

# The Politics of Operational Planning: Ira Eaker and the Combined Bomber Offensive in 1943

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When analyzing military planning it is easy to critique flaws that appear evident on paper. This presents a one dimensional view of operational warfare. Planning is a multi-dimensional process. Sometimes the plan reflects policy though it is not the most efficient means to wage war. In 1943, the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) relied on such a directive. The Allies drew up a document that satisfied every air force commander in the theater, but failed to specify an objective other than the destruction of Germany. The Allies created the CBO as a product of coalition politics between air force leaders, their superiors, and two nations. They drew up a plan that appeased all of the parties involved. As a consequence, the final plan for the implementation of the CBO did not focus on a single objective and laid the ground work for deviation from the plan by all parties who participated in the CBO.

A bombing campaign must have a clear goal in mind. What happens when there are multiple, but equally prioritized objectives? Operation Pointblank, the operational plan for the implementation of the Casablanca Directive and Combined Bomber Offensive authorized a bombing campaign that failed to focus on one specific objective or for that matter, doctrine. Incorporating everyone's ideas is not an efficient means of waging warfare. In 1943, no country was capable of fielding an air force capable of fulfilling the Pointblank objectives. The following pages will illustrate the evolution of an operational plan, built not in a

vacuum, but in the melting pot of conflicting ideas, objectives, and doctrines. In short, Pointblank was the result of international and inter-military politics.

The fact of the matter is that militaries, countries, and allies do not always choose the best plan. In theory the best plan of attack would have been to overwhelm the German Air Force with bombers and fighters through daylight bombardment missions. This scenario would provide the opportunity to bomb with greater accuracy and allow the Allies to engage German fighters effectively. Realistically, the Allies adopted the strategy they used, because it was a series of compromises between two nations. Pointblank accommodated the wishes of the Eighth Air Force's commanding officer, Major General Ira Eaker, and Bomber Command's, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris. On one hand, we have the United States Army fighting with itself. During his time as commander of the Eighth Air Force, Eaker had grown agitated by the number of aircraft diverted from his air force to other American air forces, and in particular those associated with the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. Eaker wanted to divert bombers back to his theater of operations. In response, his joint British and American staff drew up a force allocation plan that reflected these wishes. Harris represents the international conflict between two coalition partners, where each pursue two completely different air strategies. Harris made his own edits to Pointblank days before it became operational to ensure that he could deviate from the American vision of the coming air offensive. The scheme they agreed upon allowed Harris and Eaker to execute divergent operational concepts.

The process of planning Operation Pointblank began a month before the agreement at Casablanca. In December 1942, General Muir S. Fairchild, a member of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, ordered Colonel Byron E. Gates to form an American operations analysis group.<sup>1</sup> Fairchild informed Gates, Major W. Barton Leach, and Captain Guido R. Perera that he wanted a report on future strategic bombing operations. Fairchild posed this question: "How can Germany be so damaged by air attack that an invasion of the Continent may be made possible within the shortest possible period—say one year?"<sup>2</sup> On 9 December 1942, Arnold

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<sup>1</sup> James Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here" General Ira Eaker & the Command of the Air* (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler Publishers Inc., 1986), 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 250.

ordered the formation of the think tank, which became known as the Committee of Operations Analysts (COA).

The COA sent their report to Arnold on 8 March 1943. The group listed potential targets by priority from highest to lowest, which included: single-engine fighter aircraft, ball bearings, petroleum products, grinding wheels and abrasives, nonferrous metals, synthetic rubber and rubber tires, submarine construction plants and bases, military transport vehicles, transportation, coking plants, iron and steel, machine tools, electric power, electrical equipment, optical precision instruments, chemicals, food, nitrogen, and AA and antitank artillery.<sup>3</sup> Many officers in the USAAF were disturbed that transportation and electric power were not in the top group. In earlier plans, AWPD-1 and AWPD-42, these systems were considered high priority targets, but the COA thought that these targets were outside the operational capabilities of the Eighth Air Force.<sup>4</sup>

While the COA unofficially listed their priorities, the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) agreed to their own targets and priorities at the Casablanca Conference that took place from 14 to 24 January 1943. The COA laid the groundwork for the selection of targets during the planning for the CBO. By leaving the operational and aircraft requirements in Eaker's hands, they acknowledged that they were unable to put a date on when a ground invasion was possible.<sup>5</sup> Once submitted, their report ended the first stage of the planning.<sup>6</sup> Now it was up to Eaker to formulate how his forces went about destroying the systems listed in the plan.

As Arnold's research team prepared their report, another issue arose that affected Pointblank's planning. Prior to the Casablanca Conference, the Eighth Air Force lost a significant number of its bombers and nearly all of its fighters to Operation Torch, the Allied

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<sup>3</sup> John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog: Intelligence and Army Air Forces Operations in World War II*, (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 154.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>5</sup> Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog*, 156.

<sup>6</sup> Alan J. Levin, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 85.

invasion of North Africa. This set a significant precedent that continued through the 1943 campaign. Air forces in the Mediterranean Theater received air assets at the expense of the Eighth Air Force. Eaker's most experienced bomb groups, most of the fighters, and numerous ground personnel were sent to support land operations in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. This caused the Eighth Air Force to wage a private war over the allocation of heavy bombers with the Northwest African Air Forces (NAAF) under Lieutenant General Carl Spaatz.

The NAAF began operations on 18 February 1943.<sup>7</sup> Assigned to support the drive on Tunis, it received priority above all other theaters, including the Eighth Air Force in England. The strategic arm of the NAAF was the Northwest African Strategic Air Force (NASAF) under the command of Major General James H. Doolittle. His XII Bomber command of the Twelfth Air Force transferred to the NASAF. The NASAF was not a true strategic air force like the Eighth in England. Doolittle's command targeted "grand tactical targets, enemy lines of supply, and logistical support."<sup>8</sup> Doolittle's command carried out an air interdiction campaign against German forces in the Mediterranean Theater. The NASAF's limited the ability of the German army to maneuver and receive supplies.

Another arm of Spaatz's command was the Northwest African Tactical Air Force (NATAF) under the leadership of Air Marshal Arthur Coningham. The NATAF included the XII Air Support Command from the Twelfth Air Force.<sup>9</sup> These two portions of the NAAF proved to be critical during the Battle of Kasserine Pass, which began on 19 February 1943. Understandably, during the opening moments of the battle,

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<sup>7</sup> "Headquarters Northwest African Air Forces General Order Number 1," 18 February 1943, Carl Spaatz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; See also Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force history, 1993), 178.

<sup>8</sup> "Headquarters Northwest African Air Forces General Order Number 1," 18 February 1943, Carl Spaatz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; See also Richard Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, 180.

<sup>9</sup> "Headquarters Northwest African Air Forces General Order Number 1," 18 February 1943, Carl Spaatz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; See also Richard Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, 179.

American air units failed to properly coordinate their attacks.<sup>10</sup> Yet, over the course of the German offensive, the Americans recovered from their setbacks and launched more effective air attacks against Axis positions. From 20 February to 24 February 1943, Spaatz released Doolittle's strategic bombers to Coningham. The Australian unleashed a massive bombing campaign against German and Italian ground components. Axis columns came under heavy aerial bombardment as they withdrew from the region. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who commanded the Axis troops at Kasserine Pass, recalled that his forces "were subjected to hammer-blow air attacks by the US air force in the Feriana-Kasserine area."<sup>11</sup> The very aircraft transfers that plagued Eaker's campaign against Germany played a crucial role in turning back Rommel's counter-attack in Tunisia.<sup>12</sup>

Eaker overlooked these accomplishments by Spaatz as he lodged complaints about the lack of heavy bombardment groups allocated to his theater of operations. Eighth Air Force personnel objected to losing aircraft as far back as Operation Torch 1942. Commanders in England reluctantly gave up valuable air components for what many planners deemed to be a diversion in the desert. Eaker's first criticism about the state of his command came on 30 January 1943 in a letter to Arnold. Shortly after the Wilhelmshaven raid, he fired off a message asking

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas E. Griess ed., *The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean*, (Garden City, New York: Square One Publishers, 2002), 175; Christopher Rein, *The North African Air Campaign: US Army Air Forces from El Alamein to Salerno*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2012), 117-122. Rein provides an excellent analysis of the Northwest African Air Force's failures at Kasserine Pass. Amongst the reasons he lists behind the poor performance of the NAAF is the reorganization of the air forces that took place on the eve of Rommel's attack at Kasserine Pass.

<sup>11</sup>Griess ed., *The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean* , 183.

<sup>12</sup> Rein, *The North African Air Campaign: US Army Air Forces from El Alamein to Salerno* 120-121. Rein contends that the planes deviated from the Eighth Air Force to the NAAF influenced the fighting at Kasserine Pass through operational level attacks. He correctly posits that had Eaker retained the aircraft lost during the Torch transfers then those planes would have made no impact on the fighting in North Africa, where they played a more critical role.

Arnold for aircraft and in particular, replacement crews.<sup>13</sup> He detailed how the North African campaign seriously hindered his air force's combat capabilities. "We have been about bled to death by the African operation, and setting this up as a separate theater may help some on that score."<sup>14</sup> A day earlier Eaker sent a letter to Spaatz begging him to refrain from taking more aircraft from his "little Air Force."<sup>15</sup> Spaatz replied that it was crucial that Eaker send him all of the P-38s and more bombers.<sup>16</sup> Spaatz's position is understandable. Fifteen days later after the Battle of Kasserine Pass, he received a report from Doolittle detailing the fighter situation in Tunisia. According to Doolittle's assessments, the Germans and Italians possessed 295 single engine fighters. In comparison, the Americans had 437 single engine fighters.<sup>17</sup> While Spaatz may have had the upper hand, there was no guarantee that he could retain it with a four to three advantage. He needed every single engine fighter on hand if he hoped to gain and maintain air superiority over Tunisia.

Two weeks later, Eaker brought up the issue of aircraft allocation again. The general argued that he did not have the equipment or personnel to maintain consistent operations over Continental Europe. He pointed out that he did not receive a sufficient number of aircraft. "We were just getting up off the floor from the loss of our P-38 fighters, when we received cables indicating the diversion of our next two heavy groups to the [Twelfth] Air Force."<sup>18</sup> Eaker also pushed off some of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, 30 January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz, 29 January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Spaatz to Ira Eaker, 10 February 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>17</sup> James H. Doolittle, "Fighter Superiority," 24 February 1943, Carl Spaatz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>18</sup> Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, 15 February 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

responsibility of decreased operations onto Arnold's inability to send the Eighth Air Force reinforcements. "It is perfectly obvious to me that the limiting factor on the number of missions we execute will not be the weather, but the rate at which you can furnish aircraft and crews." Finally, Eaker concluded by telling Arnold to prevent "other Air Forces from stealing all our planes and pilots."<sup>19</sup>

After another two weeks, and on schedule, came another complaint about aircraft allocations from the Eighth Air Force. "We have to date, received but 24 replacement crews and 63 replacement aircraft. We have lost 75 planes and crews in over 2206 sorties."<sup>20</sup> Casualties limited operations while Arnold expected Eaker to intensify his bombing campaign. Eaker continued his criticism of the Mediterranean Theater's ever increasing demand for heavy bombers. He stated that the agreed upon quota for bombardment groups in Africa was four, but five groups had been assigned to the region with two more on the way.<sup>21</sup>

In their 1941 book, *Winged Warfare*, Arnold and Eaker suggested that air superiority operations should target the destruction of an enemy's aircraft industry.<sup>22</sup> This explains why Eaker believed air operations in the Mediterranean proved to be a diversion from his vision of the main air effort, the German aircraft industry. Air superiority had been achieved in North Africa, but not the complete destruction of the Luftwaffe. Eighth Air Force commanders believed that the USAAF had forgotten its most important duty, strategic bombing. Arnold agreed with this assessment.

There are two main theaters where we can get at the heart of our enemies' countries. One of course is England...In my opinion, any other air operations that we endeavor to carry out are mere diversions...For political and other reasons we must keep up

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, 26 1 February 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Arnold and Ira Eaker, *Winged Warfare*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers: 1941), 132.

these air forces and we must supply them with sufficient replacements to maintain a constant operating strength, but I am hopeful that in spite of pressure being brought to bear, we won't have to increase their strength.<sup>23</sup>

This letter shows Arnold's position within the greater context of the air wars being waged around the world. Arnold believed that the Eighth Air Force's operations were the primary air effort against the Axis, but due to conditions on the ground, he needed to supply other combat commands with aircraft. Arnold felt Eaker needed to be informed that there were other theaters in the war besides his own. At the same time he agreed with Eaker's view of air operations.

On 8 March 1943 the COA submitted their report to Arnold.<sup>24</sup> He passed on the report to Eaker's new superior officer, Lieutenant General Frank Andrews and Spaatz on 24 March 1943. Andrews replaced Eisenhower as commander in chief ETOUSA. Accompanying the report to headquarters was Colonel Charles Cabell, one of Arnold's closest advisers.<sup>25</sup> Cabell briefed Andrews and Eaker on the COA report and expressed Arnold's own opinions of it to the two generals, who received the report enthusiastically. Eaker told Arnold that he saw the report in the same light.<sup>26</sup> Arnold requested that the air staff in England complete a report that detailed how many planes they needed to accomplish the objectives listed in the COA report.<sup>27</sup> Eaker saw this as a chance to shift the focus of the air war back to England. He ended his letter writing campaign temporarily. Now the general was going to draw up a plan that gave him both the aircraft and air offensive he desired.

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<sup>23</sup> Arnold to Eaker, 15 March 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>24</sup> John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog: Intelligence and Army Air Forces Operations in World War II*, 154.

<sup>25</sup> James Parton, "*Air Force Spoken Here*," 251.

<sup>26</sup> Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, 5 April 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>27</sup> James Parton, "*Air Force Spoken Here*," 251-252.



Eaker immediately formed a joint staff containing both RAF and USAAF officials. The Americans were Hansell, Brigadier General Frederick Anderson, Cabell, Colonel Richard Hughes, and two others. The British contributed Air Commodore Sidney Bufton, the RAF's own precision bombing advocate.<sup>28</sup> Eaker's influence over the planning for the Combined Bomber Offensive became apparent in the composition of the planning committee. Hansell and Anderson commanded two of Eaker's combat wings. Hansell became the committee's chair.<sup>29</sup> The reason Hansell chaired the staff lay in his previous experience. He was in charge of the Air War Plans Division 1942 (AWPD-42) committee prior to being assigned to the Eighth Air Force. AWPD-42 specified how the United States would carry out the air war globally. The USAAF used AWPD-42 as the basis for the force allocation portion of Pointblank.<sup>30</sup> AWPD-42 never dealt with how the USAAF intended to destroy these systems. Instead, the plan focused on the allocation of aircraft for coalition and U.S. air forces.<sup>31</sup> AWPD-42 called for the buildup of USAAF forces in England to a total of 7,268 planes. Planners only designated 824 aircraft to the North African theater.<sup>32</sup> The plan identified 177 targets that could be destroyed in 66,045 sorties. Planners believed that the loss of these targets would destroy the Luftwaffe, eliminate the U-boat threat, and lead to the destruction of the German war economy.<sup>33</sup> AWPD-42 called for a force of 2,965 heavy bombers by January 1944 and projected a 20% monthly attrition rate.<sup>34</sup> The Allies

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<sup>28</sup> John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog*, 191.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, September 1999), 96.

<sup>31</sup> Jay A. Stout, *The Men Who Killed the Luftwaffe: The U.S. Army Air Forces against Germany in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2010), 98.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Griffith, *The Quest*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog*, 150.

<sup>34</sup> Alan J. Levin, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany*, 77.

possessed the capabilities to back up their optimistic projections. Throughout the course of the war, Allied aircraft production soared to 151,000, while the Germans countered with 43,000.<sup>35</sup>

AWPD-42 did not receive a positive reaction from American leaders. Brigadier General Laurence Kuter wrote Spaatz that the plan wasn't feasible. "It's clear that we cannot build the AWPD-42 program."<sup>36</sup> AWPD-42 reflected America's inexperience and lack of intelligence.<sup>37</sup> After the war Hansell said the idea that the bomber could penetrate German airspace without long-range escort fighters was the plan's "greatest fault."<sup>38</sup> The British had their own doubts about AWPD-42 as well, but Air Marshal John Slessor advised Portal that it would be best to avoid publicly objecting to it.<sup>39</sup>

Hansell and his joint RAF-USAAF committee melded the COA report with the AWPD-42 force allocation plan to create the "Eaker Plan." The "Eaker Plan" focused on how the RAF and Eighth Air Force would accomplish the objectives laid out in the COA report. This rough draft mixed Eaker's desire for aircraft with Hansell's vision of the air war. The plan should be called the Eaker-Hansell Plan, but Eaker received full credit when he presented it in Washington prior to the Trident Conference. The "Eaker Plan" contained six primary objectives: Neutralizing Submarine Construction Yards and Bases, The German Aircraft Industry, Production Facilities for Ball Bearings, Oil, Synthetic Rubber and tires, and Military Transport Vehicles.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, (New York, NY: W.W.& Norton Company Inc.,1996), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Griffith, *The Quest* , 99.

<sup>37</sup> John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog*,151.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, *To Command the Sky: The Battle For Air Superiority Over Germany, 1942-1944* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 82.

<sup>39</sup> Rober S. Ehlers Jr., *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns*.(Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 142.

<sup>40</sup> *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences, Trident Conference, May 1943*, CD-ROM (MilSpecManuals.com, 2011), 10-11.

The German Air Force became an intermediate objective, though intermediate in this case did not mean secondary. The joint committee considered the Luftwaffe a major obstacle to success. Allied intelligence suggested that German fighter production had increased by 44% since 1941, while bomber production dropped.<sup>41</sup> This pointed to an impending escalation of the air war. In this way, Allied intelligence proved to be incredibly accurate. The writers of the “Eaker Plan” realized the need to defeat the Luftwaffe at the earliest possible date. Ultra intercepts gave the Allies a partial picture of the Luftwaffe’s deployment in multiple theaters. However, they did not give exact locations of German air units once they reached a theater of operations. So while the Allies knew approximately where the Luftwaffe was deployed, they did not know how the Germans dispersed their planes.<sup>42</sup>

The strategic bomber offensive forced Germany to make major strategic and operational decisions with their air and ground forces to meet the new threat in the west. In 1942, the Luftwaffe deployed 60% of its planes in Russia. By July 1943, the Germans shifted the majority of their forces back west, with only 36% of the German Air Force facing the Russians. Overall, the Germans only contributed 21% of their fighters to maintain air superiority over the Red Air Force.<sup>43</sup> The situation became so bad in July that Hitler recalled the 3rd Fighter Wing from Russia, JG 27 from Italy, and JG 51 from Sardinia to defend the Reich.<sup>44</sup> Luftwaffe pilot and general, Adolph Galland, recommended that the periphery defense, used up to this point in the war, abandoned. In his opinion, German fighters were no longer able to mass effectively against the bomber stream.<sup>45</sup> The Luftwaffe was now spread thin due in no small part to Soviet advances in the east and Allied advances in the

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<sup>41</sup> *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> John F. Kreis ed., *the Piercing Fog*, 147.

<sup>43</sup> Rober S. Ehlers Jr., *Targeting the Third Reich*, 155.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham Jr., *Men of the Luftwaffe*, (Novata, California: Presidio Press, 1988), 227.

<sup>45</sup> Adolph Galland, *The First and the Last: The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe: 1939-1945*, trans Mervyn Savill (New York: Ballantine Books, 1954), 185.

Mediterranean. There were just not enough fighters to cover the entirety of Western Europe and contribute aircraft to support ground operations in other theaters. During this period, German ground defenses improved significantly. Hitler cut down on the navy's building program to build tanks, anti-tank guns, and anti-aircraft artillery.<sup>46</sup> Compared to 1943, German flak strength increased dramatically in the west. On the Western Front, Axis heavy flak batteries increased by 68% and in Germany by 65%. However, on the Russian Front Germany did not increase its flak batteries from 1942.<sup>47</sup>

The authors of the "Eaker Plan" proposed that German aircraft and engine production needed to be targeted immediately.<sup>48</sup> The plan indicated that Germany had increased its fighter production since the United States entered the war from 1,185 fighters to 1,704 fighters. An increase of forty-three percent.<sup>49</sup> The authors argued, "Even if the present wastage rates continue, we cannot hope to reduce German fighter strength by mere attrition. We have seen how it grew in the face of a three-front wastage."<sup>50</sup> Planners argued that despite the wastage of approximately 600 German fighters per month since the Americans arrived, German aircraft production had produced over 800 fighters in February 1943 alone. They projected that the Germans would gain an extra one hundred fighters each month at the current attrition rate. The plan concluded that, before any other strategic attacks are waged, German aircraft production needed to be targeted to clear the way for future bombardment missions.<sup>51</sup>

They believed that the destruction of the German Air Force could be completed in their four phase plan. Realizing that they did not

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<sup>46</sup> Edward B. Westerman, *Flak: German Anti-Aircraft Defenses, 1914-1945*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 189.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

<sup>48</sup> *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> "The Combined Bomber Offensive Plan from the United Kingdom," Tab C, Carl Spaatz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*.

possess the current bomber force necessary to penetrate into Germany, planners called for a buildup of the Eighth Air Force from May 1943 until July 1943. During this phase planners projected that the American bomber force needed to reach 944 heavy bombers no later than 30 June. During this phase, the Americans were to target: German fighter factories, German naval facilities, petroleum refineries, and finally ball bearing factories. This phase expected the Americans to launch at least twenty-eight missions with at least one hundred bombers.<sup>52</sup>

The plan stated that the second phase would begin in July 1943 and last through October 1943. During this phase the Americans were to begin depleting the German fighter forces and attacking aircraft and submarine facilities in Germany. The plan called for 1,192 heavy bombers by 30 September 1943. The number of expected missions increased to forty-eight missions of with at least one hundred bombers.<sup>53</sup>

The third phase, from October 1943 to January 1944, called for follow up attacks on targets previously destroyed during the first two stages. It also demanded attacks against all of the major objectives of the CBO. The required force was set at 1,746 heavy bombers by 31 December 1943. Along with aircraft facilities and fighter factories, ball bearings, petroleum, rubber, and military transport vehicles received top priority. During the third phase planners expected to see sixty-six missions of at least one hundred bombers.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, the last phase set the stage for operations continent. Lasting from January 1944 to April 1944, this phase began to lay the groundwork for landings in France. All previous targets were included on the list with the addition of the German transportation and rail networks across Europe. Expectations were that by 31 March there would be a force of over 2,700 heavy bombers active in the theater. Planners expected the air forces in this theater to fly one hundred

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<sup>52</sup> "The Combined Bomber Offensive Plan from the United Kingdom," Tab A, Chart I, Carl Spaatz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>53</sup> "The Combined Bomber Offensive Plan from the United Kingdom," Tab C, Chart II.

<sup>54</sup> "The Combined Bomber Offensive Plan from the United Kingdom," Tab C, Chart III.

missions with one hundred heavy bombers during this phase of operations.<sup>55</sup>

We can draw some conclusions from this four stage plan. First, Eaker and his planning committee expected to receive a large number of heavy bombers during each phase. Even under the best of circumstances, these force level numbers would be hard to meet. At this point in time Eaker and Spaatz had been fighting over a few hundred bombers. According to the new plan, Eaker could now reasonably expect to have over one thousand at his disposal by no later than October, the chief beneficiary of the plan being the Eighth Air Force. Secondly, the plan dictated that the German fighter threat would be destroyed in the second phase, which ended October 1943. This was an ambitious timeline considering the experience, quality, and size of the Luftwaffe. Yet the timeline likely appeased any concerns that Eaker's boss, Arnold, might have over the slow start that the bomber offensive had gotten off to. Finally, the inclusion of naval targets and the fourth phase would likely garner positive reviews from American naval personnel and ground personnel, who might object to a plan that placed such enormous assets in the hands of the Eight Air Force. Overall, it was a plan that was designed to pass review and give Eaker the bombers.

Two other targets mentioned in correlation with the air superiority phase were Schweinfurt and Ploesti. The "Eaker Plan" stated that an attack on Ploesti needed to be coordinated with a strategic attack in the west against oil refineries in the Ruhr. Planners felt that an attack against Ploesti alone could not cause enough damage to the Reich's oil reserves.<sup>56</sup> Schweinfurt was a different case. The Allies believed that a successful surprise attack against Schweinfurt might go a long way to ending the war. The committee considered Schweinfurt to be a one raid effort. The Allies needed to succeed in the first raid, because a second might be more costly.<sup>57</sup>

After the committee finished the plan, key participants in the bomber offensive listened to the proposal. On 8 April, Hansell briefed

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<sup>55</sup> "The Combined Bomber Offensive Plan from the United Kingdom," Tab C, Chart IV.

<sup>56</sup> *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences.*, 19.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Andrews on the “Eaker Plan.” He quickly approved it and gave Eaker orders to fly to Washington to make the pitch.<sup>58</sup> Eaker then forwarded a full copy of the plan along with a note to Andrews on 13 April. In his note he once again emphasized the importance of aircraft allocation to his air force. Eaker wrote, “A decisive proportion of German industry, most vital to her effective continuation in the war, can be destroyed by the joint operation of US and British bombers from UK bases, if sufficient forces are provided.”<sup>59</sup> Portal also looked over the rough draft and gave it his full support. He encouraged a quick approval of the proposed operation. “The German Fighter strength is increasing and every week’s delay will make the task more difficult to accomplish.”<sup>60</sup> The CCS enclosed Portal’s letter as an attachment to the Eaker proposal.<sup>61</sup> The Eighth Air Force’s commander wrote that the plan received universal approval from all of the principal commanders in the RAF and USAAF in England.<sup>62</sup>

After his arrival in Washington, Eaker prepared to present his plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Eaker rarely failed at pitching an air offensive to the CCS or JCS. At Casablanca, he convinced Churchill to withdraw his objection about daylight bombing. Churchill opposed the day bombing campaign for fear that it would lead to higher losses. During this briefing he impressed the JCS and successfully convinced them of the need to commit more resources to the bomber campaign. They agreed to the operational plan that he and Hansell wrote up. Expected opposition from the Naval Department did not materialize. The plan included provisions to win approval from other branches of the armed forces competing for aircraft. Submarine facilities remained a

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<sup>58</sup> James Parton, “Air Force Spoken Here,” 253.

<sup>59</sup> Ira Eaker to Frank Andrews, “Plan for the Build-up and Employment of the Bomber Offensive, Eighth Air Force,” 15 April 1943, Carl Spaatz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Portal to Henry Arnold, 15 April 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>61</sup> *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, 16 April 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

high priority to get the approval of naval personnel.<sup>63</sup> Keeping the submarine bases as a priority was a crucial factor in garnishing their support. Arnold expressed the overall opinion of the briefing in his last letter to Andrews. "... [H]is [Eaker] presentation was superb. As far as I can see everyone on the Joint Chiefs of Staff is convinced the idea is sound."<sup>64</sup> Eaker and his plan had gained the backing of the JCS.

General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, understood the briefing and the situation facing American air power globally better than any other person in the room at the time. He was very direct with Arnold after the meeting. "Should we accept without qualification the full estimates?"<sup>65</sup> He continued with several questions about the allocation of bombers that Eaker asked for in his briefing and plan. Marshall asked Arnold if the bomber offensive should eat up as many resources as briefed. He reminded the Chief of the USAAF that operations were ongoing in the Pacific as well as the Mediterranean Theaters.<sup>66</sup> Despite his own warnings, Marshall did support the plan now that a cross-channel invasion was going to be delayed because of the approval of Operation Husky. He now believed the CBO was the only way to strike at Axis held Europe.<sup>67</sup>

The same debate over aircraft allocation came up during the meetings of the CCS at Washington during the Trident Conference in May 1943. According to British sources, "One of the motives behind the plan had been to give the Eighth Air Force 'a definite program of operations' and thereby to strengthen General Arnold's hand in his attempts to secure reinforcements and reduce diversions."<sup>68</sup> Eaker

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<sup>63</sup> James Parton. "Air Force Spoken Here," 252-253.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Arnold to Frank Andrews, 2 May 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>65</sup> George C. Marshall to Henry Arnold, 30 April 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *Endeavor, Part 4 The Combined Bomber Offensive: The Role of Bomber Command volume II of The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1961), 17.



claimed the only requirement for success was the reinforcement of his plan.<sup>69</sup> Portal felt that the Eaker's proposal faced strong opposition in Washington and attempted to rally British efforts to support the plan.<sup>70</sup>

Eaker received greater support for the plan when he argued that the CBO would be the prelude for the land invasion of France. "During the last phase-early 1944-the entire force should be used to sustain the effect already produced and to pave the way for a combined operation on the Continent."<sup>71</sup> While Eaker briefed the JCS on the proposed offensive, the debate over a cross-channel invasion of Europe neared its end. The CCS agreed to launch an invasion of Europe at the Trident Conference, which coincided with the approval of the "Eaker Plan."

The British, who were opposed to an invasion of France, agreed that the plan laid out by Eaker must be put into action as soon as possible. Both the Americans and British feared that the ever increasing German fighter strength posed a direct threat to the future of land operations in either the Mediterranean or the Northwest European Theaters.<sup>72</sup> Portal argued that if the American proposal succeeded, the British would benefit from German fighters suffering high losses in attritional battles over Europe.<sup>73</sup> According to the British perspective, "it was clear that the task of the combined bomber offensive, as indicated in the 'Eaker Plan', which was first in importance, was an attack upon the German fighter force."<sup>74</sup>

The RAF did not whole-heartedly support the American plan for the CBO. In fact, they had no intention of working in a combined effort with the Americans. Harris and his colleagues viewed the "Eaker Plan"

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>71</sup> *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences.*, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943 volume 5 of The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago, Illinois: The University Press of Chicago, 1949), 373.

<sup>73</sup> Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Combined Bomber Offensive.*, 19.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 21.

as an American and not British plan. As a result, significant edits were made after Eaker's briefing in Washington. These changes reflected the night bombing doctrine advocated by Harris. One major revision stated that the plan did not reflect the major effort of the RAF bombing offensive. Instead, targets bombed by the Americans "should be complemented and completed by RAF bombing [of the]the industrial area at night."<sup>75</sup> What this meant was that Harris was under no obligation to support American daylight attacks, but it was recommended that he support them if the Americans bombed the same industrial systems. In short, Harris and Eaker were under no obligation to aid one another. Theoretically, Harris could be forced to support Eighth Air Force operations, something that more assertive leaders were able to achieve in 1944. On 3 June 1943 a draft of the Combined Bomber Offensive plan was sent to Harris. Now under the code name Operation Pointblank, this new directive placed Portal in command of the offensive from England.<sup>76</sup>

The Allies issued the Pointblank Directive on 10 June 1943.<sup>77</sup> What was originally drawn up as an American plan to secure bombers and destroy precision targets, transformed into a plan full of loopholes and escape clauses. Strategically, nothing changed from Casablanca to Pointblank. This plan largely reflected the concerns of the Allied air force commanders involved. It wasn't drawn up so that both air forces could exploit their strengths against the Luftwaffe. Instead, it was a series of compromises that were agreed to so that the CBO could be carried out. The first compromise was getting the Eighth Air Force more heavy bombers. Eaker wanted more aircraft and Pointblank secured thousands for his air force. The American way of bombing argued that an air force needed to strike precision targets during the daylight. Prior to the war, Eaker and Arnold further advanced this vision of striking the central nervous system of an enemy nation's industry. The COA report reflected the economic centers that the Americans thought were most

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 28.

vital to the German war economy. After the directive was issued they were allowed to bomb these objectives.

A Combined Bomber Offensive could have still been achieved in spite of the fact that the RAF and USAAF were bombing at separate times. However, Harris wisely revised the plan to preserve the RAF's style of bombing. According to Hansell, the objectives laid out in the Casablanca Directive were open to two significantly different interpretations. The RAF interpreted the document to mean that they were to focus their bombing efforts on attacking the morale of the German people. They emphasized the "undermining of the morale of the German people" portion of the document. For the British, it was through these means that they would bomb Germany to a point where "their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened."<sup>78</sup> This opposed the viewpoint of the Americans who felt that Germany should be weakened through "the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial, and economic system."<sup>79</sup> They took these ideas and placed them into the operational plan, Pointblank. This shows that despite the fact that the debate had ended over daylight bombing, the two air forces were clearly not working together to increase effectiveness. It seems apparent that neither air force intended to give ground on what they considered to be the principal objectives in the CBO. This can be seen by looking at the loopholes that Hansell pointed out. Therefore, how could "round-the-clock bombing" have been considered a joint strategy? Even when they bombed the same cities, they did not attack the same targets. With a lack of concentration on a specific objective, the idea of bombing by night and day appeared to be more of an excuse for splitting strategies rather than an actual cohesive plan. These statements by Hansell after the war indicate that nothing changed since Casablanca. Like at the conference, Harris and Eaker were given permission to select targets they felt were necessary as long as they were on the Pointblank approved list.<sup>80</sup> According to one

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<sup>78</sup> Haywood Hansell, *The Strategic Air War against Germany and Japan: A Memoir*. (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History United States Air Force, 1986), 78.

<sup>79</sup> Haywood Hansell, *The Strategic Air War against Germany and Japan*, 78-79.

<sup>80</sup> Denis Richards, *Portal of Hungerford: The Life of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford KG, GCB, OM, SO, MC*. (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1977), 311.

historian, despite the “high-sounding rhetoric about ‘round the clock’ bombing, each side gave the other one the freedom to go its own way, and the resulting bombing directive was an agreement to disagree.”<sup>81</sup> These loopholes provided Eaker and Harris the opportunity to make the tactical decisions that they saw best with regards to their own air force.<sup>82</sup> They also allowed Harris to divert from Pointblank objectives as long as he was attacking strategic targets.

The British should not be judged too harshly for this skillful move. The Americans pulled a similar maneuver earlier that year. At Casablanca, Eaker proposed the use of a loose command structure under Portal. He stated that he preferred to receive his orders from Portal and that the command, as then constructed, worked for the best. “In my opinion the directives received by the RAF Bomber Command from the Chief of Air Staff [Portal], RAF, have always been sound and have always left sufficient latitude to the Commander for the selection of individual targets.”<sup>83</sup> This gave the American air forces more autonomy. One historian argues that “the real power was in the hands of Harris and Eaker” when it came to the CBO.<sup>84</sup> Another author wrote that the Allies should not have been surprised that Harris knowingly refused to follow the Casablanca Directive.<sup>85</sup> One British air power historian wrote, “Portal’s position was anomalous; through his own Air Staff he could theoretically issue guide-lines for the prosecution of the offensive, but he never chose or saw any need to do so.” This historian states that there

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<sup>81</sup> Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 215.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Ira Eaker, “Why Not Give Our Bombers and the RAF’s Bombers the Same Strategic Objective: The Same Targets?” Ira Eaker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>84</sup> Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 215.

<sup>85</sup> Anthony Verrier, *The Bomber Offensive: The Exciting Saga of the American and British Strategic Bomber Offensive Against Germany from 1939-1945*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1968), 160.

was never any coordination established between Bomber Command and the Eighth Air Force.<sup>86</sup> Setting up such a weak command structure, where subordinates could do whatever they wanted, led each air force commander to believe he was the main theater of operations. This issue came up during the planning of the CBO and its implementation. These power coalition politics led to a disorganized command that was reflected in Operation Pointblank.

The only thing the two sides seemed to agree upon was the importance of destroying German fighters. However, this was only assigned as an intermediate objective. It was believed that the Americans could knock this force out of the sky using the defensive capabilities of their heavy bombers. The raid on Vegesack suggested that all of this was possible. At the time, many Americans believed that the German fighters were inferior to their heavy bombers.

In short, Operation Pointblank said “yes” to every request made by Eaker and Harris. The CBO continued to pursue competing agendas. By agreeing to implement opposing methods and strategies in the plan, Pointblank became a worthless piece of paper. Instead of being an actual plan, it was more of a set of guidelines than a blueprint for air superiority. What it succeeded in doing was to identify the threat that German fighters posed. Finally, it made the Eighth Air Force the premier US air command in the world.

The plan for the CBO established in 1943 was open to interpretation and not an actual plan. By writing this bombing policy the two allies agreed to avoid an argument over bombing doctrine again. Depending on who was in charge of the CBO, Pointblank could be interpreted as strictly or loosely as that officer wanted it to be. In 1943, that man was Air Marshal Charles Portal, who was chosen because he didn't try to rein in Eaker or Harris. Later, during the 1944 campaign, Eisenhower was unofficially put in charge of the CBO. He interpreted the Pointblank Directive more strictly than Portal. As a result, cooperation that was seldom seen in the 1943 offensive was achieved during 1944. So why did they choose this plan? It appeased everyone at the table, but left open the possibility of a more strictly guided bomber offensive later in the war. Pointblank was a reflection of air force politics rather than a roadmap to victory.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

Rarely are battle plans drawn up in a vacuum of military efficiency. Operation Pointblank was no different. The internal politics that led to the creation of Pointblank began with the COA Report. By commissioning his own team to carry out research for the bombing campaign separate from Eaker, Arnold began to intrude into Eaker's domain as commander of the Eighth Air Force. Eaker himself was not innocent of playing inter-service politics. Eaker had demanded more aircraft throughout the spring of 1943. His pleas were met with silence and more diversions. Finally, when offered the chance to draw up his own operational plan for the CBO he made his move. Eaker drew up a highly ambitious plan that required aircraft deliveries that were not possible in 1943. In the end, Eaker's plan made the American Eighth Air Force the premiere American air command in the world. This was internal military politics at its dirtiest.

Pointblank also reflected the international rivalry between the RAF and USAAF. Eaker and Harris had two completely different visions for the future air campaigns against Germany. They each went out of their way to ensure that they could each pursue these goals. Eaker did so by writing an American centric operational plan. It was a daylight precision bombing plan that reflected American air doctrine, not British. Harris secured his freedom to break with the plan with timely edits that made the document interpretive to its readers. By the time the final draft was produced, Pointblank left all target decisions in the hands of the air force commanders. In the end, grand strategy took a backseat to the political infighting.