‘took this as meaning that the C-in-C had accepted the order’, and accordingly was surprised by the next enclosure.³⁰ [Emphasis added].

The role, and fitness for purpose, of the Directorate of Bomber Operations was a constant source of friction from Harris’s perspective. His views, which summed up the problems, were expressed in a characteristically robust manner when he complained that Bufton’s (as Director of Bomber Operations) ideas on ‘Pathfinders, as on some other matters, have always been and still are rammed down our throats whether we like them or not, and that on occasions more weight is given to his opinions as a junior officer 2 years out of command than to the considered opinion of the Commander concerned’.³¹ Harris further objected to Bufton acting ‘as a sort of shadow C-in-C of the Bomber Offensive’ in which role he had ‘the fun of running the Bomber Offensive his way while I take the responsibility’. Harris then claimed that he did not personally dislike Bufton but could not ‘stand his methods’; this was at the root of the problem.³² Portal clinically responded with

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ AIR 2/4477, Minute 77, Portal to Bottomley dated 5 June 1943.

³¹ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E15a, Letter Harris to Portal dated 14 April 1944.

³² Ibid.

his views on what the role of the Director of Bomber Operations should be.³³ These included the duty to stay in touch with the operational needs, thought and practice of the Command; to network across other Directorates in the Air Ministry; and to advise the CAS in his role of supervising the Command so that he could exercise his responsibility to the Secretary of State and Minister of Defence.³⁴ The substance of Harris's response was that Bufton's methodology included visiting Groups and Stations and taking their views, along with his own, but 'without reference to this Headquarters' (emphasis in the original).³⁵ Harris also complained about Bufton's role in presiding over the Strategic Target Committee from which lists and priorities of targets was developed and sent out for Harris to action.³⁶ Tedder later complained that the function of this Committee was 'to choose targets and not to settle policy'.³⁷ This latter communication suggested that there may have been some substance to Harris's concerns, but demonstrated a somewhat different approach to their resolution.

These interchanges between Portal and Harris offer a valuable insight into the workings of this crucial interface. It is clear that Portal was satisfied that the process and execution in the Air Ministry were fit for purpose, or he would have changed either the organisation, or the people, or both. Harris did not have this option of changing the workings of the superior headquarters and was not slow to vent his feelings. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to venture opinions on the personalities of any of the senior leaders. But it would be fair to comment on observed (from the archival records) behaviour. Where

³³ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E15b, Letter Portal to Harris dated 16 April 1944.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E15c, Letter Harris to Portal dated 18 April 1944. Similar sentiments recurred in Portal Papers, Folder 10, E3d, Letter Harris to Portal dated 24 January 1945.

³⁶ Letter dated 18 April, op.cit.

³⁷ AIR 37/1014, Signal Tedder to DCAS dated 10 April 1945.

Portal consistently comes over as a conciliator, it is obvious that Harris relished the confrontational approach. It may also be argued that Bufton did not exactly show a degree of wisdom or tact in his dealings with either Tedder or Harris.

Area Bombing

The winter of 1941 had seen a prolonged period during which Bomber Command was required to conserve its men and machines for the forthcoming spring offensive.³⁸ What attacks that were launched were carried out by small forces and in decent weather. By February 1942, the Air Staff started to plan for a resumption of the full offensive, based largely on the advent of *Gee* (the first of the navigational aids brought in to improve bombing accuracy).³⁹ Portal considered that the bitterly cold weather would make it difficult for the Germans to combat concentrated incendiary attacks; furthermore, heavy attacks on the industrial heartland (the Ruhr and Rhineland) would both encourage the Russians and depress German morale.⁴⁰ The Air Staff acknowledged that the Germans would attempt to jam *Gee* and therefore wanted to make the attacks as concentrated as possible for maximum effect.⁴¹ The main aim was to cause the maximum possible disruption through destruction of towns specifically selected to have the greatest effect on German war production; Cologne, Essen, Dusseldorf and Duisberg were highlighted with Hamburg, Bremen, Wilhelmshaven and Emden as reserves.⁴² These attacks would also have 'widespread moral effects' (sic). The deliberations of the Air Staff were given added impetus by the MEW which confirmed the vital importance of the Ruhr as an ideal target

³⁸ AIR 41/42, p.125.

³⁹ Ibid, p.126 and AIR 2/4476, Minute Portal to Bottomley dated 5 February 1942. This then went to Sinclair and was circulated to the Defence Committee as D.O. (42) 14 dated 9 February 1942.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ AIR 41/42, p.129.

⁴² Ibid.

for area attack.⁴³ The essence of the thinking, within both Ministries, was that almost wherever the bombs fell, they were bound to do some significant damage. Accordingly, some precision type targets were omitted from the formal lists as were oil targets that fell outside the ‘coverage’ of *Gee*.⁴⁴

Following approval from Churchill the appropriate Directive was issued to Bomber Command.⁴⁵ The first point to note with this Directive is that it was sent to the acting C-in-C; Peirse had left post and Harris did not arrive until 22 February 1942. The point has already been made in an earlier chapter that the C-in-C’s primary object ‘should now be focused on the morale of the enemy civil population, and in particular of the industrial workers’.⁴⁶ The unequivocal nature of what was required was spelled out in an interchange of minutes between Portal and Bottomley in which the CAS asked for confirmation that the C-in-C understood that the aiming points were the

‘built-up areas, not for instance the dockyards or aircraft factories where these are mentioned in Appendix A’. This must be made quite clear if it is not already understood.⁴⁷ (Emphasis in the original)

The DCAS confirmed that Bomber Command understood the intent.⁴⁸ As the official historians have suggested, this Directive, if taken with Portal’s amplification, provided ‘in some respects, reasonable clarity’.⁴⁹ And while they acknowledged that the advent of new technology made it desirable for there to be some degree of flexibility, they have also pointed out that there was too much scope for future interpretations of the Directive to be

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.130-1.

⁴⁴ Portal thought that ‘coverage’ was a ‘dreadful’ word and ordered it not to be used. See AIR 2/4476 Minutes 5 and 6 for this and the discussion on limiting targets.

⁴⁵ Directive (DCAS – Bottomley) to Baldwin dated 14 February 1942, Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xxii). AIR 14/777.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, para.5.

⁴⁷ AIR20/3360, E120B, Minute Portal to Bottomley dated 15 February 1942.

⁴⁸ AIR20/3360, Minute Baker (D B Ops on behalf of Bottomley) to Portal dated 16 February 1942.

⁴⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, p.324,

made.⁵⁰ The scope for this stemmed from the inclusion of various areas to be targeted in Annex A to the Directive and for precise targets in Annex B.⁵¹ As the official historians have suggested the inclusion of Lübeck may have been merely due to its vulnerability and Schweinfurt left open the possibility of nodal, or system, attacks on key industries.⁵²

Although the vision and purpose of the bomber offensive was clear to Portal and his colleagues there remained considerable doubt in the minds of his fellow Chiefs as to whether it was an appropriate use of resources; Pound consistently argued for more air support for the Battle of the Atlantic and Brooke for support for the army.⁵³ A debate between the scientists (Lord Cherwell and Sir Henry Tizard) did little to settle the dispute over the potential effectiveness of the bombing campaign.⁵⁴ Nor did an independent enquiry by Lord Justice Singleton provide clarity.⁵⁵ To the new C-in-C, only convincing evidence from the operational arena could justify existing and future investment in his Command.⁵⁶ Successful attacks on Lübeck, Rostock and the thousand bomber raid Cologne on 30 May 1942 provided demonstrations of what the Command could do. But as Harris himself pointed out, the lack of aircraft, equipment and trained crews prevented him from starting the real offensive until 1943; diversions to attack ‘targets of immediate strategic importance – a euphemism for targets chosen by the Navy’ also continued to impede his progress.⁵⁷ From this, it can be seen, as the official historians have stated, that

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Directive dated 14 February op.cit. Annexes.

⁵² Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.324-5.

⁵³ Summarised in AIR 41/42, pp. 232-5.

⁵⁴ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.331-6. The Cherwell minute is reproduced in full at p.331. The Air Staff were obviously happy to endorse Cherwell’s positive views on the efficacy of area bombing and its capacity for disruption through rendering people homeless: see AIR 20/3360, Minute Sinclair to Churchill following draft from Portal.

⁵⁵ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I. pp. 337-8.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.339.

⁵⁷ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.90.

Harris was a ‘man of strong convictions and unshakeable determination’ who saw ideas, other than his own, as ‘mere obstruction’.⁵⁸ If direction from the Air Ministry allowed any latitude, Harris would exploit it to the full. It can therefore be seen that the February Directive gave him sufficient legitimacy to pursue his own ideas, with the fallback of claiming impossibility if told otherwise.⁵⁹ Despite the occasional outburst, it was not until the Command started to achieve its potential strength in 1943 that Harris was forced to take on the Air Ministry in earnest.

The Casablanca Directive had given top priority to the Battle of the Atlantic and it was therefore not until the new Directive of 6 April 1943 that Harris was formally told that the ‘effort thus released is to revert as far as possible to the attack of targets in Germany’.⁶⁰ He himself had actually started the Battle of the Ruhr on 5 March 1943, with *Oboe* equipped aircraft marking the targets.⁶¹ At the operational level of war, 1943 saw the Battles of the Ruhr, Hamburg and Berlin. But at the strategic level, the debate rumbled on as to the purpose of the offensive. The initial draft of the *Pointblank* Directive had been replaced with a document more in keeping with Harris’s pursuit of the ‘general disorganisation of German industry’ ideally in concert with the actions of the Eighth Air Force.⁶² But the critical point of the *Pointblank* plan, and the Directive as far as it went, was that the strategic air offensive was to be carried out in support of the eventual invasion of north-west Europe and not as an end in itself. Harris did not see it that way; he

⁵⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.345-6.

⁵⁹ Ibid. See AIR 2/4476, E73A, Letter Harris to Bottomley dated 10 September 1942 for an early example of Harris refusing to attack two plants at Gelsenkirchen on the grounds that they were ‘very small and difficult to find in the smoky and hazy atmosphere of the Ruhr’.

⁶⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 8 (xxx). Directive Bottomley to Harris dated 6 April 1943.

⁶¹ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.144. *Oboe* was a radar device introduced to improve bombing accuracy.

⁶² Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 8 (xxxii). Directive Bottomley to Harris dated 10 June 1943.

considered that the offensive would ultimately be decisive and the armies landing in Europe would be used for occupation rather than invasion.⁶³ For Portal and his staff operating at the interface between the military strategic level and above, the problem was more complex than the world seen from High Wycombe. Having sat through the various conferences, Portal accepted totally that *Overlord* was inevitable, and that for it to have a chance of success, air superiority had to be achieved. In short, the strategic bombing offensive had to be conducted in accordance with the *Pointblank* plan, not the all-encompassing wording of the Directive. Evidence of Harris's attachment to this wording is clear from the use of green pencil on the Bomber Command file copy of the Directive against the wording 'the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened'.⁶⁴

In September 1943, the Air Staff had analysed the impact that the Combined Bomber Offensive was having on the German air force and Bottomley expressed a degree of disappointment to Portal over Harris's failure to attack a number of towns in Germany which would have taken steps towards the reduction of fighter production.⁶⁵ Bottomley went on to advocate that the area offensive should be more specifically targeted against fighter production. As the official historians have noted, this would be a change of policy in keeping with the original draft of the *Pointblank* Directive.⁶⁶ The potential for a crisis over *Pointblank* came to a head following the American daylight raid on Schweinfurt on

⁶³ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E57, Minute Harris to Churchill dated 3 November 1943. Harris to Portal 15 May 43.

⁶⁴ AIR 14/778, para.5.

⁶⁵ AIR 2/4476, Minute Bottomley to Portal dated 25 September 1943.

⁶⁶ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p. 35. See also Vol. IV, App. 8 (xxx). Draft Directive Bottomley to Harris dated 3 June 1943.

14 October 1943 when Portal's worst fears were realised. Out of 291 aircraft despatched, the USAAF had 198 lost or damaged.⁶⁷ It was clear that the laissez-faire leadership approach to the Combined Bomber Offensive would not produce the desired results; a concerted approach utilising both strategic bomber commands and long-range fighters would be required.⁶⁸ Conversely, as Harris wrote to the Prime Minister on 3 November, it was time to bring the Americans into the area offensive.⁶⁹ By doing so, collectively they could 'wreck Berlin from end to end'. Predictably, Harris neither mentioned *Overlord*, nor the German air force.⁷⁰ As the official historians have pointed out, adoption of this course of action would have had fatal results for the Intermediate objective of *Pointblank* (reduction of German fighter strength).⁷¹ Harris persisted in his approach and wrote formally to the Air Ministry on 7 December 1943 summarising what his Command had achieved and forecast what could be done by the end of March 1944.⁷² He considered that the 'Lancaster force alone should be sufficient but just sufficient to produce in Germany by April 1st 1944, a state of devastation in which surrender is inevitable'. Harris admitted that it was 'not possible to dogmatise on the degree of destruction necessary to cause the enemy to capitulate' but considered that destruction of between 40% and 50% of each of the principal German towns would have the desired effect.⁷³

The ensuing correspondence between the Air Ministry and Bomber Command was vigorous to say the least and provides an interesting insight into one of the most

⁶⁷ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.40-44.

⁶⁹ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E57, Minute Harris to Churchill dated 3 November 1943.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.49.

⁷² Reproduced in full in Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, pp. 54-7. Letter Harris to Air Ministry dated 7 December 1943. Addressees included Sinclair, Portal and down to the ACAS level.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

controversial leadership questions of the relationship; should Portal have sacked Harris and, if so, when? This question is usually discussed in the context of the oil debate in late 1944, but it could be argued that December 1943 would have been a possible exit point.⁷⁴ The subtext to this question would have been whether Churchill would have allowed such a contentious move when the C-in-C had done so much to turn around the Command's fortunes. On 17 December 1943, Bottomley sent an Air Staff paper to Harris that had been partly based on work done by the MEW on German reliance on ball-bearings and the desirability of attacking Schweinfurt.⁷⁵ Harris responded stating that he did 'not regard a night attack on Schweinfurt as a reasonable operation of war' and reiterated his 'strong views on the subject of "Panacea" targets in general and ball bearings in particular.'⁷⁶ Harris further objected to the diversion of assets from 'worth-while targets' and harked back to his aim of inducing surrender by reminding his audience that 'we have only four months left!'. Harris concluded with a single sentence; 'I am not prepared to take it on'.⁷⁷ In his internal minute to Bottomley, Portal was surprisingly tolerant (or arguably complacent).⁷⁸ He described Harris's letter as 'characteristically exaggerated but I think we must ignore the temptation to dispute with the C-in-C about the past and concentrate on trying to get the right answer for the future'. Portal's exasperation did show through in his query as to whether the German mission to Sweden and extra flak at a similar factory in Turin were 'merely part of a deep-laid German plot to deceive us into believing that they cared about the damage done to Schweinfurt!'. In a more positive refrain, he then described the choice between just dropping bombs over a wide area such that few were

⁷⁴ See, for example, Tami Davis Biddle, 'Bombing by the Square Yard: Sir Arthur Harris at War 1942-1945', *The International History Review*, XXI (3), September 1999, p.642.

⁷⁵ AIR 2/4476, Letter Bottomley to Harris dated 17 December 1943.

⁷⁶ AIR 2/4476, E64A, Letter Harris to Bottomley dated 20 December 1943.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ AIR 2/4476, Minute 65, Portal to Bottomley dated 23 December 1943.

wasted versus picking a ‘key industry’ where the ‘result per ton of bombs must inevitably be increased’.⁷⁹ This effectively mirrored American thinking.⁸⁰ Bottomley’s response confirmed the logic behind attacking Schweinfurt and went on to lay out the nature of Harris’s challenge

The C-in-C again discloses the fact that he does not agree with the present direction of bombing policy and he disputes the basis upon which this direction is founded. In fact he challenges the foundation of the Combined Bomber Offensive plan and the soundness of the present method of employment of the American Strategic Bomber Forces.⁸¹

Bottomley then went on to make the obvious choice facing Portal that Harris must either ‘conform to the direction of the Combined Chiefs of Staff despite any personal misgivings’ or the Air staff would have to take a new plan to the Combined Chiefs.⁸² He continued that the area bombing on its own was unlikely to achieve the ultimate aim in the timeframe envisaged.⁸³ This was a serious statement for Bottomley to make because it suggested that the Air Staff had modified the established policy to come more in line with American thinking. Portal referred the whole issue to Sinclair ‘as it may lead to trouble with Harris’.⁸⁴ The ensuing Directive was issued on 14 January 1944 and was unequivocal in its reiteration of the strategic policy that had been set in place by the Combined Chiefs.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Harris was requested to ‘adhere to the spirit of the directive’ forwarded on 10 June 1943 and that priority had to be given to the German aircraft industry and ball-bearing

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.68.

⁸¹ AIR 2/4476, Minute 67, Bottomley to Portal dated 12 January 1944.

⁸² Ibid., para.4 If Bottomley thought that there was a third choice in that Portal could have sacked Harris, he did not say so on the minute sheet. This may have been especially relevant as he may have seen himself as a possible replacement.

⁸³ Ibid., para.5.

⁸⁴ AIR 2/4476, Minute 68, Portal to Sinclair dated 12 January 1944.

⁸⁵ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 8 (xxxiv). Directive Bottomley to Harris dated 14 January 1944.

production; in particular Harris was effectively told get on with the attacks on Schweinfurt, whatever his misgivings.⁸⁶

As the official historians have pointed out, this episode brought into question Air Staff confidence over Harris's protestations over tactical difficulties.⁸⁷ As the crews and aircraft improved, their capabilities were greater and Harris was less able to hide behind the art of what was tactically feasible. His objections on these grounds were less and less likely to convince. This further blurred the overlap between the strategic and operational levels. Although the Air Staff consistently proclaimed that they were applying the terms of the *Pointblank* Directive, this was only true to an extent. The Directives had been so broadly composed that a commander would have been justified in claiming obedience in the furtherance of almost any plan of action he concocted. By the same token, the various elements in the Air Staff, the MEW and elsewhere also could claim that their pet target system was covered; certainly each Directive included an element of an option for precision targeting. The critical element for a leader in these circumstances is to demonstrate the capacity to situate the policy in the realm of the overarching strategic, or grand strategic, priorities of the time. Portal was able to do so, but Harris was very firmly entrenched in a dogmatic approach based on his conviction that overwhelming destruction was sufficient to bring about victory. As the official historians have bluntly suggested, Harris's arguments were not only extravagant, they were becoming irrelevant. The debate therefore remains open as to whether Portal should have replaced Harris at this point.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.70. See AIR 2/4477, Minute Bufton to Bottomley dated 12 January 1944 in which each of Harris's tactical problems is analysed in detail.

Diversions and Panaceas

It is clear that, to Harris at least, any utilisation of Bomber Command aircraft, crews or senior personnel for other tasks was an unnecessary diversion from the true mission of the area bombing of Germany. And it would provoke inevitable protest even though the priorities had been set by the Prime Minister, The Chiefs, or the Combined Chiefs. It is small wonder that Portal had, on occasions to plead that Harris broaden his outlook. Furthermore, as Portal regularly had to remind Harris, that predations on Bomber Command were inevitable because the Air Ministry had ensured that Bomber Command had received the 'lion's share of the resources'.⁸⁸ The diversions can be considered to fall into a number of broad categories including to the maritime war; to other theatres; to *Overlord* which will be described in its own right; and to so-called 'panacea' target sets. This section will not explore each area in depth, but will look at the strategic leadership implications. Some of the proposed diversions were so extreme that it would be difficult not to have some sympathy; for example an Air Ministry request that he send aircraft on tours of 'semi-finished aerodromes to encourage the workmen', Harris considered 'typical of the endless suggestions I get for dispersing the effort of this Command, the mere rebuttal of which becomes a weariness to the flesh'.⁸⁹

At the other end of the spectrum were the pressing claims from the Admiralty for support in the Battle of the Atlantic. These had been evident from the period before Harris took command and sparked debate as to what was the best, or most effective, use of the heavy bombers.⁹⁰ As Howard has clearly pointed out, once Harris had voiced his

⁸⁸ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E14e, Letter Portal to Harris dated 20 April 1944.

⁸⁹ Portal Papers, Folder 9, E66, Letter Harris to Portal dated 21 October 1942.

⁹⁰ See AIR 41/41 Part III.

complaints and the Directive had been issued, 'he loyally carried it out'.⁹¹ The issue under contention was the effectiveness of the attacks carried out by Bomber Command. The Air Staff had warned their colleagues in the Admiralty that submarine construction yards and submarine slips were small and very well-defended targets, but nevertheless, a sizeable effort was made both against facilities in Germany and the Bay of Biscay.⁹² More contentious was the loan from Bomber to Coastal Command of squadrons of precious Lancasters for anti-U-boat reconnaissance.⁹³ Results were meagre in comparison to what Harris thought could be achieved by the area offensive. The leadership issue was that he consistently failed to broaden his perspective as asked by his CAS. It would have been naive in the extreme for Harris seriously to have believed that, with the Battle of the Atlantic at its height, he could expect exclusive rights on all aircraft and crews. But it appears that he did as there is no indication that he was just indulging in formulaic protest. The other area where it could be argued that serious leadership issues were botched was in the use of language or vocabulary. Harris's invective against, for example, 'oily boys' with their 'fairy stories', 'panacea mongers' and so forth could only alienate those senior colleagues who did not know him as well as Portal.⁹⁴ Furthermore, there appeared to be little effort to develop a high level (i.e. for senior officers) vocabulary to convey the balance of effort against results achieved.⁹⁵ Even where some policies were effective, such as mining operations, it is not always obvious that Harris got the message across.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Howard, *Grand Strategy*, p.315.

⁹² AIR 41/42, pp.319-20. See also AIR 20/3360, Minute Portal to ACAS (O) dated 12 June 1942.

⁹³ AIR 41/42, p.320. Portal Papers, Folder 9, E66, Letter Harris to Portal dated 21 October 1942.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ The modern vocabulary for this is 'Effects Based Operations' and while it could be argued that it has flaws, it at least provides a vocabulary for discussing what the commander at the highest levels is trying to achieve.

⁹⁶ See for example, Portal Papers, Folder 9, Letter Harris to Portal dated 21 November 1942 over the mining of Brest.

Harris's limited perspective was again displayed by his refusal to acquiesce in deployments of his squadrons to overseas theatres. When, for example, three squadrons of Wellingtons were sent to North Africa he openly expressed his scepticism over the temporary nature of the deployment.⁹⁷ Harris went on to criticise those above him tasked with allocating priorities saying that he was 'astonished at the difficulty which those who have the deciding voice appear to find in recognising that at this crucial moment in the war Bomber Command ought to have first call on our available resources'.⁹⁸ Portal, with typical tolerance and patience, responded saying that it would be very easy for every Commander to make similar calls, but they had been 'commendably broad minded'.⁹⁹ Harris displayed similar traits in his calls for the resistance to 'the fearful diversion from the Bomber Offensive' for Operation Starkey (which was a feint or deception operation). Harris then ruined the potential effect of his message by stating that this was 'just the sort of thing an idle army dotes on'.¹⁰⁰

Harris's objections to 'panacea targets' has been described above in connection with the raids on ball bearings at Schweinfurt. Oil was a similar source of frustration to him as were molybdenum plants in Norway and locomotive plants.¹⁰¹ The essence of the problem was Harris either did not, or did not want to, understand the theories that underpinned what was being advocated. This may have been an issue of Harris not having sufficient cognitive capacity; or it may have been a failure of the interfaces between the agencies concerned; or it could revert to poor personal relationships. Evidence of a deeper- rooted

⁹⁷ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E26, Letter Harris to Portal dated 26 April 1943.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E25a, Letter Portal to Harris dated 29 April 1943.

¹⁰⁰ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E39, Letter Harris to Portal dated 9 July 1943.

¹⁰¹ See Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.66 and Portal Papers, Folder 10, E66, Letter Harris to Portal dated 21 October 1942.

explanation may come from Harris's attitude to the Transportation plan. In a private letter Harris described 'our worst headache has been a panacea plan devised by a civilian professor whose peacetime forte is the study of the sexual aberrations of the higher apes'.¹⁰² Harris makes no mention of the detailed work that Zuckerman (for he was the Professor to whom he was referring) had carried out on blast effects earlier in the war.¹⁰³ Although not an unbiased commentator, Kingston McCloughry made the point that in contrast with Tedder, Harris particularly 'disliked admitting that ...Zuckerman, a civilian, knew more about bomb damage than himself'.¹⁰⁴ He went on to explain the work done by the Professor in the field actually studying the effects of the weapons. Zuckerman's background, his friends from the London literary world and so forth were poles apart from that of Harris and it could be argued that his reluctance to engage with the principles may either have been raw anti-intellectualism, or an inferiority complex. As Furnham has pointed out, intellectual ability is one of the best predictors of job success; maybe the complexity of the debate was a step too far for Harris.¹⁰⁵

The Bomber Offensive as a *Guerre de Course*?

The official historians described the Bomber Command offensive against Germany as a *guerre de course*.¹⁰⁶ They likened Bomber Command's night activity to that of cruisers or submarines which sought to evade opposing forces and 'to strike blows at the commerce or military communications of the enemy; in the air war the opposing forces were the German

¹⁰² Quoted in Probert, *Bomber Harris*, p.292

¹⁰³ See Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, ch. 6.

¹⁰⁴ E. J. Kingston McCloughry, *The Direction of War: A Critique of the Political Direction and High Command in War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), p.129. McCloughry worked closely with Zuckerman, frequently sharing an office.

¹⁰⁵ Adrian Furnham, *The Incompetent Manager: The Causes, consequences and Cures of Management Failure* (London: Whurr, 2003). P.67.

¹⁰⁶ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.26.

night fighters.¹⁰⁷ This theory was based on the work of Mahan and was specifically chosen by Frankland as an analytical framework on which to base their discussion of the bombing offensive.¹⁰⁸ The French adopted commerce raiding in the early eighteenth century as an alternative to major fleet actions; the suggestion was that Bomber Command did the same for the air war. This theory was first used as the underpinning framework for Frankland's DPhil thesis which he wrote under the supervision of Professor R. B. Wernham on the *Planning of the Bombing Offensive and its Contribution to German Collapse* while on the fulltime staff of the AHB; this was a fully classified work which also became an AHB Narrative.¹⁰⁹ Authors, such as Cox, have pointed out that this 'intellectual and analytical framework' may well have been one of the greatest strengths of the official history, but acknowledged that it also may have contained 'significant weaknesses'.¹¹⁰ The analytical focus on attacking commerce had the dubious consequence that judgement on the efficacy of the offensive concentrated on the economic results, rather than the broader military and strategic achievements.¹¹¹ Notwithstanding the fact that the accepted high standard of the official history led a number of authors to follow it, very few have elected to acknowledge, let alone adopt, the *guerre de course* analytical framework.¹¹² That this argument has not been taken further, other than in the historiographical debate, suggests that it is either not well understood or does not ring true in the wider scholarly interpretation of the planning

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783* (New York: Dover, 1987 [1890]), p.209.

¹⁰⁹ Cox, 'Setting the Historical Agenda', p.160. For a broader perspective see Christina J.M. Goulter, 'British Official Histories of the Air War' in Grey, *The last word*. See also Frankland, *History at War*, p.39. Wernham produced the bulk of the first volume of the AHB Narrative on the RAF in the Bomber Offensive (AIR 41/39) with Frankland completing the rest; Cox, op. cit., p. 149. Frankland's DPhil Thesis became the AHB Narrative at AIR 41/57, *The Planning of the Bombing Offensive and its Contribution to German Collapse*.

¹¹⁰ Cox, op. cit.

¹¹¹ Cox, op. cit., p.162.

¹¹² See for example Hastings, *Bomber Command* and Verrier, *The Bomber Offensive*, (p.5 acknowledges the importance of the official history). Biddle uses the expression but does not reference Webster and Frankland; *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.216.

and direction of the bomber offensive. It is particularly hard to square the role of commerce raiding with the delivery of a knock-out blow, or the bomber always getting through. Neither the phrase '*guerre de course*', nor the concept of mere commerce raiding appeared in the writings of the senior leaders involved during the planning or execution of the offensive.¹¹³ Frankland himself took this apparent myopia a stage further with a direct attack on those senior leaders when he stated in his autobiography

Mahan proved to be a more reliable prophet of air power than Giulio Douhet or Lord Trenchard; the American Generals, Arnold and Spaatz, who demanded long-range fighters and knew how to use them with deadly effect in combination with long-range bombers, proved to be better strategist and tacticians than the British Air Marshals Portal and Harris, who clung to the *guerre de course* almost to the bitter end.¹¹⁴

If the concept of the *guerre de course* has not been broadly adopted by scholars in the field, adoption of Mahan as an air power prophet has not been taken further either. It is therefore suggested that this particular criticism of the senior leadership is not to be taken further, even though made by such a distinguished historian. As a footnote to this debate over Mahan, it is worth acknowledging that at least some of the senior leaders were well aware of his work. Tedder, in his 1947 Lee Knowles lectures, mentioned Mahan several times and the concept of the *guerre de course*.¹¹⁵ But Tedder likened the bomber offensive to the Royal Navy's blockade of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France with its full strategic impact.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ See for example, Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, Tedder, *With Prejudice*.

¹¹⁴ Frankland, *History at War*, p.63.

¹¹⁵ Lord Tedder, *Air Power in War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947); see p. 31 for the *guerre de course* concept and pp.15-6 for Mahan.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Debate over Perceptions of the Campaign

Not only was Harris willing to challenge directly the Air Staff over what his Command was to be used to achieve, he was also ready to challenge it on how the Command's activities were to be portrayed to the wider public. Any war machine runs the risk of being depicted as causing wanton death and destruction; this is an enduring fact of warfare. The problem for Bomber Command, and the Air Ministry, was all the more complex because the crews, who risked their lives daily, still lived in the local community and had to return there every morning. Accusations against them would have been hugely detrimental to their morale and that of their families. But Harris was keen for the importance of his Command's work to reach a wider public.¹¹⁷ His post-war complaint was that the Air Ministry was 'extraordinarily cautious' in the way in which it dealt with even the more intelligent and reputable journalists.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, Churchill, Portal and the Air Staff were concerned that offensive could be portrayed as indiscriminate.¹¹⁹ Although Harris would almost certainly not have been bothered by the comparison, it is probable that his more strategically minded colleagues would have preferred not to have any comparisons between British and American professed operational techniques aired in public, particularly in the United States.

The problem was exacerbated by the repeated government statements confirming that 'the policy of limiting objectives of Bomber Command to targets of military importance... and not been changed to the bombing of towns and wide areas in which

¹¹⁷ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.156.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ See Biddle, 'Bombing by the Square Yard', p.641.

military targets are situated'.¹²⁰ In Parliament, in December 1943, Sinclair confirmed that the policy had not changed since he had previously answered a similar question in March 1943. When tackled over Berlin, Sinclair confirmed the military and economic significance of the capital, but again avoided the issue of the government having now 'resorted to indiscriminate bombing, including residential areas'.¹²¹ As Hastings has pointed out, a similar exchange took place between Sinclair and Lord Salisbury when again the Secretary of State failed to defend the C-in-C whose rhetoric over the heart of Berlin 'ceasing to beat' had provoked the correspondence.¹²²

Predictably, Harris took up the cudgels formally against the 'dead hand of the Civil Service' in attempting to ensure that the public understood what was being achieved by his people.¹²³ The Permanent Under Secretary (PUS), Sir Arthur Street assured Harris that 'no attempt has been made to conceal from the public the immense devastation that is being brought to the German industrial cities', but he went on to point out that 'in all official pronouncements' the emphasis was on the 'obvious truth, i.e., that the widespread devastation is not an end in itself but the inevitable accompaniment of an all-out attack on the enemy's means and capacity to wage war'.¹²⁴ Street then went on to state that

It is, in any event, desirable to present the bomber offensive in such a light as to provoke the minimum of public controversy and so far as possible to avoid conflict with religious and humanitarian opinion. Any public protest, whether reasonable or unreasonable, against the bomber offensive could not but hamper the Government in the execution of this policy and might affect the morale of the aircrews themselves.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ HC Deb 1 December 1943, vol.395, cc. 337-9; Question put to Sinclair by Mr Richard Stokes (Labour, Ipswich).

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Hastings, *Bomber Command*, pp.172-3.

¹²³ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.164. Harris was less than charitable about many of his civilian 'colleagues' one of whom he described as being 'worth at least a division to the enemy on every day of the war'. Harris's original complaint is at AIR 14/843, Letter Harris to Street dated 25 October 1943.

¹²⁴ AIR 14/843, Letter Street to Harris dated 15 December 1943.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Biddle has described this as ‘semantic hair-splitting’ which ‘enraged Harris’; presumably the lengthy delay before Street replied would have done little to help.¹²⁶ Harris was not prepared to accept what was arguably a more reasoned and strategic outlook. His response provided both a blunt statement of the reality of the offensive and a clear insight into his own view of the total nature of the war.

It is surely obvious that children, invalids and old people who are economically unproductive but must nevertheless consume food and other necessities are a handicap to the German war effort and it would therefore be sheer waste of effort to attack them....The German economic system, which I am instructed by my directive to destroy, *includes* workers, houses, and public utilities, and it is therefore meaningless to claim that the wiping out of German cities is ‘not an end in itself....’¹²⁷

Harris then went on to explain the reality, that in the war as it was then being fought, ‘everything and everybody’ in the cities ‘which is a help to the German war effort’ came within the objectives which Bomber Command was seeking to destroy. Furthermore, he asked that anyone in the authorities who did not understand this should ‘at once be disabused of the illusion, which is not merely unfair to our crews now but will inevitably lead to deplorable controversies when the facts are fully and generally known’. Harris further emphasised that

It is not enough to admit that devastation is caused by our attacks, or to suggest that it is an incidental and rather regrettable concomitant of night bombing. It is in fact produced deliberately.¹²⁸

He went on to recommend that the Air Ministry request the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) to produce a report on German morale.¹²⁹ The findings of this, and the more detailed report produced by the Air Ministry intelligence staff will be covered in the next section; meanwhile, it is interesting to note that with the exception of a JIC Report in October 1943,

¹²⁶ Biddle, ‘Bombing by the Square Yard’, p.642.

¹²⁷ AIR 14/843, Letter Harris to Sweet dated 23 December 1943.

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Ibid., para.6.

very little intelligence work had been done on the subject since at least before America entered the war.¹³⁰

It is clear from the correspondence that Harris understood that the Air Ministry was trying to ‘provoke the minimum of public controversy and so far as possible avoid conflict with religious and humanitarian opinion’, but did not accept the primacy of such an approach over the protection of the morale of his crews who may not have been expected to grasp the subtleties of the real strategic level. Probert, citing Longmate presumably with approval, has suggested that only Harris emerged from this debate with any real credit.¹³¹ But it could be argued that Harris was not able to grasp, or accept, the complexities and ambiguity that characterises leadership at the highest levels. Furthermore, although he professed that he understood the potential consequences of too open an admission of the totality of the war Bomber Command was fighting, Harris was clearly not willing to moderate his anger or exasperation. In his memoirs, he remained uncompromising and almost dismissive with language such as ‘the fact that our aircraft occasionally killed women and children is cast in my teeth I always produce this example of the blockade’.¹³² To Harris, it was evident that the war with Germany was total war, and he was unshakeable in this view and in the consequences that stemmed from it.¹³³ In the context of Sinclair’s ‘hedging’, Probert has suggested that Harris ‘was being left, in effect, to carry the can at home and abroad’.¹³⁴ It could therefore be argued that allowing Harris to remain in post

¹³⁰ See AIR 20/8143 for the absence of reporting. But see below for the JIC Report.

¹³¹ Probert, *Bomber Harris*, p.194. See also Norman Longmate, *The Bombers* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), ch.26. Longmate described Harris as having none of Street’s ‘Jesuitical niceties’; *op.cit.*, p.369

¹³² Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.177.

¹³³ For a wider debate of the role of air power in total war see Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*.

¹³⁴ Probert, *Bomber Harris*, p.193.

was a politically shrewd decision by Sinclair and Portal, even though they may not have said as much.

The Vulnerability of German Morale

The literature on the use of air power to target civilian morale has invariably merely acknowledged that the senior leaders decided to adopt this course of action and the series of Directives has been used to support this.¹³⁵ Often targeting morale has been directly associated with Trenchardian thinking (or dogma), both in the formative years of the Service and during the War (which will be covered below).¹³⁶ Often, the debate has centred on the effectiveness of ‘morale bombing’, or the lack of it in a state ruled by the ‘Gestapo’ with a ‘concentration camp around every corner’.¹³⁷ Inevitably, most of the literature acknowledging the role of the authorities was published after the event. The literature has, however, been relatively silent on the issue of why the senior leaders thought that the morale of a population might be vulnerable to aerial bombardment and that the German population would be more susceptible than the British.¹³⁸ It would be all too easy to dismiss these views as evidence of racism, or xenophobia, on the part of the senior decision makers. But the majority of these people had seen the defeat of Germany in 1918 and understood the impact that the Allied blockade had had on the German home front; ‘the rot had started from within’.¹³⁹ This was also specifically tackled in a Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) report in 1943.¹⁴⁰ The Report included a detailed Annex

¹³⁵ See, for example, Robin Neillands, *The Bomber War: Arthur Harris and the Allied Bomber Offensive 1939-1945* (London: Murray, 2001), p.55.

¹³⁶ See Max Hastings, *Bomber Command*, p.46 and Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p.83. See also Richard Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), p.136.

¹³⁷ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.79.

¹³⁸ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. I, pp.296-7.

¹³⁹ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.78.

¹⁴⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.255. See PREM 3/193/6A, JIC (43) 367 Final dated 9 September 1943 ‘Probabilities of a German Collapse’.

comparing the situation in 1943 to that which had existed in 1918; the main conclusions were that, in 1943, food was reasonable, people were generally healthy and the SS had rigid control.¹⁴¹ Churchill considered this report to be sufficiently serious to justify formal printing and circulation.¹⁴² The fact that Hitler had used the ‘rot from within’ as part of his campaigning rhetoric in the inter-war years was also well understood in the Whitehall community who were not on the JIC distribution.¹⁴³ But it was also prevalent in Germany and whole state reporting systems had been set up to monitor morale among the workforce that British senior leaders sought to target; concern that ‘the activists now started their agitation and staged another November 1918’ was never far from the surface.¹⁴⁴ It was also evident that the German authorities took their internal security reporting seriously as was clear, for example, in the spring of 1942 when food rations were cut; with ‘the regime’s mortal fear of damaging morale’, the cuts had to be reversed.¹⁴⁵ It is clear from Harris’s own account that this monitoring was well understood in Britain.¹⁴⁶

What was meant by ‘morale’? The members of the Air Staff (including Portal) who had been through the RAF Staff College at Andover would have had a relatively sophisticated understanding of morale from the lectures and notes given by Brooke-Popham on the subject, and the essays that they had to produce.¹⁴⁷ Notwithstanding the relative infancy of psychology as an academic subject, Brooke-Popham was able to explain the importance of self-preservation as the first and foremost ‘basic instinct’. This was

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² PREM 3/193/6A, Churchill Minute dated 5 October 1943.

¹⁴³ Not least from Hitler’s own writing and its publication in English; Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (trans. James Murphy, London: Hurst and Blackett, 1939 [1924]), p.198.

¹⁴⁴ Report by the Leipzig branch of the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) on 17 May 1941 in Jeremy Noakes (ed), *Nazism 1919-1945; Vol. 4, The German Home Front in World War II: A Documentary Reader* (Exeter; Exeter University Press, 1998), p.532.

¹⁴⁵ Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, p.541.

¹⁴⁶ Harris, *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁷ See A.P. 956 for Portal’s essay on morale and Brooke-Popham Papers 1/6/1 ‘Some Notes on Morale’.

followed by the ‘group instinct’ in which preservation of the group could be powerful enough ‘to be proof against any shock or stress’.¹⁴⁸ Brooke-Popham then went on to cite the work of Gustave le Bon in which people, especially if from a common race, were ‘imbued with a common thought’ the whole could become a ‘self-hypnotised’ crowd.¹⁴⁹ Brooke-Popham developed this theme in a leadership context and not in conjunction with the impact of bombing on a civilian population. But his notes would not have been inconsistent with the notion of the rot starting from within.

It should also be acknowledged that the impact of bombing on morale was being actively studied in Britain and, allowing for standard beliefs in the British being better ‘at taking it’, the senior leaders would at least be aware (through the War Cabinet) of the work carried out on Home Intelligence. A detailed paper was produced in 1941 and attached to a weekly report.¹⁵⁰ Morale was defined as the ‘state of conduct and behaviour of an individual or a group’ and had to be measured by what people did, not what they grumbled about. The paper also explained the complexity of the linkages between public opinion and the probable state of morale. It then stressed the material factors affecting morale such as food, warmth, work, leisure, a secure base and safety for dependents. Mental factors included belief in victory; belief in equality of sacrifices; belief in the efficiency and integrity of leadership; and belief that the war was necessary and the cause just.¹⁵¹ The report mirrored cutting edge work in psychology that had been first published as early as

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., para.6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., para.8

¹⁵⁰ See INF 1/292, Pt.2 ‘Home Morale and Public Opinion’ dated 22 September 1941. It was produced by Stephen Taylor MD MRCP.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

1940, albeit without appropriate citation.¹⁵² The essence of the thinking, and was spelled out in Taylor's report, was that the material factors were invariably more important than the mental and had to be satisfied first.¹⁵³ Furthermore, although the material factors could be directly affected by bombing, especially as planned by Portal, and executed by Harris, against Germany, morale was measured by what people actually did. Taylor concluded that the British would not be 'defeated by any means other than extermination'.¹⁵⁴ Although Taylor concentrated solely on British morale, and public opinion, his report is at least evidence of relevant high level thinking within government.

The official historians were rather dismissive of intelligence reporting on German morale, stating that the JIC tended to exaggerate the extension of the effects of bombing once the campaign was well under way.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the detailed Air Ministry report was produced (at Harris's goading as discussed above) to cover the period 1 November 1943 to 1 March 1944. Detailed source reports had been compiled which showed that the general attitude of the German public was one of increasing apathy.¹⁵⁶ The report did not predict widespread unrest or an uprising, but forecast that morale would deteriorate and apathy worsen. Although the report did not cross-refer to the Taylor report, it covered very similar ground including both material and mental factors; it concluded that speeches and rhetoric had become less relevant or effective.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² See in particular A. H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper, 1954), pp. ix and xi. This was a ground breaking treatise on the hierarchy of needs.

¹⁵³ INF 1/292, op.cit., para.2. See also the discussion on Cherwell whose minute to the PM in March 1942 emphasised the demoralising effect of being made homeless in Hugh Berrington, 'When Does Personality Make a Difference? Lord Cherwell and the Area Bombing of Germany', *International Political Science Review*, 10 (1) January 1989, p.20.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., para.10.

¹⁵⁵ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. II, p.255 and Vol. III, pp.302-3..

¹⁵⁶ AIR 40/1494, 'Allied Air Attacks and German Morale' dated 2 April 1944.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

This section does not conclude that the senior leaders responsible for the strategic air offensive had a detailed, or all-embracing, scientific appreciation of the nature of morale and the effect thereon caused by aerial bombardment. But it is not unreasonable to infer that from Brooke-Popham's notes onwards there was more to their thinking than just dogmatic adherence to pre-war thinking, a matter of faith or a mere excuse for indiscriminate bombing.¹⁵⁸ It had been accepted from at least 1941 that the Trenchard model of attacking morale was outdated.¹⁵⁹ Hope that there would be a repetition of the collapse of the German home front was clearly evident in London as was the concern over it in German high command. It could be argued that a more detailed analysis might have predicted apathy amongst the population from the outset, but for most of the senior leaders, the Delphic experience of the history of 1918 was more influential than the relatively new world of psychology.¹⁶⁰

Overlord

The planning of *Overlord* and Harris's (and Spaatz's) eventual, grudging, agreement to the Transportation plan has been covered in the previous chapter. In terms of making the interfaces work, it is clear from both Tedder and Harris's own accounts that the two senior leaders were able to orchestrate the campaign with a minimum of fuss.¹⁶¹ Harris wrote that he

¹⁵⁸ Terraine, *Right of the Line*, pp.262-3 stated that it merely another word for massacre.

¹⁵⁹ See AIR 20/3360 for the correspondence between Slessor and Bottomley around a 'Draft directive that Trenchard had asked Slessor, as AOC 5 Group, to wordsmith; In particular, the Minute, Slessor to Bottomley dated 2 October 1941.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Howard, 'The Use and Abuse of Military History', in Howard (ed), *The Causes of War* (London: Temple Smith, 1983). 'The lessons of history are never clear. Clio is like the Delphic oracle: it is only in retrospect, and usually too late, that we can understand what she is trying to say'. A more serious interpretation of what had actually happened in 1918 would have had to acknowledge the interrelation of events on the battlefield with those on the German home front.

¹⁶¹ Tedder, *With Prejudice*, p. 564. See also Orange, *Tedder*, p.259.

was able to proceed with a campaign without being harassed by confused and conflicting directives. It was in many ways a great relief after working under other directions.¹⁶²

The root of the problem, Harris believed, had been the level of detail at which the Air Ministry had been prepared to work; this involvement in tactical detail had then percolated upwards to the Chiefs of Staff Committee and even to the War Cabinet.¹⁶³ This, in turn, resulted in the situation where ‘many individuals thought that they enjoyed the privilege of running or trying to run a force without direct responsibility for the results which must, of course, remain with the commander’.¹⁶⁴ From a senior leadership perspective, Harris was possibly right to have been so frustrated. In part, the lack of clarity over the command and control arrangements was bound to irritate, but it could be argued that, at his level, Harris could have shown more understanding of the strategic complexities of combined operations. But more important was the continuing friction between Harris and the DCAS and his team in the Directorate of Bomber Operations who Harris believed were anxious to regain control of the air offensive.¹⁶⁵

In the event, the Air Staff were concerned that Harris’s ‘loyal support’ to Tedder, and his commitment to *Overlord*, had resulted in only ‘small tonnages being dropped on the principal strategic targets’.¹⁶⁶ Once the land forces became established on the Continent, the Air Staff argued for a return of the heavy bombers to Portal’s control on the basis that London had the more complete strategic picture. Furthermore, the situation was complicated by Air Staff concerns that the strategic bombing commanders had too much

¹⁶² Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.214.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.215.

¹⁶⁵ Bottomley, and Bufton in particular. For the full saga, see Cording, *The Other Bomber War* which utilises the Bufton Papers heavily.

¹⁶⁶ See Tedder, *With Prejudice*, p.564 for the comment on Harris and AIR 41/56, p.52 for the Air Staff concerns.

latitude in their choices of targets, and that the Eighth Air Force in particular was not tackling its *Crossbow* commitments.¹⁶⁷ More importantly, the Air Staff and their specialist advisers were becoming increasingly convinced that attacking German oil production would have a potentially decisive effect on the war.¹⁶⁸ Harris concurred that reduced bombing of German industry would allow war production to rebuild. He further argued that *Crossbow*, attacks on oil and on the German air force were all mere diversions from *Overlord* and strategic bombing.¹⁶⁹

Harris particularly objected to the Air Ministry continuing to task him directly, rather than through the Supreme Commander as they did over *Crossbow* and aircraft production targets.¹⁷⁰ The acerbic nature of the relationship is clear from correspondence between Bottomley and Harris over the period of the landings in Normandy.¹⁷¹ On 3 June 1944, Bottomley had sent Harris an appreciation on attacking ten synthetic oil plants on the Ruhr.¹⁷² He responded pointing out that the tonnage of bombs required equated to about ‘one month’s normal effort by the whole force under my Command.’¹⁷³ Harris refused to answer the direct question as to whether he would have capacity to start these attacks when the situation with *Overlord* allowed by tartly reminding the Air Staff that he no longer had ‘the responsibility for choosing strategical (sic) objectives and I assume that this question will be submitted to the proper quarter in due course and that I shall be informed of the result’. Harris then went on to state that ‘In the meantime by agreement with Deputy Supreme Commander, I am taking such opportunities as may serve to include synthetic oil

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.53.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.52.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p.53.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.54. AIR 2/4476, E129A, Letter from Harris to Bottomley dated 9 June 1943 asking that the DCAS sends his ‘advice on targets’ to SHAEF.

¹⁷¹ AIR 2/4476, E127A, Letter Bottomley to Harris dated 3 June 1944.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ AIR 2/4476, E130A, Letter Harris to Bottomley dated 13 June 1944.

plants in the Ruhr amongst other objectives in Germany which are within range during these short nights and which may be attacked from time to time for the purpose of preventing the enemy from bringing his defences further forward into France'.¹⁷⁴

Bomber Command had actually attacked the first oil target after *Overlord* the night before Harris sent this letter and were to launch two more in June, five in July and four in August.¹⁷⁵ The essence of this interchange was that Harris did actually understand the importance of using Bomber Command in support of *Overlord*, in the widest strategic sense, and was certainly prepared to do so at the behest of Tedder. But he was equally determined to continue his war of words with the Air Staff with almost childish vigour. Notwithstanding his outspoken objections to the whole concept of a land invasion which Harris, as a voice in the wilderness, had considered to be unnecessary, he had got on and done the job to the great satisfaction of Eisenhower and Tedder.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Probert has quoted from autobiographical material not included in Harris's memoirs in which he could 'recall only one period of calm sailing in the 3 ½ bitter years – a veritable centre of the hurricane – when all went well, when all pulled together, when there was at last continuity of contact between the compass course required and the lubber line – and that was during the all too short period when Eisenhower was Admiral and Tedder the Captain on the bridge'.¹⁷⁷

There can be little doubt that the bitterness to which Harris refers in this last passage was evident to those at the strategic level in London; the tone of his letter of 13

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ AIR 41/56, p.57.

¹⁷⁶ Seward quotes in full the exchange of correspondence between Eisenhower and Harris on the occasion of Bomber Command reverting to London's control; see *Bomber Harris*, pp.339-40.

¹⁷⁷ Probert, *Bomber Harris*, p.303

June 1944 certainly reflected the angst that he felt. This begs the leadership question as to what, if anything, should have been done to calm the waters. It could be argued that the *Overlord* period was not one in which Portal could have removed Harris, especially as the Command was co-operating to the full. But it begs the question as to whether the Air Staff, under Portal and Bottomley, was 'fit for purpose'. What is beyond doubt is that the acrimony that had built up was not going to dissipate without serious leadership intervention and the impending debate over attacking oil would provide the forum for this to surface.

Oil

The previous chapter set the strategic context for the Combined Bomber Offensive in the months after control of heavy bombers reverted to Portal and Arnold, albeit through Bottomley and Spaatz. This was the control situation which Harris described as producing 'an extraordinary lack of continuity and with responsibility so uncertainly poised the natural result was a multiplicity of directives embodying one change of plan after another and so cautiously worded at the end with so many provisos and such wide conditions that the authors were in effect guarded against any and every outcome of the orders issued'.¹⁷⁸ As Cox has pointed out, the debate over whether Harris had disobeyed orders on attacking oil targets and should have been removed has taxed historians in general and in particular those who have sought to denigrate Harris.¹⁷⁹ It is suggested that had an attempt so to do been made, Harris's first line of defence would have been to question the clarity of his orders in line with his quotation above.

¹⁷⁸ Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p.215.

¹⁷⁹ Cox, 'Sir Arthur Harris and the Air Ministry', p.224.

Notwithstanding Harris's objections to his Directives, that issued on 25 September 1944 was unequivocal in its placement of the 'Petroleum industry, with special emphasis on petrol (gasoline) including storage' as first priority.¹⁸⁰ The German Transportation system was at the head of the target systems listed as second priority. The Directive allowed the designated commanders latitude due to 'the exigencies of weather and tactical feasibility'.¹⁸¹ This discretion allowed the operational commanders as much room for manoeuvre as it did those writing the orders so maligned in Harris's earlier quotation. The catalyst for what became a bitter debate came from Harris's response to Tedder's 'Note... on Air Policy to be Adopted with a View to Rapid Defeat of Germany' dated 25 October 1944.¹⁸² Coincident with Harris's receipt of a copy of Tedder's Note, he had been challenged as to why Bomber Command had attacked Cologne on the night of 31 October.¹⁸³ In a detailed defence of his decision to bomb Cologne, Harris listed eight reasons which included weather and tactical considerations; he also stated that the target was of direct value to the land offensive and 'generally in line with the Directive'.¹⁸⁴ Harris also commented in great detail on Tedder's paper and made an impassioned appeal for a continuation of the area offensive.¹⁸⁵ The official historians have described his letter as 'unrepentant defence of his grounds for neglecting the bombing directive of 25 September 1944, but also a defiant challenge to any further directives of that nature'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App.8 (xl), Directive by Air Marshal Sir Norman Bottomley, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff and General Carl Spaatz.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. IV, App. 25, Note, Tedder to Portal on 'Air Policy to be adopted with a View to Rapid Defeat of Germany' dated 25 October 1944.

¹⁸³ AIR 41/56, pp.152-3.

¹⁸⁴ AIR 37/1013, Letter Harris to Portal dated 1 November 1944.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.83.

Harris's constant railing against the Directorate of Bomber Operations and the DCAS could, when emanating from a successful Commander in the field, be seen as eccentric and, given the personalities involved on both sides, almost understandable. But Harris's letter of 1 November marked a direct challenge to the authority of the CAS and the Combined Chiefs. It was also clear that he did not share, or had ever admitted to, any expression of the vision and purpose of the bomber offensive that did not match his own interpretation. It was also evident that Portal had failed to convince Harris of either the strategic considerations or the real merits of alternative strategies. While it was by then too late in the war to sack Harris without causing uproar in the Command and the wider public, it was also arguably late in the day to try and win Harris around. Nevertheless, Portal attempted so to do. In his response on 5 November, Portal informed Harris that his requests for information were made not because 'I am ipso facto exhibiting lack of confidence in Bomber Command's operations', but that he may have to 'explain, and if necessary defend' what had been going on.¹⁸⁷ Portal accepted that he was risking being dubbed by the C-in-C as 'another panacea merchant', but went on to state his belief that 'the air offensive against oil gives us the best hope of complete victory in the next few months'. Although Portal admitted that there may be occasions when the re-emerging U-boat threat would need to be addressed, or the land campaign would require support, he considered that the bomber offensive must seize absolutely every opportunity to maintain a positive balance between their destruction of the industry and German efforts to repair it. On the basis of the 'available intelligence' (including Ultra) the CAS believed that the 'whole war situation is poised on 'oil' as on a knife edge'.¹⁸⁸ What had previously been a debate between 'directed letters' and appropriate 'Sir, I have the honour to refer' responses

¹⁸⁷ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E32A, Letter Portal to Harris dated 5 November 1944.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

had now become a battle of will between two of the most senior leaders in the Service couched in demi-official language. The sensitivity of the correspondence was still evident some years later when the official historians sought to use the material and were initially refused.¹⁸⁹ As a result the whole Official History project was either nearly ‘emasculated’, or driven into extinction.¹⁹⁰

Harris replied with yet another defence of his decisions to attack cities rather than oil targets, and then challenged the accuracy of the intelligence upon which the plan was based.¹⁹¹ He also regretted the suggestion that it was thought that he did not ‘understand the importance of the oil war, because that is entirely wrong’.¹⁹² Portal’s response returned to the issue of the devastation of cities to which Harris had referred in his letter of 1 November

I know that you have long felt that such a plan to be the most effective way of bringing about the collapse of Germany. Knowing this, I have, I must confess, at times wondered whether the magnetism of the remaining German cities has not in the past tended as much to deflect our bombers from their primary objectives as the tactical and weather difficulties which you described so fully in your letter of 1st November. I would like you to reassure me that this is not so. If I knew you to be as wholehearted in the attack on oil as in the past you have been in the matter of attacking cities I would have little to worry about.¹⁹³

Notwithstanding the vagaries of the language used in the various Air Staff communications there could be absolutely no doubt as to the higher commander’s intent on this matter. Portal’s language was firm, to the point and personal. At this point, it is suggested that, under an objective test, it would have been reasonable for Harris either to do what he had been directed, in the spirit in which it was intended, or at least return to ‘consent and

¹⁸⁹ See Goulter, ‘British Official Histories of the Air War’, p.141 and Frankland, *History at War*, p.88.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E32b, Letter Harris to Portal dated 6 November 1944.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E32c, Letter Portal to Harris dated 12 November 1944.

evade'. But Harris chose to resort to a battle of the experts and forwarded an appreciation carried out by his Operational Research Section who had calculated a huge required sortie and bomb load rate to destroy the key targets.¹⁹⁴ He berated the 'MEW experts' for having 'never failed to overstate their case on "panaceas", e.g. ball-bearings, molybdenum, locomotives etc'. Harris considered that the oil plan was already following the path of previous schemes with the inclusion of Benzol plants.¹⁹⁵

Richards has stated that this missive 'disturbed Portal more than the earlier ones'.¹⁹⁶ Certainly, Portal's pencil annotations to Harris's letter confirm that he spent a considerable period going through the detail.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, he responded patiently by stating that he was 'profoundly disappointed that you still feel that the oil plan is just another "panacea"'.¹⁹⁸ Portal went on to confirm that Bomber Command's load in attacking these targets was shared with the Americans (thereby spreading the risk of attrition against which Harris had complained) and that 'immobilisation and the continued immobilisation of the remaining producers' was the 'greatest and most certain contribution that our strategic bombers could make'. In response to Harris's challenge on the competence of the MEW, Portal suggested that greater efforts might have produced the results predicted. Portal also expressed his doubts that Harris's staff would not give of their best in the 'accomplishment of your first priority task if you yourself are not whole heartedly in support of it'.¹⁹⁹ Harris responded by reiterating his distrust of the MEW and defended his Command's efforts against the target sets which Portal had said had not been

¹⁹⁴ Portal Papers, Folder 10 (1945), E1, Letter Harris to Portal dated 12 December 1944.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Richards, *Portal*, p.320.

¹⁹⁷ File copy on AIR 8/1020.

¹⁹⁸ Portal Papers, Folder 10 (1945), E2, Letter Portal to Harris dated 22 December 1944.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

prosecuted with due diligence.²⁰⁰ The official historians have described Harris's response to this next letter as 'extraordinary' and suggested that further attempts to persuade him 'would be useless'.²⁰¹ They also alluded to Portal's unwillingness to replace Harris at this stage.²⁰² But what is arguably a key paragraph in this letter, from which they do not quote, is where Harris admits that where he leaves 'no stone unturned to get my views across, but, when the decision is made I carry it out to the utmost and best of my ability'.²⁰³ Nor did the Air Staff seriously challenge this saying that there was 'no doubt that Bomber Command have excellently in the attack on oil and the C-in-C may well feel convinced that he is attacking it to the best of his ability'; they did, however doubt that every opportunity had been taken.²⁰⁴ In support of the contention that Bomber Command had made progress against oil targets, Cox in his introduction to Harris's *Despatch on War Operations*, has made the point that Bomber Command's performance was acceptable given the weather, moon conditions and so forth.²⁰⁵ What continued to concern the Air Staff was Harris's lack of enthusiasm and the effect that this would have on his staff and the wider prosecution of the campaign.²⁰⁶ But Harris refuted Portal's accusation that his views may well have influenced his staff for the worse. His words were classic Harris and are an interesting cameo, depicting him as very much an 'old school', or traditional military Commander

I do not give my staff views. I give them orders. They do and always have done exactly what I tell them to. I have told them to miss no opportunity of prosecuting the oil plan, and they have missed no worth while (sic) opportunity.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ Portal Papers, Folder 10 (1945), E3, Letter Harris to Portal dated 28 December 1944.

²⁰¹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.87.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Portal Papers, Folder 10, (1945), E3, Letter Harris to Portal dated 28 December 1944.

²⁰⁴ AIR 8/1020, Minute Bufton to Portal dated 3 January 1945.

²⁰⁵ Cox, Introduction to Harris, *Despatch*, pp. xxii-xxiv. See also Cox, 'Sir Arthur Harris and the Air Ministry', p.224

²⁰⁶ AIR 8/1020, Minute Bufton to Portal dated 3 January 1945.

²⁰⁷ Portal Papers, Folder 10, (1945), E3, Letter Harris to Portal dated 28 December 1944. For life on the receiving end see Martin Middlebrook (ed), *The Everlasting Arms: The War Memoirs of Air Commodore John Searby DSO, DFC* (London: William Kimber, 1988), ch. X.

The correspondence therefore continued and Portal's next letter, of eight pages and produced after lengthy discussions with his staff, contained what the official historians have called 'a most significant passage' which is worthy of repetition at length

While area bombing, if it could have been continued long enough and in sufficient weight, might in the end have forced the enemy to capitulate, his counter-measures would have prevented us from maintaining such a policy to decisive point. We would have been forced to precision attack to maintain the air situation needed to continue the offensive at all. The Americans did this for themselves in 1943/44 with a little help from Bomber Command. Under cover of the favourable air situation which was created "*OVERLORD*" was launched successfully, and the advance to the German frontier gave night bombing a new lease of life. But for this it is possible that the night blitzing of German cities would by now have been too costly to sustain upon a heavy scale. These factors must not be overlooked when considering the past and future results of area attack.²⁰⁸

In many ways, this passage is actually the most significant, even extraordinary, of the whole chain of correspondence and could only have been conducted in the less formal demi-official manner. The key element was that it was the United States Army Air Forces that had won the vital air superiority necessary for *Overlord* without which the bomber offensive would have ground to a costly halt. *Overlord* had, in turn, allowed the ground forces to overrun the early warning sites and Bomber Command was thus able to operate more freely. The official historians challenged Portal's understanding of the situation, or at least his 'oversimplification'.²⁰⁹ But it could be argued that this is beside the point. The demi-official correspondence had, by its personal nature, a degree of subjectivity to it that would not otherwise be evident and that was behind the two leaders' reluctance to have it quoted from and refusal to allow its publication. Whether Webster and Frankland's subsequent analysis was more correct, the critical issue is whether that is what Portal

²⁰⁸ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E3a, Letter Portal to Harris dated 8 January 1945.

²⁰⁹ Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, p.90.

actually believed.²¹⁰ If it was, and he had decided to remove Harris, it would have all the appearances of the C-in-C being sacked because Portal and the Air Staff thought that the area offensive had failed: they could hardly have published the letters as evidence of Harris's intransigence. Had Harris been sacked for the perceived failure of such a costly campaign the wider impact on morale in the RAF would have been considerable.

Harris duly responded, albeit with regret that the debate had been widened beyond the merits of the oil plan.²¹¹ Harris outlined, again, his objections to any form of selective bombing and to the oil plan in particular. He also vigorously defended himself against any charge of disloyalty, but likened the situation to a case of 'heads I lose, tails you win'; if the policy in which he had no faith failed, the blame would lie at his door for not prosecuting it with sufficient vigour. Harris went on to ask the CAS 'to consider whether it is best for the prosecution of the war and our success of arms, which alone matters, that I should remain in this situation'.²¹² As Richards has stated, 'Portal in the pleasantest possible way brushed aside Harris's offer of resignation';

I willingly accept your assurance that you will continue to do your utmost to ensure the successful execution of the policy laid down. I am sorry that you do not believe in it but it is no use my craving for the unattainable. We must wait until the end of the war before we can know for certain who was right and I sincerely hope that until then you will continue in command of the force which has done so much towards defeating the enemy and has brought such credit and renown to yourself and the Air Force.²¹³

²¹⁰ The official historians make a perfectly valid case on the war of attrition that was being fought between Bomber Command and the German fighter force, alone at first and then with the huge numbers the USStAF was able to throw at the conflict; see Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, Vol. III, pp. 90-93.

²¹¹ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E3b, Letter Harris to Portal dated 18 January 1945.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Portal Papers, Folder 10, E3c, Letter Portal to Harris dated 20 January 1945.

In many ways Portal was either naive, suffering from wishful thinking or merely being placatory in his hope that the end of the war would see one or the other proved right. The literature suggests that the debate is still healthy and contentious.²¹⁴ It is certainly outside the scope of this thesis to examine the merits or pass judgement on the success of the bomber offensive. From the leadership perspective, however, it is instructive to note Sinclair's comment when he was shown the trail of correspondence; he concluded that Portal was 'exquisitely right' against one of CAS's replies to Harris and that 'I see what troubles his soul – our failure to go nap on the policy of obliteration and that the laurels he is receiving are for successes – e.g. the pathfinders, incendiary attack, the oil plan – which are not of his design'.²¹⁵ As Sinclair also noted, Harris was obviously 'under considerable mental stress' which is less than surprising given his role for so long. But then the same could be said for Portal who had to endure numerous overseas trips as well as Churchill's 'midnight follies'.²¹⁶ Senior leadership is, and has always been, mentally and physically taxing.

Having justified his request for information on the grounds that he may either have to explain, or defend, Bomber Command's operations, it is worthy of note that Churchill's sole minute to Portal on the subject of oil came at the end of January 1945.²¹⁷ In this minute, Churchill noted that three times as many bombs had been dropped on transportation targets compared with oil. He went on to say that 'in view of the great success of attacks on oil targets and of their immediate effects, I trust they will not be

²¹⁴ Probably the best analysis of the validity of the criticisms of Harris is by Cox in his introduction to Harris, *Despatch*, pp. xxii-xxiv.

²¹⁵ Harris's disagreement over Pathfinders has been quoted above; for disagreement even on the post mortem see Portal Papers, Folder 10, E15, Letter Portal to Harris dated 12 April 1944 and subsequent reply. For incendiaries, see Portal Papers' Folder 9, E3c, Letter Harris to Portal, dated 28 February 1942, in response to Cherwell's advocacy of the plan.

²¹⁶ This was the nickname used to describe Churchill's late night discussions.

²¹⁷ Portal Papers, Folder 6, E7, Minute Churchill to CAS dated 28 January 1945.

neglected in favour of the long term attrition of German communications'.²¹⁸ Portal assured him that all 'the Air Authorities, RAF and American, are agreed that oil has top priority'.²¹⁹ The Prime Minister appears to have been oblivious to the turbulent correspondence at the interface between the military strategic level and the operational. From this, it is not unreasonable to infer that Portal had no intention of escalating matters by attempting to remove Harris and was content to weather the storm.

Conclusions.

The typical controversies over the period when Harris was C-in-C have tended to concentrate on his strident advocacy of area bombing and the contentious issue as to whether he should have been retained in post. From a leadership viewpoint, there are a number of wider perspectives that need to be added to this debate. In the first instance it must be remembered that Harris was not the architect of area bombing; the formal directive was in place before he took command. If there was to a single author of the concept, Portal would be the leader responsible. For the first two years of Harris's tenure, area bombing was the primary means of Britain striking back at Germany; from the C-in-C's perspective, his war was the war. If Harris had a major failing as a leader therefore, it was not adjusting to the realities that other options had been opening through 1943, and that *Overlord* was going to happen. All the indications from the eastern front were that Germany was going to fight to the end and Harris's concept of merely needing an army of occupation was irrelevant. The fact that Bomber Command was at its strongest and most potent at this stage clouded his judgement further. Although Harris was vociferous in his objections to any deviation, or diversion, from his course of action, Bomber Command carried out the

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Portal Papers, Folder 6, E7, Minute Portal to Churchill dated 28 January 1945.

tasks broadly as directed; this was especially evident during *Overlord*. This may not always have been to the satisfaction of all in the Air Staff, but that did not necessarily give serious grounds for considering removing Harris from Command. This chapter has suggested that if Portal had had such a move in mind, the row over ball bearings and Schweinfurt would have been the opportunity; by the time the debate over oil took place, it was too late to be a serious proposition and Portal's measured correspondence shows that he had that view.

The chapter has also alluded to Harris's very traditional attitude to 'Command' and it could be argued that this influenced his approach to his relationship with the Air Ministry. Harris appeared to see the function of the Air Staff as a high level co-ordination body without power of command. The Staff was there to provide him with broad direction and the resources with which to prosecute the offensive. But with their input into the Chiefs of Staff, Combined Chiefs of Staff and the constitutional responsibility to the War Cabinet, as well as links with other government departments, Portal and his staff had a far wider remit. With his responsibilities for the direction of the Combined Bomber Offensive, Portal had clear primacy in setting the policy. Admittedly the language of 'direction' was somewhat more opaque than that of 'command', but that did not change the de facto realities. As a function of strategic leadership, 'direction' had two distinct facets. The first was for Portal, on behalf of the Combined Chiefs, to set their determination of the vision and purpose, or their 'intent' into practical direction to the two bomber commanders. The second was for the will of the War Cabinet to be translated into formal Directives for the C-in-C to prosecute. The political intricacies of all of this made it a complex web of priorities which conspired against the broad mission command approach that Harris would

have preferred. Instead, it resulted in a system of high level centralised command with devolved execution. Modern commanders are comfortable with this notion; Portal was ideally suited to working in this way, Harris evidently was not.

Chapter 8

THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

The stereotypical image of the strategic leaders responsible for the planning, and execution, of the air offensive against Germany is, at its most extreme, of a unified band of ‘bomber barons’ steadfastly following a Trenchardian doctrine of the supremacy of the bomber and its ability ‘always to get through’. The ‘barons’, in this cameo, would be depicted as a united band of brothers in concert with a single cause, oblivious to the wider utility of air power. And if Trenchard was the master, Harris was his chief disciple in waging an immoral, wasteful offensive against the women and children of Germany. As with all caricatures, there are touches of veracity in each of these elements. But the realities of the strategic leadership challenge were altogether more complex than this simplistic summary. This thesis has sought to examine these complexities and has shown that, not only were the challenges multi-dimensional, but also consisted of many threads of differing hues that changed in texture over time.

The thesis has looked at the senior leadership challenges from the inception of the strategic bombing concept through to the conclusion of the campaign in May 1945. It would be tempting to risk casually using the word ‘apogee’ to describe this point, but again the realities are too complex. The concept of the ‘strategic’ nature of the campaign is also complex. It could be argued, and to an extent still is, that the strategic nature of the campaign was simply that it straddled operational theatres by taking the war to the heartland of the enemy and, as such, was no more than a large-scale ‘operational campaign’ in its own right. But it could also be suggested (and was) that the bomber

offensive could have the ultimate strategic effect in either directly causing outright victory, or significantly creating the conditions for this to result. One of the key features of strategic leadership is the establishment of the vision and purpose of the enterprise. Although it could be suggested that victory over Germany was the ultimate goal, even this was complicated with the entry of America into the war and priority over the Pacific. Even if the 'ends' desired in Europe were commonly accepted, the 'ways and means' were not; there was considerable variation in the thinking over the execution of the campaign.

The stages of evolution of the strategic offensive could be depicted as a linear progression from its inception during the First World War; its development as a concept and as a force in being; the challenges to its very survival in the bleak inter-war years; the expansion to meet the growing threat in Germany; the early application; and then the exploitation of the force as it grew in strength, capacity and accuracy. But again, this too simplistic: it was not a linear development over time. There were elements of each cycle in each of temporal phases. The conceptual thinking evolved in conjunction with technological advances and in response to political circumstances. At each stage in the process, the strategic bomber force was under threat of extinction at either the hands of the other services; from a complete abolition of military aviation in Geneva; from diversion to, arguably, higher priority tasks such as the anti-submarine offensive; or subordinated to the support of the invasion of other theatres, including, ultimately, north-west Europe and *Overlord*; and ironically when it was at its genuine perigee when the force nearly died because it was failing to deliver. There were also several phases of expansion, each of which was fraught with danger as the resilience of the technology was stretched to, and sometimes beyond, its limits of elasticity. Each of these bore the risk of catastrophic

failure. It was only with the advent of the Lancaster, with its huge bomb load, variation in types of ordnance, and improved navigational accuracy that the application of the force reached a point where it could be exploited in a sustainable fashion. In each of the phases, and in each of the cycles therein, the whole enterprise could have failed. The senior leaders' task throughout was to ensure that the balance was maintained, between the strategic bomber and the wider picture.

A number of enduring tenets overlaid these challenges. Some were matters of faith; others the result of public or political priority; some may have been just wishful thinking. The role of the media in the voicing the thinking of the prophets, or even the more mundane process of prioritisation is open to debate, but its influence on leaders, and followers, was undeniable.¹ The first influence on the senior leaders, throughout the period covered in this thesis, was the promise of air power. Its ability to go beyond the two dimensional constraints of the war at sea, or on land, gave air power the potential to revolutionise warfare. That this could obviate the slaughter of the trenches brought about by industrialisation, mass armies and the coalescence of artillery and rapid fire weapons, made the possibility of war in the third dimension all the more alluring. That this might extend, beyond the battlefield, to the means of war production and even to the fundamental will of the people to support continuance of the conflict gave the future of air power an almost 'el Dorado' quality. The extent to which the senior leaders really internalised this possibility of transmutation is debatable; but what is evident from the sources was the desirability of avoiding the carnage of the trenches over which they had flown with bravery and distinction. The inherent flexibility of air power offered more than just this allure.

¹ For the debate in this context see Mark Connelly, 'The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany, 1939-45', *Contemporary British History*, 16(2) 2002, p.40.

And in many ways, it could be argued that it prevented the bomber offensive from ever realising the true potential advocated by the 'barons'. The reach, and resulting deployability, of air power in its various guises so often made it the arm of choice for reinforcement, or for offensive action when other choices would have been too costly.

The Trenchardian spirit of the use of air power in the offensive was all-pervasive in the new Service and was to endure to the end of the war. But again it would be too simplistic to suggest that this was merely a Blackadder-style incarnation of the senior airman doggedly following Haig as the master of attritional warfare.² Whether desirable, or otherwise, land warfare has been described as a question of movement, supply and of destruction all brought together on increasingly vast scales.³ It was therefore axiomatic that air power, as an offshoot from the army, would follow this doctrine. Equally, with antecedents in the naval tradition, it is not surprising that the strategy of blockade allowed the war to be taken indiscriminately to the population. Indeed the British strategy for much of the Second World War was to maintain the blockade along with aerial bombardment. Furthermore, the unique nature of British imperial history ensured that continental armies were the exception, but worldwide commitments and dependencies (in all senses of the word) absolutely prevented an isolationist stance. The advent of air power, and its offensive use, fitted ideally into this melange and this was intuitively understood by all the leaders concerned.

Although the debate was to flourish over the balance between offence and defence, the need to protect Britain's island shores was accentuated by the ability of German air

² See Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp.1-3.

³ Henderson, *The Science of War*, p.1.

power in the First World War to take the conflict to the domestic audience. The offensive was advocated consistently as the best form of defence, in which the enemy was forced to defend vital interests, thereby reducing the intensity of attack against Britain, but it was not always politically acceptable. Something had to be done, and to be seen to be done. Thus the defence of London in particular, also emerged as an enduring theme which was well understood by the senior leaders at the political and military levels. If attention to other theatre of operation distracted the senior leaders, the press could always be relied upon to remind them of the threat to the home front. In a similar vein, the press could also be relied upon to call on retaliation and retribution following attacks on the British towns and cities.⁴ And until the desirability of a comfortable seat on the moral high ground following Dresden appealed to Churchill, his advocacy of reprisals was strident, particularly against Berlin. Inevitably, this was not lost on the military leaders, as shown when Portal was still the C-in-C.

The task of the senior leaders in transforming these principles into workable, and affordable, policies and then executing them was considerable. The challenges at each phase were variable and complex. Linear, or simple, solutions to such ‘wicked problems’ were not applicable. Although the strategic leaders of the period would not have used such language, the more discerning would have certainly understood the difficulty. There are no single ‘magic solutions’ to leadership at the most senior levels. Nor are there unique characteristics that are transferrable to every scenario. But, again, there are recurring themes. The first of these is the ability, at the senior level, to be able to make the transition from the operational level to the strategic in which the leader at that level is

⁴ Connolly, ‘The British People’, pp. 47-9.

required to oversee a diverse spectrum of operational ‘silos’ beyond the one from which she or he has just been promoted. Portal’s promotion to CAS from Bomber Command was a classic example of this. The strategic leader has to look across the tops of these silos and thence to the interfaces of the various organisations that contribute to the greater enterprise. Portal was able to do this across the range of Whitehall and into international arena. Harris, operating in the difficult area of overlap between the strategic and operational levels had frequently to be asked to broaden his outlook. It has also been evident in this examination that the traditional descriptions of the levels of warfare, whilst convenient tools, are no more than that. The realities of senior leadership are that there will be overlaps, blurred zones and inevitable forays from the grand strategic to the tactical with Churchill the best, and worst, example. Although it is outside the scope of this thesis to draw contemporary lessons from these challenges, it is evident that they still apply.

A detailed analysis of the strategic leadership of the bomber offensive through the lens of Dixon’s *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* has been outside the scope of this thesis, not least because it is essentially a social psychology task. Nevertheless, another enduring theme of senior leadership is that it is ambiguous and complex, requiring intelligence and intellectual capacity to cope with the demands. In an ideal world, the succession planning in an organisation would ensure that people with these traits reached the top. In a military organisation, this simple statement is easier said than done. From the start, the attributes required at the top of the organisation may not have been those necessary to climb through the ranks, especially where there is evidence of anti-intellectualism. This was, arguably, particularly relevant in an air force where skills as a pilot, and the unique challenges of actually leading in the air, were of the first most

importance. Again, it is arguable that this remains as relevant today, albeit in a range of institutions. It is clear that officers such as Portal, Tedder and Slessor had these attributes. But the fact that they stood out, has suggested that they were the exception rather than the rule. Regrettably, there appears to be little evidence to suggest that Harris was in this league and the bitter wrangle over the targeting of oil suggests the opposite.

A further recurring theme in the modern literature of strategic leadership is the need to build, and maintain, strong interpersonal relationships. This is essential at the military-political interface; with allies; with peers; and at the institutional boundaries where intent, leadership and direction interact with the operational, or tactical, task of delivering output. It would be tempting to seek a workable template, or model, of a situation which could be emulated. But this thesis has demonstrated the each of the 'top team' relationships has been different depending on the people, the circumstances and the challenges faced. For example, the relationship between Londonderry and Salmond (and then Ellington) in the face of disarmament and rearmament was very different to the situation between Churchill, Sinclair and Portal. As has been discussed, Sinclair was effectively relegated to the role of spokesman in the Commons leaving the running of the bomber offensive to Churchill and Portal, both working and interacting with Harris 'jointly and severally'. In the face of these positive relationships, it is interesting to compare the neutral, or dead, situation in the phoney war between Chamberlain and Newall. At the other end of the spectrum, the appointment of Leigh-Mallory as the Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces has demonstrated the potential for what can go wrong when parties are just not prepared to work together. In a military situation, with so much at stake, it seems almost bizarre that such a thing could occur; the stereotypical view would have been that military personnel

did as they are told and got on with it. But the critical element was that there was so much at stake that those involved were not prepared to risk the outcome, or their own position in history, on having to trust the intellect, capacity and qualities of a senior leader who appeared out of place. Portal's, and Churchill's wisdom in making this appointment, which was agreed in advance of the appointment of the Supreme Commander, must be questioned particularly with talented airmen such as Douglas and Slessor available.⁵

The machinery which a British government uses to take the country to war, and then oversee the conduct of the conflict must, of constitutional necessity, be answerable to Parliament and this invariably done through the War Cabinet. Churchill, by his own admission, had set himself up with wide ranging powers as Minister of Defence. Senior leaders in such a situation have to understand, and adapt to, the situation. Clear, linear wiring diagrams describing the chain of command are rarely apposite. This was true from Churchill taking power until the end of the war. It was complicated further by the entry of America into the war and the, often tortuous lines of 'direction' and 'oversight'. It was evident that both Portal and Tedder were comfortable operating in this environment. But from his outbursts, it was clear that Harris was, at best, unwilling to accept the vicissitudes of coalition warfare. At worst, Harris did not have the intellectual capacity to cope with the necessarily opaque language used as political and strategic 'direction' was translated into 'Directives'. That the Air Staff may have added their own spin to the process cannot have helped.

⁵ See Christina J.M. Goulter, *A Forgotten Offensive: Royal Air Force Coastal Command's Anti-Shipping Campaign, 1940-1945* (London: Cass, 1995), pp.214-5.

For a major enterprise, such as the strategic bomber offensive, to succeed, it needs to be supported by an organisation that is fit for purpose. As has been described, Harris recognised this when he was DCAS and set up the Directorates of Fighter and Bomber Operations. His relationship with the latter, or with its occupants, was to be one of longstanding friction. At the heart of the issue was that Harris wanted to be given broad direction and then allowed to prosecute his bit of the war in his own way. When the Air Staff, through the Director of Bomber Operations, sought to amend direction due to an evolving intelligence picture, strategic requirements or advice from other government departments, Harris objected, often vehemently. In many ways, Harris was naive to think that he could draw upon the lion's share of the nation's resources and then expend them with unlimited flexibility, especially in his early days when the case for area bombing had not been proven. That he failed to follow Churchill's hints on not overstating the case adds evidence to the case for the charge that he was not up to leadership at the strategic level. This has been further reinforced by the stubbornness of his reluctance to acquiesce (or even accept orders) when the grand strategic direction did not suit. To be fair, it was evident that others, such as Tedder, shared the disquiet over Bufton (as Director of Bomber Operations) who had his own very clear views on how the bomber war should be fought; and as Harris pointed out the Air Commodore did not have the responsibility of the Commander. Nevertheless, it certainly appeared that Portal was content both with his Air Staff and that he would need to expend considerable energy on keeping his C-in-C in harness.

This necessarily leads to a brief comment on whether Harris should have been sacked. In replacing Peirse, both Churchill and Portal demonstrated a willingness to move

Commanders who were not performing to accepted standards. Churchill was certainly not averse to moving senior generals when he was unhappy with their performance. But equally nor was he keen to move senior commanders for the sake of it, or when they had only just started to understand their Command. It is to be regretted that Portal did not leave diaries similar to those kept by his colleague Brooke. It can only therefore be surmised that Portal was content that Harris's performance as an operational commander in conducting the offensive along the lines that he had originally envisaged and was prepared to tolerate his tantrums. There are other explanations, including that Churchill would not have accepted Harris being sacked as they shared the belief in the offensive spirit and the hard-nosed approach to the campaign. Alternatively a common view is that there was no obvious replacement. If this was indeed the rationale, it does not speak well of the senior leadership requirement to ensure succession planning. It could also be argued that Harris's extreme, and openly stated, views on the potential of area bombing allowed those responsible for its original instigation to take a more measured, and morally secure, position in the background. This cynical interpretation, when seen in the light of the correspondence following Dresden and the failure to recognise the sacrifice, and achievements, of the Command appears more reasonable.

The need to establish a just and moral cause has been part of the western military ethic for many centuries. Part of the rationale has been that soldiers fight better if they know what that cause is and can believe in it. This remains as valid today as it did for the bomber offensive. In addition to providing this moral underpinning, states have sought to provide a formal codification of rules of going to war and conducting it once enjoined. Some authors have concluded that the failure, through self-interest, of states to ratify the

1923 Hague Rules rendered them a failure. But as this thesis has shown, the Air Staff, with cognisance at the highest levels, were strongly of the opinion that some form of regulation was desirable, even though there was a tacit acknowledgement that, sooner or later, the 'gloves would have to come off'. A combination of factors, including limited offensive capability, and Chamberlain's pacifistic leanings, delayed the onset of full scale area bombing until just before Harris came into Command. The incremental nature of the relaxation of the restrictions has also been noted. The totality of the war, and the need for it to be finished as quickly as possible, not least to save further lives, did not prevent debate. The correspondence between the Permanent Secretary and Harris is illustrative of the tension discussed above.

The thesis has used the broad tenets of modern thinking on senior leadership as an aid to the analysis of the strategic challenges at the different stages from the inception of the concept of bombing. Although the senior leaders of the period under discussion would not have used the more recent vocabulary, they would have recognised the principles and acknowledged the realities and challenges. Although some of social science leadership literature has used historical examples, these have faced the challenge of selectivity. This thesis has done the opposite with the theory used as an analytical tool. The primary themes in strategic leadership have also proved to be enduring.

Leadership at the most senior levels is demanding, both physically and mentally. It requires intelligence and intellectual capacity. This is true in any walk of life, but is especially the case in warfare where the survival of the nation, and arguably of an acceptable form of civilisation, is at stake. Many forms and occasions in war have

provoked controversy and debate; many still do. For the debate of the bomber offensive to be labelled 'savage' is indicative of its depth, and of the passions that it ignites. Many of the senior leaders were aware of this as the events that they led and directed unfolded. It is improbable that the debate will die away, not least because many of themes continue to recur. These include the essence of leadership, the justness of the cause and the never ending battle for the resources necessary to wage war in the most effective way. The most enduring of all the themes is that of the importance of people and their relationships with each other and between their organisations.

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND COMMAND

The following definitions are those utilised by the United Kingdom Defence Academy, Defence Leadership and Management Centre¹ from 2003 onwards:

Leadership

“Leadership is visionary; it is the projection of personality and character to inspire people to achieve the desired outcome”. There is no prescription for leadership and no prescribed style of leader. Leadership is a combination of example, persuasion and compulsion dependent on the situation. It should aim to transform and be underpinned by individual skills and an enabling ethos/culture. The successful leader is an individual who understands him/herself, the organisation, the environment in which they operate and the people that they are privileged to lead.

Management

Management is a facet of Command. It is about the allocation and control of resources (human, material and financial) to achieve objectives. Management requires the capability to deploy a range of techniques and skills to enhance and facilitate the planning, organisation and execution of the business of defence. A successful Manager combines these skills with those of leadership. A Manager with the style of management most suited to the circumstances is the most successful. (A Leader/Manager)

Command

Command is a position of authority and responsibility to which military men and women are legally appointed. Leadership and management are the key components to the successful exercise of Command. Successful management is readily measured against objective criteria but commanders are not leaders until their position has been ratified in the hearts and minds of those they command.

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APPENDIX 2: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The following notes complement the main text in providing brief comment on the key military and political figures. They are based on the relevant autobiographies, biographies, Probert's *High Commanders* and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

RAF Officers:

ACM Sir Norman Bottomley (1891-1970). Transferred from the Territorial Force to the RFC in 1916. Bottomley became SASO Bomber Command in 1938 and then commanded 5 Group from 1940. He was appointed as DCAS from 1941 (and then ACAS Ops when the DCAS post was disestablished). Bottomley spent the rest of the War in this role before taking command of Bomber Command in September 1945.

AVM Sydney Bufton (1908-1993). Joined the RAF in 1927. After commanding 10 Squadron, Bufton was posted to the Air Ministry as deputy director Bomber Operations rising to Air Commodore rank. He was called the 'the little air commodore' by Churchill.

ACM Sir Hugh Dowding (1882-1970). Joined the Army through Woolwich and was commissioned into the Royal Garrison Artillery in 1900. Dowding learned to fly in 1913 and transferred to the RFC in 1914. After a patchy war, including falling out with Trenchard, clawed his way back into favour reaching the Air Council as Air Member for Supply and Research in 1930 and then for Research and Development in 1935. Dowding took over the newly formed Fighter Command in 1936. He was then passed over for CAS in 1937 and his tenure at Bentley Priory was marked with both conspicuous success and further controversy including his removal in 1940.

MRAF Sir Edward Ellington (1877-1967). Joined the Army through Woolwich in 1895 and was commissioned into the Royal Artillery in 1897. Ellington learned to fly in 1912 and attended CFS in 1913. However, he spent most of the War in the Royal Artillery and subsequent staff appointments including deputy director-general of aeronautics in the War Office in 1917. He transferred to the RAF on its formation and rose to become CAS on the death of Sir Geoffrey Salmond in 1933. Sweetman (ODNB) is scathing about his weak leadership and lack of air mindedness. Nickname: Uncle Ted (from when he was Inspector General of the RAF).

MRAF Sir Arthur Harris (1892-1984). Joined the 1st Rhodesian Regiment in 1914 before returning to the UK and learned to fly in 1915. After transferring from the RFC to the RAF in 1919, Harris rose to become deputy director plans in the Air Ministry from 1934-7. He commanded 4 Group prior to a liaison tour in America. After the outbreak of War, Harris commanded 5 Group before joining Portal in the Air Ministry as DCAS. After another spell in America, Harris took over Bomber Command from Peirse in 1942. Was

known affectionately by his crews as 'Bomber' and by his friends as 'Bert' (a naval tradition in which all those with Harris as their surname are known as Bert).

ACM Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt (1886-1973). Joined the Army through Sandhurst and was commissioned into the Royal Irish Rifles in 1905. Ludlow-Hewitt joined the RFC in August 1914. Under Trenchard's patronage, he rose rapidly through the ranks to become C-in-C Bomber Command from 1937-1940. Hastings has commented that 'Ludlow' lacked the steel for the highest levels of command.

AVM E. J. Kingston-McCloughry (1896-1972). Born in Australia and commissioned into their engineers in 1915 McCloughry joined the Australian Flying Corps in 1917. Wrote and published extensively in the inter-war years. He worked extensively with Zuckerman on the Overlord bombing committee.

MRAF Lord Newall (1886-1963). Joined the Army through Sandhurst and was commissioned into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1905. He learned to fly in 1911 and subsequently joined the RFC rising to be the brigadier-general in charge of the 8 Brigade charged with bombing operations under Trenchard. Newall succeeded Ellington as CAS in 1937 and remained in post until 1940. Newall had a reputation for working exceptionally long hours and was at the centre of a number of controversies including his own removal!

ACM Sir Richard Peirse (1892-1970). Peirse learned to fly in 1913 before joining the RNR and flying operationally in the RNAS. He transferred to the RAF in 1919 and rose through the ranks to become DCAS in 1937. After a short spell as VCAS, Peirse was appointed C-in-C Bomber Command after Portal in 1940. As Jordan (ODNB) has pointed out, Peirse joined the Command at an awkward time with heavy commitments and considerable pressure to perform. Portal's confidence in him as C-in-C waned after a series of heavy losses and he was removed in January 1942 to be succeeded by Harris.

MRAF Sir John Salmond (1881-1968). Joined the Army through Sandhurst and was commissioned into the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment. He wrote on air power as early as 1910 and learned to fly in 1912 just after joining the RFC. By October 1917, Salmond had become a major-general and the youngest officer ever to reach the Army Council (as DG Military Aeronautics). He then distinguished himself in Iraq before becoming AOC-in-C of the air defence of Great Britain. He replaced Trenchard as CAS at then of 1929 and the plan had been for him to hand over to his brother (Sir Geoffrey) who became too ill to take up the post allowing the way in for Ellington.

MRAF Viscount Portal (1893-1971). Joined the Army as a motorcycle despatch rider in 1914 from Christ Church Oxford. Portal joined the RFC in 1915 and gained great distinction as a pilot and commander. Trenchard marked Portal out as a future star and

selected him for the first RAF Staff College Course. Rising rapidly through the ranks, Portal became Director of Organisation in the Air Ministry in 1937 and the AMP in 1939. After a short stint as AOC-in-C Bomber Command in 1940 'Peter' Portal served as CAS for the rest of the War.

MRAF Sir John Slessor (1897-1979). Despite having been rejected as 'totally unfit' for military service, Slessor wangled his way into the RFC. Slessor was clearly identified (along with Portal) as a future star and was one of 'Boom's wordsmiths'. He published *Air Power and Armies* in 1936 and was the Director of Plans from 1937 to 1940. Slessor was the highly influential in the sensitive staff talks with the Americans in 1940-41 before Commanding 5 Group. He then moved to C-in-C Coastal Command in 1943 and replaced Tedder commanding the RAF in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

MRAF Lord Tedder (1890-1967). After Cambridge and the diplomatic service, Tedder joined the Army as a second lieutenant in the Dorsetshire Regiment in 1915. He transferred to the RFC in 1916. Tedder made good progress in the inter-war years rising to become DG Research and Development in 1938. He then made his name in the Mediterranean despite Churchill attempting to have him sacked in November 1941. Tedder was influential in shaping British and American air efforts in the early days of the combined operations and worked exceptionally well with Eisenhower. He was therefore a natural choice to become his deputy for Overlord. Was addressed in demi-official letters as 'Tirpitz'.

MRAF Viscount Trenchard (1873-1956). Joined the Army, at the third attempt, in 1893 in Royal Scots Fusiliers and was posted to India where he was known as 'Camel' because did not drink and could not speak! He joined the RFC in 1912 having learned to fly at the advanced age of nearly 40. He rose quickly to head the RFC in 1915 and pursued a policy of constant offensive action. He became the first CAS before falling out with the political establishment, then commanding the Independent Force in France. Trenchard regained his CAS post at the behest of Churchill in 1919 and remained in post until 1929. Known fondly as 'Boom'.

Civil Servants:

Sir Arthur Street (1892-1951). Street became Permanent under-Secretary in the Air Ministry in 1939 and served in that role until 1946.

Politicians:

Marquess of Londonderry (Charles Stewart) (1878-1949). Served as finance member of the Air Council and then Under Secretary of State from 1919-1921. He became Secretary Of State in 1931 and served until 1935 over the years of disarmament.

Earl of Swinton Philip Cunliffe-Lister) (1884-1972). Became Secretary of State for Air in 1935 and oversaw the expansion of the RAF through to 1938.

Viscount Templewood (Samuel Hoare) (1880-1959). Hoare was Secretary of State for Air from 1922 until 1929 working with Trenchard to secure the survival of the RAF and to boost long distance air travel.

Viscount Thurso (Sir Archibald Sinclair) (1890-1970). A long and close friend of Churchill, Sinclair was a leading Liberal in the inter-war years. Although he refused office under Chamberlain he accepted the position as Secretary of State for Air in 1940 from Churchill.

Viscount Weir (William Douglas Weir) (1877-1959). Weir was an active advocate for the formation a Single Air Board in 1916 and subsequently succeeded Rothermere as President of the Air Council in 1918. He was an early supporter of the concept of strategic bombing.

APPENDIX 3: LEGAL TEXTS

The 1923 Convention on Aerial Warfare (p.62):

Article 25. The attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages or buildings which are undefended is prohibited.

Article 26. The officer in Command of an attacking force must, before commencing a bombardment, except in cases of assault, do all in his power to warn the authorities.

Article 27. In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps must be taken to spare, as far as possible, buildings dedicated to religion, art science, or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not being used for military purposes.

The Hague Conference and the Rules of Aerial Warfare

Article 22. Aerial bombardment for the purpose of terrorizing the civilian population, of destroying or damaging private property not of military character, or of injuring non-combatants is prohibited.

Article 24 went on to state that:

- (1) Aerial bombardment is legitimate only when directed at a military objective, that is to say, an object of which destruction or injury would constitute a distinct military advantage to the belligerent.
- (2) Such bombardment is legitimate only when directed exclusively at the following objectives: military forces; military works; military establishments or depots; factories constituting important and well-known centres engaged in the manufacture of arms, ammunition or distinctively military supplies; lines of communication or transportation used for military forces.
- (3) The bombardment of cities, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings not in the immediate neighbourhood of the operations of land forces is prohibited. In cases where the objectives specified in paragraph 2 are so situated, that they cannot be bombarded without the indiscriminate bombardment of the civilian population, the aircraft must abstain from bombardment.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the operations of land forces, the bombardment of cities, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings is legitimate provided there exists a reasonable presumption that the military concentration is sufficiently important to justify such bombardment having regard to the danger thus caused to the civilian population.

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- I.2 Official Manuals
- I.3 Air Historical Branch Narratives
- I.4 Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon
- I.5 The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives KCL
- I.6 Joint Services Command and Staff College
- I.7 Christ Church Library, University of Oxford

II. PUBLISHED WORKS

- II.1 Official Histories and Despatches
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III. REFERENCE WORKS

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