

Editorial

By Robert S. Dudney, Editor in Chief

The Ten Truths

IN THE 1943 version of Field Manual 100-20, "Command and Employment of Airpower," the War Department declared, "Landpower and airpower are co-equal and interdependent forces; neither is an auxiliary of the other." That, unfortunately, was not the Army's last word on this matter.

Army officials and supporters have often advanced the claim that "boots on the ground," not aircraft, count most in today's battlespace. They hold that landpower generally dominates combat, and airpower plays a "supporting" role. In the green world, it seems, airpower has a kind of "auxiliary" status, after all—one focused on support for the land force in battle.

However, that is true only in the green world. The Air Force has never accepted claims of ground force dominance. More and more since 1990, USAF has challenged such notions where it matters a great deal—in service and joint doctrine.

The latest example is the recently released Air Force Doctrine Document 2, "Operations and Organization," which is the last word on employment of airpower at the operational, or "theater," level of warfare. Signed out by Gen. T. Michael Moseley, Chief of Staff, it is the first update of its kind in six years.

The Air Force has added a considerable amount of starch to the document. At its core is a list of 24 "foundational statements," deemed to be "the basic principles and beliefs" that undergird all USAF doctrine. And of those two dozen statements, 10 stand out as being fundamental truths about air and space power.

Taken together, these factors reaffirm that air and space power is not now, and never could be, "auxiliary" in any way. Call them "The Ten Truths":

- Air and space power "operates in ways that are fundamentally different from other forms of military power." It provides speed, range, and a three-dimensional perspective. Airmen range across a whole theater, unlike geographically limited surface forces with their "fronts, flanks, and rears."

- By using "the vertical dimension" and time, "air and space forces can wrest the initiative, set the terms of

battle, establish a dominant tempo of operations, anticipate the enemy, take advantage of tactical and operational opportunities, and thus can strike directly at the adversary's strategy."

- "When employed aggressively, air and space forces can conduct operations aimed directly at accomplishing the joint force commander's objectives." These operations are not dependent upon friendly surface force disposition. Some can be conducted at long range, reducing the need for forward deployed US forces.

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- "Air and space forces can strike directly at an adversary's centers of gravity, vital centers, and critical vulnerabilities," with an impact that goes beyond tactical effects of individual actions. The attacks disrupt an enemy's decision cycle and force tempos that cannot be matched by enemy forces.

- "Air and space superiority allows simultaneous and rapid attack on key nodes and forces, producing effects that overwhelm the enemy's capacity to adapt or recover." The surprise nature of such attacks, and fear of the next blow, demoralizes targeted forces and opens up opportunities for exploitation.

- Recent experience, said the document, "has shown that parallel, asymmetric operations are more effective, achieve results faster, and are less costly than symmetric or serial operations." These types of attacks cause maximum dislocation. It is true that some symmetric, force-on-force warfare may be needed, but it should be avoided if at all possible.

- Air and space power is needed for emergencies. "In some situations, air and space power, whether land- or sea-based, may be the only force immediately available and capable of providing an initial response." Whether this 911 force is based on land or at sea, it should be employed directly

against enemy systems so as to block their immediate war aims.

- For all airmen, "air superiority is the desired state before all other combat operations." That is because "attaining air superiority provides both the freedom to attack and freedom from attack, as well as ensuring freedom to maneuver." Seeking battle without air superiority "radically increases risk to surface and air operations."

- Likewise, "space superiority is important in maintaining our unique advantages in precision, situational awareness, and operational reach." Offensive operations can hit an enemy's spacelift and information infrastructure. Defensive steps such as hardening and dispersal can protect US space assets.

- There is no one-size-fits-all model appropriate for commanding air and space operations, but, "at the focus of operations within any region, it is possible to place the collective capabilities of air and space power in the hands of a single airman."

The point of such doctrine statements is not, as critics sometimes claim, the creation of an "Air Force Über Alles" view of the world. Senior airmen know as well as any—and better than most—that wars are won by the joint force, not service forces in isolation.

The point, rather, is to distill the experiences of recent years, adjust Air Force practices accordingly, and make sure that today's air and space operators understand the intellectual foundation of their craft and can articulate it well to defense leaders, other services, and the public.

In his 2000 version of this doctrine statement, Gen. Michael E. Ryan, USAF Chief of Staff at the time, declared, "Aerospace power is a critical—and decisive—element. ... We, each of us, must be articulate, knowledgeable, and unapologetic advocates of aerospace power."

Six years later, in his version, Moseley also called on airmen to be "unapologetic advocates" for the Air Force's capabilities.

Note the recurrence of the word "unapologetic." Some things shouldn't change. That is one of them. ■