

## Conclusion

It has been shown that British intelligence suffered from a noticeable lack of a critical attitude at all levels. In some respects this was due to the essentially horizontal structure of its organisation.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that, technically, the JIC and the COS were inter-Service co-ordinating bodies, the tendencies of the Service intelligence bodies to work in a vacuum from each other meant that the JIC and COS were effectively put on the sidelines. All the bodies concerned with intelligence failed to appreciate that there was more to intelligence work than the collection of facts.<sup>2</sup> It is also significant that the civilian and military consumers of 'air intelligence' varied in their receptivity to intelligence.<sup>3</sup> Some were aware that intelligence was useful and called for better financing.<sup>4</sup> Others appeared not to value its functions too highly, if they were ever aware of its real purpose, and refused to increase spending.<sup>5</sup> On the whole, the documentation reveals a largely non-critical nature. This is also supported by an analysis of the papers and what comments they occasionally provoked. The papers and the comments show the extent to which the civilian and military leadership all operated on the basis of their fearful preconceptions about the nature of strategic bombing by the *Luftwaffe*.<sup>6</sup> Clausewitz, the military philosopher, wrote:

"The effect of fear is to multiply lies and inaccuracies. As a rule most men would rather believe bad news than good, and rather tend to exaggerate the bad".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A

<sup>2</sup> F.H. Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*: Volume I (London, 1979), p.11

<sup>3</sup> D. Dilks, "Flashes of Intelligence: The Foreign Office, the SIS and Security before the Second World War", in C. Andrew and D. Dilks (eds.), *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 1984), p.102

<sup>4</sup> Appendix C; DRC 37 "Programmes of the Defence Services: Third Report: Volume I", November 1935, CAB 24/259

<sup>5</sup> CP100(35), 13 May 1935, CAB 24/259

<sup>6</sup> See Chapters 3, 4, and 5 *passim*

<sup>7</sup> C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, P. Paret, M. Howard, B. Brodie Introduction and Commentary, (Princeton, N.J., 1976), p.117

Despite the JIC warning that the lessons of aerial bombardment from the First World War and the Spanish Civil War were inconclusive,<sup>8</sup> many were "psychologically convinced" that air raids were effective.<sup>9</sup> It is somewhat unavoidable that leaders have preconceptions, as they cannot operate without them,<sup>10</sup> but what is avoidable is the influence of preconceived thought in an intelligence service. Politics and intelligence work must, in one sense be guided by the experiences of the past, but it must not dominate these processes as history never repeats itself.<sup>11</sup> Intelligence work must avoid this tendency. Preconceptions and a 'closed' mind lead to intelligence failures.<sup>12</sup> If any one organisation has to be singled out for 'blame' in allowing these preconceptions to remain in the minds of the civilians consumers of intelligence, it must be the Air Ministry. Only the Air Ministry could have really produced the papers that would have challenged, though not necessarily altered, the dogmatic assumptions of the civilians. That the Air Ministry failed to do so is significant. It failed because its own assumptions were coloured by their own memories of the RAF's expansion during the 1920s. They could conceive of no other way of building up an airforce. In one sense they were correct to argue that the rapid build up of an airforce leads to a corresponding decline in efficiency, but they were wrong to adhere to this belief when it was clear by the end of 1936 that the *Luftwaffe* was going for all-out expansion irrespective of quality.<sup>13</sup> These preconceptions of the Air Ministry meant that

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<sup>8</sup> *Vide supra*, pp.65-66

<sup>9</sup> U. Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics* (London, 1980), p.125

<sup>10</sup> R.K. Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures are Inevitable", *World Politics* (i), Volume 31, 1978, p.63

<sup>11</sup> W. Laqueur, *World of Secrets: The Uses and Limits of Intelligence* (New York, 1985), p.270

<sup>12</sup> Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision", p.63

<sup>13</sup> *Vide supra*, p.40

“intelligence was made to fit into the mould of a German airforce expanding in neat and well-ordered steps from the creation of one air division to the next”.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the impact of preconceptions was great upon the Air Ministry’s ‘appreciation’ of the *Luftwaffe*’s strategic orientation. Again, the Air Ministry automatically assumed that the application of the *Luftwaffe* would be exactly the same as that of the RAF: Douhetian strategic bombing. It is in this field of intelligence that the Air Ministry failed the most. It is not just sufficient to collect facts that supports one’s own beliefs, but one must collect also facts that are likely to contradict hypotheses and opinions, so that the ‘truth’ is more accurately arrived at.<sup>15</sup> “Feasibility” concerning the *Luftwaffe*’s ability to mount and sustain a strategic bombing offensive against Britain “was neither examined nor questioned”.<sup>16</sup> The Air Ministry failed to acknowledge the essential preparations that Germany would have needed to have done to undertake a campaign, and if they ever did, they did not initiate any intelligence investigation into whether the Germans had done so or not.<sup>17</sup> They did not even bother to investigate the training programmes of German pilots to see if they were ‘taught’ the techniques necessary for strategic bombing. Similarly, the Air Ministry neglected to use the specialist intelligence that was available, and did not ask the other departments, in particular the WO, for their opinions.<sup>18</sup> It was not the quality of intelligence that affected judgements, but the system and its personnel:

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<sup>14</sup> W.K. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (London, 1985), p.43

<sup>15</sup> I. Ben-Israel, “Philosophy and Methodology of Intelligence: The Logic of Estimative Process”, *Intelligence and National Security* (October-iv), Volume 4, 1989, pp. 678, 679

<sup>16</sup> Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, p.78

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79

<sup>18</sup> *Vide supra*, pp.62-72

“So poor was western Intelligence on the *Luftwaffe* that neither Britain nor France succeeded before the war in realising that it was a tactical, not a strategic, force”.<sup>19</sup>

The impression has been given that the whole of the Air Ministry shared such views. As stated before,<sup>20</sup> there is some evidence to suggest that the AID had a difference of opinion with the Air Ministry over the *Luftwaffe*'s strategic orientation. This difference of opinion does not appear to have made any headway outside its section given the prevailing consensus on the *Luftwaffe*. This hegemonic view would help account for why all the papers surveyed contained no hint of anything other than a 'knock-out blow', and why there was little discussion. It was so 'obvious' to all concerned that it needed little discussion. The same can be said over the papers detailing the *Luftwaffe*'s expansion. The figures mentioned were never criticised for being too high or too low. The figures were all taken as proof that Germany was expanding her production for maximum wartime expansion in order to supply replacements of the great slaughter of air crews that an offensive would entail. They never stopped to consider that they were being manipulated by the Germans as regards the capability or strategic application of their airforce.<sup>21</sup> However it is difficult to say whether this failure to take deception into consideration was due to ignorance of what deception was, or whether the Air Ministry and others believed that deception manoeuvres could only work in wartime. If the latter is the case it can only be another example of the non-critical attitude at work in the Air Ministry. However conclusive the evidence (real and 'negative') seems, the methodological problems discussed earlier<sup>22</sup> makes it

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<sup>19</sup> R.J. Overy, "Airpower and the Origins of Deterrence Theory before 1939", *Journal of Strategic Studies* (March-i), Volume 15, 1992, p.91

<sup>20</sup> *Vide supra*, pp.71-72; F.W. Winterbotham, *The Nazi Connection* (London, 1978), p.3, 94-96, 98-99

<sup>21</sup> *Vide supra*, pp.86-89

<sup>22</sup> *Vide supra*, chapter 1

“impossible for the researcher to say, with full confidence, that he knows what his historical counterpart, the intelligence officer knew at the time”.<sup>23</sup>

It certainly appears that there was a distinct lack of a critical attitude inside, and outside, the Air Ministry. However, it must be added that the historian can never be as completely sure as he would like to be until *all* intelligence documentation from this period is released to the public. Only when this occurs can he feel safe in his judgements.

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<sup>23</sup> W.K. Wark, “British Intelligence on the German Air Force and the Aircraft Industry, 1933-1939”, *Historical Journal* (September-iii), Volume 25, 1982, p.628