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DOCTRINAL FRONTIERS*

CARL H. BUILDER

I WOULD LIKE TO develop two themes dealing with doctrinal frontiers. One is the importance of our pursuing this subject. The other is the location of one of those frontiers.

Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1 tells us that "doctrine should be alive—growing, evolving, and maturing. New experiences, reinterpretations of former experiences, advances in technology, changes in threats, and cultural changes can all require alterations to parts of our doctrine even as other parts remain constant. If we allow our thinking about aerospace power to stagnate, our doctrine can become dogma." [1] We are accustomed to seeing doctrine grow, evolve, and mature, particularly where doctrine applies to what we care most about—our traditional roles and missions in the mainstream of the Air Force. We seem to have more difficulty, however, with nurturing doctrine off the mainstream roles and missions—what I call the doctrinal frontiers, such as space and special operations. I don't know whether that is because of insufficient interest from the mainstream of the Air Force or because such developments might be perceived as threats to (or unwanted diversions from) the mainstream interests. History admits to both possibilities.

Frontiers Are Lonely

Think about the American frontier. Today we are proud of the American frontier spirit (even though we may be uneasy about some of its excesses [2]). But when

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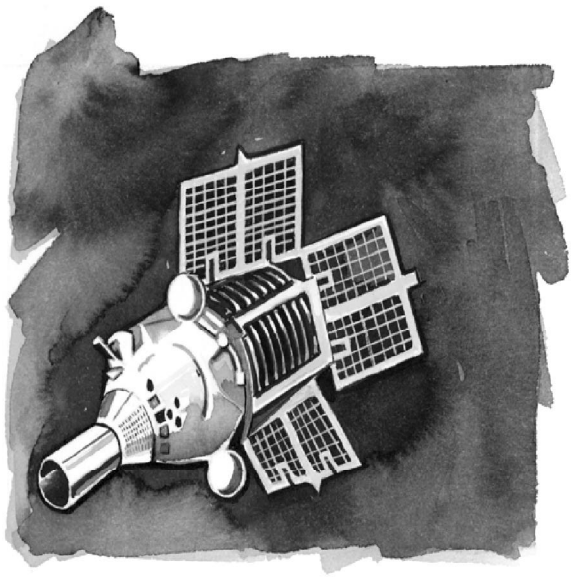

the American frontier first yawned wide with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the mainstream of American society was not particularly enthusiastic. Indeed, many of the established Easterners were skeptical of the value and concerned about the future implications of an expanding Western frontier. Essayist Richard Barnet has noted that "in the War of 1812, a good many Federalists would have preferred to see the British win rather than to see the locus of national power pass to the American West."[3]

It got worse. By the time the Western frontier reached full flood, in the 1850s, its implications were tearing at the fabric of governance woven by the Eastern establishment 50 years earlier. The American Civil War was precipitated by many issues—not the least of which was how the West should be divided between slave and free states and, therefore, what the balance of power should be in the future union.

Nevertheless, the frontier spirit ultimately prevailed, and we still celebrate it in stories, films, clothing, song, dance, food, lifestyles, attitudes, and even as an ethic. The Western frontier helped define us as a nation and transform us from what we were to what we are today. "Go west, young man!" urged Horace Greeley. The frontier was the future of the nation, and our society still carries its imprint. Even though, at the beginning, the frontier was counter to the mainstream, it would ultimately become the mainstream.

If we allow our thinking about aerospace power to stagnate, our doctrine can become dogma.
—AFM 1-1

We have a good example of doctrinal frontiers in Air Force history—history that was written at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, and that we continue to celebrate. In the 1920s, the Army mainstream wanted its flyers to focus on providing air *services*—scouting and spotting for the Army—but some airmen saw a new frontier in an air *force* that could carry the war to an enemy as a new military arm. Sixty years ago, at Maxwell's Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS), some courageous airmen began to explore that frontier by pursuing the doctrinal and tactical issues in an air force for strategic bombardment. They were frontiersmen—out of the Army mainstream, anticipating the future. The stories of their struggles and triumphs are now Air Force legends. Their frontier was the future of the Air Force. Their countermainstream became mainstream.

Let's not forget how far those early airmen were from the mainstream or what they paid for their frontier spirit. Benjamin Foulois recalled that "anyone who went against [Army] staff thinking on any subject in those days invited a reprimand for himself rather than a reward for daring to think imaginatively."[4] Those doctrinal frontiersmen were a lonely band of brothers. Disapproved by their leadership, they were united not just by their dream, but also by their common jeopardy. More than one of these intellectual frontiersmen found himself exiled to *physical* frontiers—to the dusty camps of Kansas or the fetid air of Panama. Yet, less than a decade later, their ideas were molding the largest air armada ever assembled. In another decade, their ideas would be the mainstream of the most powerful military institution ever forged.

Today, we stand at a point of new departure in the aftermath of the cold war. We have the greatest opportunity since the beginning of the space age, 40 years ago, to be frontiersmen again. If we could turn back the clocks by 150 years, we would be gathering in Saint Louis, speculating about the opportunities and perils that lie to the west, at the risks of our lives and fortunes. If we could turn back the clocks by 60 years, we would be gathering at Maxwell, speculating about the opportunities and perils that will attend our efforts to turn the airplane into a decisive instrument of war, at the risks of our careers and our nation's security. We can't turn the clocks back, but we *should* be speculating about the opportunities and perils that will attend the wise use of air and space power by our nation as it pursues its interests in a radically changed world.

The New Landscape

The political stasis of the cold war masked just how much the world had been changing for more than a

Hugh Trenchard

decade before the Berlin Wall collapsed. The microchip begat global communication nets, which, in turn, begat global markets, which gave wings to people and goods and wealth and information, which undermined the sovereign powers of all nations, which delivered increasing power into the hands of groups whose interests were no longer bound by geography and national boundaries. While we, as cold warriors, stood transfixed by the sudden collapse of communism, the 300-year-old world order of nations was being transformed into something else that still defies our naming or understanding. Is it to be Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations [5] or Robert Kaplan's coming anarchy [6] or my disorderly world, where nations are in less control of their fates even as societies demand more of them?[7]

Whatever the shape of this new global structure, air and space doctrine will continue to evolve, of course. My concern is whether the evolution of air and space doctrine will be mostly in the mainstream—with the traditional roles and missions we have come to associate with fighting and winning the nation's wars—or out on the frontiers, in new or long-forgotten roles and missions for air and space power. My first plea is for the frontiers—not the mainstream. The mainstream, by definition, will have enough volunteers and preferences to garner the attention it needs to see us through the necessary doctrinal evolution. But what of the lonely, dangerous frontiers, with all of their uncertainties and risks? Will we have enough volunteers? Will those who volunteer have the wit, courage, and stamina that frontiers seem always to demand of pioneers? I hope that the frontiers of air and space doctrine will beckon those airmen who have the potential to be doctrinal pioneers.

Where are those doctrinal frontiers? They aren't hiding from us. Information warfare and space defense against ballistic missile attacks are two that are in the news every day. The fact that they carry with them more questions than answers is a very good sign that they are frontiers.

Constabulary Missions

For the past several years, I have been beating the drum for a frontier that I call the constabulary [8] role for air and space power—where our military forces are employed in policelike operations. It is not a new role. It emerged early in the history of flying machines—in little more than a dozen years of Kitty Hawk. [9] But we seem to have neglected it as airpower became more central to fighting and winning the wars of the twentieth century. Now, as war clouds recede and civil disorders multiply, constabulary tasks are increasing. Airmen have been here before.

Could air and space power—by themselves—substantially pursue the constabulary objectives of the United States today?

After the "war to end all wars," there was a clamor in Britain to disband the newly formed Royal Air Force (RAF). In the words of James Parton,

> [Hugh] Trenchard . . . the first Chief of the RAF . . . saw a unique way to prove . . . to the British public and government . . . that national security required a centralized and independent air arm. As part of the settlement of World War I, Britain had accepted from the new League of Nations a supervisory "Mandate" for a clutch of new "nations" formed from the territory that had belonged to the Turks. These included Palestine, Transjordan, Mesopotamia, the Lebanon, the Hejaz, and the Yemen, all of which were squabbling with themselves and the outside world as they still do today.

> In 1920, for example, quelling rebellion in Mesopotamia cost the British 2,000 military casualties and £1,000,000. Trenchard proceeded to demonstrate that the Royal Air Force, even though shrunk [to a third of its wartime strength], could handle Britain's problems in the Middle East effectively and at far less cost. He then did the same thing on the troubled Northwest Frontier of India. By 1924 . . . efforts to disband the RAF had disappeared, and Trenchard was secure in the reputation he carried ever after as its "Founder."[10]

That was airpower as an instrument of colonialism—albeit dressed up in the form of a supervisory mandate from the League of Nations. Today, we might call it a peacekeeping mission from the United Nations (UN)—same problem and some of the same actors but with different words and 70 years apart. Today, we are flying over Mesopotamia (Iraq), trying to stop the Ba'athists from squabbling with their Shi'ite and Kurdish neighbors. We are also flying over Bosnia, trying to suppress conflicts between the ethnic factions left over from the fragmentation of Yugoslavia. But are we doing as good a job as Trenchard did? If not, why not?

Trenchard proved that the RAF could do the lion's share of Britain's constabulary job with airpower, effectively and at far less cost than by putting more British soldiers on the ground. In today's cult of jointness, we are all but forbidden to suggest that one military service or instrument can do any job by itself; everything must be done jointly if it is to be politically correct. That point aside, the question remains, Could air and space power—by themselves—substantially pursue the constabulary objectives of the United States today? If not, why not?

Some airmen saw a new frontier in an air force that could carry the war to an enemy. At Maxwell's Air Corps Tacticl School . . . some courageous airmen began to explore the frontier by pursuing the doctrinal and tactical issues in an air force for strategic bombardment. They were frontiersmen—out of the Army mainstream, anticipating the future.

I think the answer is that we are not pursuing these objectives, but we could do much more than we are. We are trying to apply forces and doctrine designed for fighting and winning wars to constabulary missions—and they don't apply very well. We are not stopping the enemy from flying in the no-fly zones. We are not stopping the use of heavy weapons against sanctuaries. Now, many people will protest that the fault lies with the restrictive rules of engagement or the inadequacies of the UN's commanders. I will argue that the fault lies not with the problem that confronts us but with the solution we have fashioned for a completely different problem.

Constabulary missions are different from fighting and winning wars. These missions are more policelike than warlike. They are reactive more than proactive. They typically cede the initiative to those who would violate the rules. The enemy is not persons or things but an act—a violation of rules. The purpose of the constabulary response is not to defeat an enemy; it is to deter and suppress violations of the rules. There can be no expectation of winning—any more than we can expect to win a war against crime. We can only hope to reduce violations to a more acceptable level. These are conditions for which neither our equipment nor our doctrine has been designed. We design our forces for speed, stealth, destructiveness, payload, and range. Our doctrine emphasizes surprise, initiative, freedom of action, mass, shock, and the principles of war. These qualities are only occasionally pertinent to constabulary missions.

Some people will argue that military forces should not be used for constabulary functions: they should be withheld for fighting and winning wars, which is their primary purpose for being. History, however, runs contrary to that argument. Historically, the military—including the American military—has been assigned constabulary missions in peacetime and in the aftermaths of wars. Ours have included the pacification of the American West, the suppression of rebellions in the Philippines, and the occupations of Germany, Russia, and Japan in the wakes of two world wars—not to mention many constabulary interventions into Latin America.

Today, our military forces are deployed around the world in constabulary missions that are much more policelike than warlike. Some people warn of the effect of these constabulary missions upon our war-fighting readiness, but they are shouting against the steady wind of history. The emerging shape of the world around us suggests that we will be involved in many more constabulary than war-fighting missions

over the next several decades. Are we ready with the equipment and doctrine we will need? Are we willing to venture into this frontier? Or would we rather stay with the mainstream of war-fighting missions? That is the dilemma all frontiersmen must confront.

Constabulary Capabilities

What should we ask of air and space power in constabulary missions? We won't know all the answers until we explore this frontier further—anymore than the early pioneers at ACTS could be sure of all they would ultimately ask for strategic bombardment capabilities. But I would offer four places we need to look for new equipment and doctrine:

Historically, the military—including the American military—has been assigned constabulary missions in peacetime and in the aftermaths of wars.

1. We need effective means for nailing the smoking gun—ways for immediately engaging and suppressing heavy weapons fire. Our current equipment and doctrine are designed for attacking artillery en masse, wherever and whenever it is detected and with little concern for collateral damage. What we need is reactive, directed counterbattery capabilities—to return fire, round for round—from the air, without having to put forward air controllers on the ground, where they can be turned into hostages. We ought to be able to do this by combining gunships and "fire-finder" radars.

2. We need effective means for stopping surreptitious flights by low and slow flyers. Our current equipment and doctrine are designed to attack aircraft wherever they are—on the ground and in the air. But constabulary rules of engagement may prevent us from engaging aircraft on the ground. That means that helicopters and light planes can "squat" on the ground when detected in order to avoid being engaged. [11] If we only have "fast movers" of limited flight endurance to enforce a no-fly zone, the violators can outwait us and move on when we must return to base. What we need are aircraft that can also squat and wait or, better yet, squat and capture. We ought to be able to do this with helicopters and vertical-takeoff-and-landing aircraft—even though we prefer the fast jets.

3. We need effective air and space power for suppressing street disorders and violence. We face the problem repeatedly—in Panama, Somalia, and Haiti—but when we put people on the ground to deal with it, we set ourselves up for hostages to the conflicts of others. Somewhere, in the emerging development of "nonlethal" weapons, we might be able to find the tools to exploit our control of the air and space for controlling the use of the ground. If air and space power can be forged into means that can effectively deny people the use of the streets for looting property or mobbing human victims, the dark shadow of one of the most vexing problems of the future will have been drawn back.

4. We need effective means for inserting and recovering modest numbers of people (a squad or so) and amounts of materiel (a ton or two) anywhere in the world, at any time (day or night, all-weather), at places of our choosing (a soccer field or tennis court instead of the few airports where we may be anticipated). From Desert One to Rwanda, we have learned that our current vertical-lift capabilities are too short-legged and that our current global airlift capabilities are too demanding of landing places. We need a marriage of these capabilities for urgent, high-priority drops and pick-ups.

Undoubtedly, there are other capabilities that would also make air and space power more effective in the constabulary roles and missions that I see in our future. But these four convey the flavor of the challenging frontier that is opening up on our flank.

Like Greeley, I too would urge young men to go west—would urge airmen to look to the frontiers of air and space power. New doctrine is desperately needed there. The doctrinal gaps between the war-fighting and constabulary roles for air and space forces are probably as great as those faced by the ACTS pioneers 60 years ago as they contemplated the doctrinal gap between an air service and an air force. Stalking and conquering frontiers are clearly the Air Force heritage. That alone should tell us where the future lies.

Notes

l. Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force,* vol. 1, March 1992, vi.

2. Those excesses, from today's perspectives, include the rough frontier justice (or lack thereof), the treatment of native Americans, and the disregard for the natural environment.

3. Richard J. Barnet, "Rethinking National Strategy," *The New Yorker* 64, no. 5 (21 March 1988): 109.

4. Quoted in Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 51.

5. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22–49.

6. Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 2 (February 1994): 44–76.

7. Carl H. Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 290.

8. A constabulary may be defined as an armed police force organized on military lines but distinct from the regular army. I use the word as an attributive here to describe the use of regular military forces in policelike functions.

9. Aircraft played a modest role in Brig Gen John J. Pershing's punitive expedition (what I would call a constabulary mission) into Mexico after the bandit Pancho Villa in 1916.

10. James Parton, "The Thirty-One Year Gestation of the Independent USAF," *Aerospace Historian*, September 1987, 151–52. Bruce Hoffman, in *British Air Power in Peripheral Conflict, 1919–1976*, RAND Report R-3749-AF (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, October 1989), 4–35, provides an excellent description of these colonial operations of the RAF.

11. It might first seem that the rules of engagement are at fault, but this is a commonplace police situation. Force may be used to halt actions that break the law, but if those unlawful actions cease, force may not be used against the lawbreaker simply because the law had been broken previously. Flying in a no-fly zone is unlawful; squatting on the ground is not. In the air, the violator can be attacked. Once on the ground, the violator can be guarded or captured but not attacked.

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