In this article Graham Cross argues that British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt based their understanding on the application of air power during the Second World War not on the work of any air power theorists who were prevalent during the inter-war years but rather on the writing of nineteenth-century United States naval theorist Alfred T. Mahan. In his major work, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, Mahan argued that those who commanded the sea gained a significant advantage over other nations. He wrote, “The profound influence of sea commerce upon the wealth and strength of countries was clearly seen long before the true principles which governed its growth and prosperity were detected.”

The basis for Cross’s assessment lies heavily on the fact that both Roosevelt and Churchill had naval backgrounds prior to the Second World War. As a result, they would have been heavily influenced by Mahan’s writings not only on naval affairs but also on how to apply air power. Cross argues that this bled over into their discussions prior to and during the Second World War. He also argues that this influenced their choices on how best to use air power to apply maximum pressure against the Axis during the strategic bombing campaign over Europe (28-29).

Cross gives four examples of how both Roosevelt and Churchill applied Mahan’s concepts to air power. These four different uses of air power at the diplomatic level include deterrence, coercion, persuasion, and morale bombing. With regards to using air power as a deterrent, Cross argues that in the aftermath of the Munich conference Roosevelt immediately set about expanding the Army Air Corps as a means of deterring future aggression against the United States. Cross argues, “Roosevelt set about the creation of an adequate American deterrent force grounded in his long-standing appreciation of Mahan’s notions of power” (34). Cross asserts that Roosevelt saw the growth of the Army Air Corps as a more cost effective deterrent that the American public could more easily accept than a large expansion of the United States military as a whole.

It is not hard to find historians who analyze the use of air power as a diplomatic tool. For example, Robert A. Pape in *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, argues that strategic bombing as a form of diplomatic coercion does not work. Tami Davis Biddle in her 2002 work, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare* that: “It is

probably too early to judge the efficacy of precision air attack as a political tool.” Historians have largely looked at the use of air power as a diplomatic weapon from the perspective of effectiveness in comparison to the potential that air power theorists promised during the 1920s and 1930s.

Where Cross’s article stands out though is that it is the first to try and link concepts surrounding the application of air power to the education and experience that political figures had prior to the Second World War. It was no secret that Churchill and Roosevelt both had extensive knowledge and practice in running their navies. Airplanes as weapons of war were still relatively new. They had first seen combat during the First World War. Policy makers like Roosevelt and Churchill relied on their experience with different branches of the military to try and understand how to best employ this new weapon on the battlefield. In another example proving the point Cross makes in this article, American air power theorist Major William Sherman used his United States Army background when discussing the proper employment of air power in 1926. When arguing in favor of air interdiction missions, Sherman wrote: “The bombing of supply systems. Napoleon’s epigram that ‘an army moves on its belly,’ expresses a truth that is of far greater consequence today, than ever before in the history of war.” Further research into the backgrounds of those who used air power in the Second World War has the potential to reshape how historians understand the development of air power theory and its early application.

One of the more fascinating arguments that Cross makes is that Churchill and Roosevelt applied air power coercively in the same way that Mahan argued that naval power could be used in to bully a nation into an action that it normally would not take. One of Cross’s intriguing examples is the Allied used of air power to either try to draw Turkey into the war or maintain its neutrality in 1943. Of the attempt, Cross wrote. “Nothing eventually came of this particular proposal, suggesting real limits on the extent of Allied power and that the Turks had their own agenda of trying to acquire military equipment to protect themselves from the Soviets” (37). In fact, this discussion about using air power to affect Turkey’s diplomacy continued beyond 1943. On 21 April 1944 the commander of the United States Army Air Forces, General Henry H. Arnold, proposed strikes against rail lines connecting Bulgaria to Turkey. Arnold argued that the attacks could be used to convince Turkey to cease its trade with the Axis. Cross’s argument warrants further exploration especially in light of his points about the use of air power to move Turkey diplomatically.

Cross also argues that the two leaders used air power to shape their alliances through persuasion. He explores diplomatic negotiations between the Allies over the deployment of an air force to the Caucasus region to support Soviet ground and air forces in 1942, known as Operation Velvet. Concerned that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was not pleased with the lack of an established second front in 1942, Churchill argued that American and British air power should be used to support the Soviet advances on the Eastern Front as a means of appeasing Stalin. Cross argues that Roosevelt too was amenable to this proposal. Despite their efforts, Stalin was not interested in the proposed plan. As a result, Operation Velvet was never implemented (42-44).

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The author asserts that while publicly Roosevelt and Churchill denied that their air forces conducted indiscriminate bombing, the two men saw the tactic as a necessary evil to win the war. Cross argues, “With the potential bombing of culturally sensitive sites or occupied countries and peoples, both Roosevelt and Churchill drew on a language of military necessity and moral superiority to justify their decisions” (48). Cross also argues that with regards to decisions over city bombing attacks against civilians, Churchill and Roosevelt preferred to defer to their military commanders and did little to rein them in (49-50).

Cross’s argument that Churchill and Roosevelt understood the air war from the prism of naval warfare is convincing. Much of this work is based on the correspondence files between the two leaders and their public statements. These exchanges bolster the author’s argument that the two leaders had similar thoughts about the employment of air power as a diplomatic tool. This is the strength of the article.

With regards to sources, the article would have benefited from the inclusion of Mahan’s writings and lectures throughout the text. This would help readers better understand the connections between Mahan and Churchill and Roosevelt. Additionally, the papers of Henry H. Arnold and Charles Portal would have been useful. Arnold commanded the Army Air Forces and Portal was the Chief of the Air Staff for the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Their papers might shed more light on how Mahan’s ideas made their way into operational decisions. Portal showed a particular interest in using bombing diplomatically on the Eastern Front. Cross’s thesis can be greatly expanded by delving into these two archives.

The argument could have been bolstered in a few places. A deeper discussion of the 1943 Casablanca Conference, which is the birthplace of the Anglo-American combined bomber offensive against Germany, would have grounded his argument. Churchill pushed Roosevelt to shift strategic bombing strategy from daylight precision bombing to night area bombing. While the Allies debated the employment of strategic air power at Casablanca they also discussed developments on the Eastern Front and how to aid Stalin. This is an unexplored area in the article.

Another topic that should have been elaborate on is the diplomatic tight rope that the Allies had to walk when targeting French cities from 1942 to 1944. The vast majority of these attacks were done by the Americans using daylight precision bombing so as to limit French civilian losses. Discussion of the diplomatic negotiations between the leader of the Free French government, Charles De Gaulle, Churchill, and Roosevelt about the bombing campaigns over occupied France, would have further enhanced the article. A good place to start is Stephen Bourque’s work Beyond the Beach. Bourque looks at the missions themselves as well as how the bombings affected French civilians and their perception of the Allies.

Cross does an excellent job of discussing the importance of Operation Frantic and the use of shuttle bombing as a form of diplomatic outreach to the Soviets. This argument would have been enhanced with an expansion of sources. First, Mark Conversino’s book on Operation Frantic is one of the best sources that examines the diplomatic aspects of the shuttle bombing missions. United States Army Brigadier General John Deane, who was the head of the United States Military Mission to Moscow, wrote about his own experience

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9 Stephen Bourque, Beyond the Beach: The Allied War Against France (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018).
in coordinating Anglo-American air operations with the Soviets in his memoirs, *A Strange Alliance*. Additionally, there are a number of files on Operation Frantic available at the United States Air Force Historical Research Center.¹⁰

Overall, this is an excellent article. Cross has created a new way to examine the diplomatic use of air power during the Second World War. He convincingly demonstrates that Churchill and Roosevelt applied naval principles when using air power strategically during the Second World War. Cross shows that since air power was still in its infancy, political leaders had to rely on their experience in other branches of service to conceive of how best to apply these new weapons and ideas. Both Churchill and Roosevelt leaned on their naval experience and the teachings of Mahan.

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