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Bombs without Boots: The Limits of Airpower

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Given that Delli quanti has collaborated with coauthor David Axe before, it would be interesting to learn why the authors picked her for this task.

Coauthors Kevin Knodell and David Axe are both freelance journalists / war correspondents. Axe has produced graphic novels before, most notably his extremely self-focused, slightly fictionalized *War Is Boring* (2010). Knodell currently produces the *Acts of Valor* comic series for *Naval History* magazine. Axe provides the preface to *The 'Stan*. To his credit, he is quite candid about his feelings about the war and his condemnation of the actions of the United States. His position is strong enough to raise legitimate questions regarding *The 'Stan's* potential political agenda, the possibility of cherry-picked memoirs, pointed sequencing of stories, and so on. Neither Knodell nor Delli quanti gets a similar opportunity to address the reader. This is a missed opportunity both for *The 'Stan* and for *Dead Reckoning*. Without a preface, the memoirs would have at least appeared to stand or fall on their own merit. Had Knodell and Delli quanti provided their points of view, either separately or in conjunction with Axe, questions regarding agendas and biases might be fewer. It is also understandable that many readers would want to know more about how the authors selected the stories and collaborated on the book. Why were other stories discarded, if they were? Delli quanti's voice potentially would be more welcome than Axe's, as she, more than anyone, brings the memoirs to life.

The 'Stan represents a notable effort. Although readers' opinions about its overall quality will vary, it deserves an audience. More importantly,

Dead Reckoning and the U.S. Naval Institute deserve applause for taking this first step. It will be very interesting to see what comes next.

RICHARD J. NORTON



Bombs without Boots: The Limits of Airpower, by Anthony M. Schinella. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2019. 300 pages. \$44.99.

In our war colleges, professional journals, the halls of Congress, and countless bars and ready rooms, the argument has been running since the early twentieth century with Italian general Giulio Douhet and General William "Billy" Mitchell, USA. On one side, advocates of airpower offer a vision of rapid and potentially low-cost warfare; on the other, critics assert that boots on the ground remain the essential standard of military control.

Anthony Schinella has waded into this fray and, while unlikely to end the debate, his book *Bombs without Boots* offers a new and thoughtful discussion of the limitations and utility of airpower when used without commitment of ground forces. Carefully constructed and exquisitely sourced, *Bombs without Boots* is an exemplar of what analysis of a thorny and fundamental military issue should look like.

Schinella frames his arguments around five case studies spanning almost twenty years: Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Israel in Lebanon (2006), and Libya (2011). Schinella describes, with extraordinary thoroughness, the strategic, geographic, and political situation that confronted airpower planners in each case. He then explains

why decision makers chose airpower as a tool, to what end, and to what effect. The resulting analysis goes well beyond the military, ultimately assessing impacts across the entire strategic spectrum.

Despite the title, ground forces feature in every case study. Indeed, that basic observation is central to Schinella's argument. In each case study, although the intervening power focused on using airpower, that airpower supported ground forces present at the scene. This observation holds true even in cases in which the stated intent of the intervening powers was not to provide support for any particular faction in the conflict. Schinella asserts that the goals, behavior, and effectiveness of these proxies must be understood to assess fully the impact of airpower. For example, employment of NATO airpower in Libya blunted the Qaddafi regime's battlefield advantages, while Libyan geography allowed NATO airpower to create a *de facto* sanctuary where nascent opposition forces could coalesce. These opposition ground forces eventually toppled the regime. The result, he asserts, should be called "a victory made possible by airpower" rather than "a victory by airpower" (p. 286).

In cases in which the application of airpower achieved battlefield success, Schinella observes that it has been largely ineffective in giving intervening powers a voice in what follows the conflict. Even a successful case of "bombs without boots," he suggests, may require "boots after bombs" to shape the peace and secure the desired strategic end state. Across his five case studies, Schinella observes a strong pattern of air forces exhausting the fixed targets associated with an adversary, as well as available stocks of precision munitions, early in the conflict. He also notes the

importance of strategic patience for the intervening powers. Time can allow airpower to enable and shape proxies, who then can have impact on the ground in ways that airpower cannot.

While this book is about airpower, the specific tools of airpower or the tactical nuances of its employment consume little of the volume. This strategic view serves the reader well, with the exception that drones—perhaps the most novel and distinctive application of airpower in the last two decades—do not factor into these case studies, and thus hardly are mentioned.

In a debate marked by over a century of passion, this volume is notable for its objectivity. Schinella's professional role as the National Intelligence Officer for Military Issues within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence makes him the most senior official in the U.S. Intelligence Community who focuses purely on understanding foreign military institutions, capabilities, and operations. He has an insider's deep understanding of U.S. and foreign styles of warfare, while at the same time he has no allegiance to any particular military branch or tribe.

In the end, Schinella concludes that "airpower interventions can succeed without committing ground troops—but only under the right circumstances" (p. 287). Even in these cases, however, "it is never as easy as you think." His clear and thoughtful consideration of how and when "bombs without boots" can serve the national interest is why this book deserves a place in the collection of every professional and strategist tasked with employing airpower to its full potential.

DALE C. RIELAGE