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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War by Robert A. Pape

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# Military, Scientific, and Technological

ELIOT A. COHEN

*Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War.* BY ROBERT A. PAPE. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, 359 pp. \$49.95 (paper, \$19.95).

This solidly constructed work concludes with some overly simple assertions: "Strategic bombing does not matter," "Punishment does not work," and the like. Exploring a large number of cases superficially and five cases in depth, the author builds a strenuous argument that strategic air power has never delivered on its promises and, for reasons intrinsic to strategy, cannot. An excessively narrow political science framework (and perhaps a desire to tweak the noses of true believers) has led the author further than the evidence can take him. To say that the air power used against government leaders is doomed to fail may be true, but it has never been tried with the same determination as other military means. Similarly, his hoary contention that "punishment generates more public anger against the attacker than against the target governments" glosses over a complex of popular reactions. Unsustainable assertions notwithstanding, its rigorous argumentation and skillfully assembled evidence make this a book to be reckoned with.

*Why the Allies Won.* BY RICHARD OVERY. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996, 396 pp. \$29.95.  
A sharply different view from Pape's.

Overy, a professor of modern European history at the University of London, argues that "there has always seemed something fundamentally implausible about the contention of bombing's critics that dropping almost 2.5 million tons of bombs on tautly stretched industrial systems and war-weary urban populations would not seriously weaken them." The author of important books on World War II, including a biography of Hermann Goering and the best overall account of the air war, Overy has produced a broad and insightful synthesis. He contends that the outcome of the war rested less on the balance of personnel and matériel than the Allies' greater cohesion and attention to support, chiefly logistics and intelligence. In the final analysis, however, the conduct of individual campaigns mattered greatly. Deftly and convincingly, Overy reminds students of World War II that although all history is contingent, war is perhaps the most uncertain of all human activities.

*Thread of the Silkworm.* BY IRIS CHANG. New York: BasicBooks, 1995, 329 pp. \$27.50.

Chang's book tells the fascinating biography of Tsien Hsue-shen, a brilliant Chinese scientist who played a central role in American rocket and space science during World War II and its immediate aftermath, returned to China in the 1950s, and played a central role in that country's missile programs. Chang, a journalist fluent in Chinese, has carefully tapped a wide array of sources. She is sympathetic to Tsien's travails in the darkest days of the Cold War, when because of suspicions of communist lean-

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