

The Essence of Air Power

Mitchell realized and advocated air power as profoundly changing not only the manner in which wars would be fought, but the very ways nations of the globe would conduct their relations. Mitchell wrote: **“In the future, no nation can call itself great unless its air power is properly organized and provided for, because air power, both from a military and economic standpoint, will not only dominate the land but the sea as well.”**⁵

The value of Mitchell’s words are not diminished by new technologies and capabilities, for the essence of air power remains unchanged. The globe has become inexorably linked to air power, and air power has forever altered the manner in which conflicts are conducted.

- We have launched ourselves into what we call the air, a fluid that covers the whole earth like a deep blanket. Wherever this blanket extends, there we can go. As it covers the whole world, all places are accessible to the flyer.⁶
- Air power is the ability to do something in or through the air, and, as the air covers the whole world, aircraft are able to go anywhere on the planet.⁷
- The air is a common medium all over the world. It is bounded by no oceans, mountains, rivers or deserts.⁸
- The State has no air frontiers comparable to borders protected by deserts, coastlines, mountain ranges or deep rivers on the ground. The air permeates the whole world homogeneously, the only change being in its temperature and density.⁹
- The advent of air power has made every country and the world smaller. We do not measure distances by the unit of miles, but by the unit of hours.¹⁰
- Not only will every part of the world be reached but the world itself will be made correspondingly smaller

WILLIAM "BILLY" MITCHELL'S AIR POWER

because distance will be measured in hours and not in miles.¹¹

- Air power has not only come to stay but is, and will be, a dominating factor in the world's development.¹²
- Air power not only has decisive military advantages, but most of it can be used in time of peace for some useful purpose.¹³
- No longer is the making of war gauged merely by land and naval forces. Both of these old, well understood factors in conducting war are affected by air power which operates over both of them.¹⁴
- No longer will the tedious and expensive process of wearing down the enemy's land forces by continuous attacks be resorted to.¹⁵
- Aerial siege may be laid against a country so as to prevent any communication with it, ingress or egress, on the surface of the water or even along railroads and roads.¹⁶
- Aircraft move hundreds of miles in an incredibly short space of time, so even if they are reported as coming into a country, across its frontiers, there is no telling where they are going to go to strike. Wherever an object can be seen from the air, aircraft are able to hit it with their guns, bombs, and other weapons. Not only is this the case on land, it is even more the case on the water, because on the water no object can be concealed unless it dives beneath the surface.¹⁷
- Air power, therefore, has to be employed as a major instrument of war, no matter whether a land or sea force is acting on the surface of the earth.¹⁸
- We should, therefore, investigate the nature of this new power which has come to us in the air, to see what advantages it has over the older arms on the ground and the water, in its principal use for national defense.¹⁹
- The airplane is one of the most complicated military instruments that has ever been used, and an Air Service, in reality, is harder to create and carry on than is any other arm, harder even than any army or navy.²⁰

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- Air power is the great determining influence in the world's development, both as concerns national defense and economic development. An army's value today lies only in holding the ground, it cannot conquer it. A navy's value lies only in undersea operations, away from the attack of aircraft, because aircraft can destroy any kind of surface ship that has ever been built or that can be built. Air power, therefore, conquers the opposing state in war by paralyzing its nerve centers; the army occupies the ground so conquered; while the navy by submarines, attempts to destroy hostile commerce and acts as a means of supply for air forces operating from islands or possessions contiguous to the sea, which require transportation over and above what they can effect through the air.²¹
- The day has passed when armies on the ground or navies on the sea can be the arbiters of a nation's destiny in war. The main power of defense and the power of initiative against an enemy has passed to the air.²²
- Aviation is and will continue to be the principle arm of national defense.²³
- Nothing in the world's history has brought about as great a change in the employment of military power as the coming of the airplane.²⁴
- We need the airplanes for what was demonstrated time and time again in the European War, and only for one unit of each kind. If you do not authorize it, we shall lose all we learned in the war. It will have the same effect—except worse—of not allowing any rifles for a battalion of infantry, no cannon for a battery of artillery, and no horses for a troop of cavalry.²⁵
- Those of us in the air have had a vision of the future which we believe to be unquestionably correct.²⁶