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How Effective Is Strategic Bombing? Lessons Learned from World War II to Kosovo,

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blue-collar or decidedly middle-class background, mostly from farms or small towns. Their story is an important one, and the first-person accounts of individual sacrifice and aircrew heroism are a needed addition to the narrative of the Navy's nearly forgotten war in the Mekong Delta.

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Gentile, Gian P. *How Effective Is Strategic Bombing? Lessons Learned from World War II to Kosovo*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 2001. 273pp. \$36

The issue of strategic bombing's effectiveness is vitally important to political and military leaders. U.S. Air Force doctrine has argued for decades that airpower's ability to operate directly and immediately at the strategic level of war is its unique and defining characteristic—a characteristic that must be exploited. Many disagree, so the debates have been long and heated.

Gian Gentile, a serving Army officer, now adds to the literature on this important subject. Unfortunately, he never really comes to grips with the key issue of effectiveness implied by the title of his book. Rather, he has chosen to replot some old ground, looking anew at the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), chartered by President Franklin Roosevelt to examine and report on the effects of strategic bombing in World War II. Measuring bombing's effectiveness and examining the workings of the USSBS that studied bomb effects are two different things.

The story of USSBS has been told before. In many ways it is a typical tale of wartime America. A need is identified, resources and personnel are mobilized, vast

amounts of energy and material are expended, and notable gains are achieved. At the same time, the path to success is not a straight line—there is much inefficiency, debate, and compromise. Sausage is being made.

Gentile does not contest the findings of USSBS. Indeed, virtually no one has attempted to do so in the five-plus decades since they were released. The reason is simple: no one has the time, stamina, resources, or expertise to review the mountain of data collected and analyzed by the thousand individuals who conducted the USSBS.

Instead, Gentile seeks to discredit the survey's findings by revealing flaws and inconsistencies in the survey itself. Primarily, he argues that Army Air Forces (AAF) leaders were so interested in forming a separate air force after the war that they induced bias into the USSBS. He is unable to make this charge stick. The survey was led by noted industrialists, bankers, economists, lawyers, and other professionals, most of whom had had little or no direct involvement with aviation prior to their work with the survey. Gentile admits that General Henry "Hap" Arnold, the AAF commander, stressed to these civilian leaders the need for objectivity, impartiality, and truth in the survey's findings. Yet he treats such admonitions as duplicitous, despite the statement by the USSBS head that "at no time has there been the slightest inclination to interfere with us."

In truth, it is difficult to imagine that men like John Kenneth Galbraith, Paul Nitze, and George Ball could have been manipulated and pressured to distort their findings. Common sense and logic tell us it is more likely that these men—and their hundreds of colleagues on the survey—examined thousands of

documents, interviewed hundreds of witnesses, visited scores of bombed sites, and then concluded that strategic bombing had indeed been a decisive factor in the Allied victory, as they reported.

Alas, such a conclusion is unacceptable to Gentile. He must find nefarious schemes and schemers, and so he repeatedly questions the motives and veracity of the participants. For example, when General Curtis LeMay testified before Congress that he did not believe airpower could “win the war” and that a balanced mix of land, sea, and air forces was necessary for victory, Gentile dismisses his statement as a “shrewd and bureaucratically astute” tactic to manipulate his civilian superiors.

The USSBS has been controversial ever since it was written. Small wonder—attempting to measure the effects of strategic bombing in World War II was a massive undertaking, conducted at a time when the techniques of systems analysis were in their infancy. Gentile finds it troubling that survey members were not in total agreement. This should hardly come as a surprise. If the unfolding of historical events were simple and uncontested, our libraries would be far smaller.

His concluding chapter, dealing with the survey that analyzed the air campaign of the Persian Gulf War, is less tendentious. Here again, however, the author presents little that is new, and, more importantly, he does not attempt to address the book’s ostensible focus—the efficacy of strategic bombing.

Measuring the effectiveness of strategic air attack is one of the greatest challenges facing military planners today. It is an enormously complex and difficult problem that defies easy solution. Yet as airpower becomes increasingly dominant

as a foreign-policy tool, such measurement is essential. This poorly reasoned and highly parochial book will not help us find answers to that pressing need, nor will it foster understanding among the services.

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Jordan, Robert S. *Norstad: Cold War NATO Supreme Commander—Airman, Strategist, Diplomat*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000. 329pp. \$49

Lauris Norstad was a major Air Force leader during the defining years of the Cold War, and except for Dwight Eisenhower, he was the most prominent of all the Supreme Allied Commanders Europe (SACEUR) since that position was established in early 1951. Surprisingly, up to now, nothing definitive had been written on his role as SACEUR. Robert Jordan, a professor at the University of New Orleans and an authority on Nato, has filled that gap.

Norstad grew up in a small town in Minnesota and graduated from West Point in the class of 1930. Transferring to the Air Corps in 1931, he was one of that relatively small group of regular-officer aviators who provided air force leadership during World War II. When the war began, Major Norstad was serving on an air staff in Washington, D.C. He came to the attention of General Henry “Hap” Arnold, who headed what had become in June 1941 the Army Air Forces. In 1942 Arnold established a select group of young officers, the brightest he could find, to work in his immediate office. Norstad was one of them—he was on the way up.