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## The Outsider: Giulio Douhet and the Italian Army

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# The Outsider: Giulio Douhet and the Italian Army

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### 1. Introduction

- 1 In the summer of 1926, an Italian Army review board voted against promoting Major General Giulio Douhet, the airpower advocate. According to the board, Douhet could “ably discharge the duties of his rank” but was “not worthy of being included in the list of those selected for promotion because he does not eminently possess the qualities required for Lieutenant General rank”.<sup>1</sup> When the news reached Douhet in Potenza Picena, the small town in the Marche where his wife Teresa “Gina” Casalis (1876-1960) owned a large estate, the theorist replied to the Army that he believed the rejection to be “inevitable because [it is] logical and mandatory”.

Logical, because, if I was promoted to general, it was against the unanimous opinion of the Higher Promotion Board; mandatory because my technical thinking on the issue of National Defence – a well-known position – is so far from that which dominates in the upper military hierarchy that it could not, consciously and conscientiously, accept me into its fold.<sup>2</sup>

- 2 These caustic words can be taken to summarize the troubled relationship between Douhet and the Italian military establishment, culturally ill-disposed to engaging with reformist – let alone revolutionary – thinkers. Even before turning to airpower, as a young officer Douhet displayed many of the traits which would slow and, eventually, ruin his career. This paper explores Douhet as soldier and member of the Italian Army, positing that he was never fully accepted by his organization; it further posits that his role as outsider militated against the acceptance of the novel concepts he proposed. By focusing on this turbulent relationship, the paper also suggests why the Army was the main target of Douhet's strategic vision.

## 2. Was Douhet a soldier by vocation?

- 3 Giulio Douhet was born in 1869 in Caserta and spent most of his life in uniform. His father, Giulio Douhet *senior* (1828-1894), a pharmacist in the Italian Army, served at a number of military hospitals and called himself “twice Italian” on account of his decision to remain in Italy when his birthplace outside Nice was ceded to France in 1860;<sup>3</sup> his mother Giacinta Battaglia (1837-?) was a school teacher. In 1882 Giulio *junior* matriculated at the Florence military college, one of five such institutions then existing in Italy. College graduates could matriculate at Italian universities, but in practice their main purpose was to prepare students to attend officer academies, and it is said that they provided up to two-thirds of War College students.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Giulio appears to have committed to a military career at age 13. Why he did so is unexplained. Because family papers are lost, no trace remains of any doubts, debates, regrets (or indeed joys) connected to the decision. Family influence was almost certainly a factor; the desire to obtain a good education was possibly another. It should be noted, however, that cadets paid tuition; this suggests that since the Douhet family could afford to send Giulio to military college, it would have had little difficulty supporting him at civilian institutions, particularly in Bologna, where the family then lived and home to the first and oldest university in the world.
- 4 Whatever his motivation, Douhet was undoubtedly a bright and dedicated student who graduated top of his class from the College and

the Military Academy, the selective institution in Turin which trained artillery and engineering officers. Once again, nothing is known about favourite subjects or teachers, if indeed there were any. In 1890 Douhet was placed third out of 53 artillery lieutenants who completed the Scuola di Applicazione, the post-graduate institution which provided education specific to the chosen service branch. Douhet, however, did not stand out in strictly military duties. In his first posting as Lieutenant in the 5<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment, Douhet performed well in most respects but skipped the 1892 and 1893 “mountain hikes” for unspecified health reasons, which led the regimental board to assess him as better suited to field artillery or a military school. Douhet chose the latter, but was instead assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment in Alessandria, where he spent a lacklustre year impressing his superiors with his “lack of élan and initiative”.<sup>5</sup> By early 1895 Douhet was back at the 5<sup>th</sup> Artillery, where he studied hard enough to pass the dreaded War College exam on the first attempt; he then proceeded to complete the three-year course, placing sixth out of 49 students. In 1900 Douhet completed an advanced course in electro-technics at the Museo Industriale in Turin and was promoted to captain.

- 5 With these premises, Douhet was more or less assured a clear career path. By 1904, however, he was already looking for other opportunities, including, with characteristic foresight, the creation of a moving-picture news company based on equipment designed and built by himself.<sup>6</sup> To promote this idea, in April 1904 Douhet took three months’ leave, which he spent in London seeking to finalize the preliminary negotiations he had started some time before. The deal fell through: but it is significant as the first attestation of Douhet considering leaving the military. In 1910, now a Major, he was appointed to command the Cyclist Battalion, newly formed within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment, in Rome. Unlike many colleagues, Douhet did not jump at the opportunity to fight in Libya during the Turkish-Italian war. With the end of his tour approaching, he again tried to return to academia by preparing to sit the exam to teach at the War College; nothing came of it. On July 1, 1912 Douhet was assigned to the newly-formed Aviators’ Battalion, serving first as deputy commander to Lieutenant Colonel Vittorio Cordero di Montezemolo, then as provisional commanding officer and eventually as commanding officer.

- 6 Douhet never commanded units in the field during the First World War; instead, he served as chief of staff first with the 5<sup>th</sup> Division (1915) and then the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps (1916). This was apparently because the regiment he had been selected to lead was not formed. However, in March 1916 Douhet went as far as drafting a letter to the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps commander, General Clemente Lequio, in which he asked not to be considered for promotion to Brigadier General because he felt that an operational command would require him to actively promote the Supreme Command vision and leadership model, which he did not share.<sup>7</sup>
- 7 For all practical purposes, Douhet's military career ended in the late afternoon of September 16, 1916, when he admitted to being the author of the unsigned August 21 memorandum warning minister Leonida Bissolati about the illusory gains brought about by the conquest of Gorizia.<sup>8</sup> General Dino Della Noce, head of the Supreme Command's Discipline Department, arrested Douhet on charges potentially leading to the death penalty. The arrest resulted in a rapid sequence of trials, convictions and appeals (October 14-15, in the first degree; November 25, Cassation; December 21, Supreme Tribunal of War and Navy). Lt Col Douhet was eventually incarcerated for about nine months in Fenestrelle, the ice-cold military prison originally built by the house of Savoy to block the Val Chisone and prevent French invasions.

### 3. The recalcitrant insider

- 8 The dramatic "Bissolati memorandum" crisis was only the latest in a string of indiscretions and clashes with authority dating to the very beginning of Douhet's career. The shared common trait for these events appears to be the unwillingness to accept contrary decisions, which Douhet displayed for the first time in 1901. While serving with the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment in Vigevano, Captain Douhet delivered the lecture "A military view of automobility", in which he proposed an electric-powered "road train" to move troops, armaments and supplies in quantity where railroads were unavailable.<sup>9</sup> The lecture was apparently well-received, leading Douhet to submit it for publication in the prestigious *Rivista di artiglieria e genio*. The journal turned it down, arguing that experiments carried out in France along the same

lines had yielded meagre results and adding several technical objections, including the underestimation of power losses at various points in the system. Douhet therefore turned to the Associazione Elettrotecnica Italiana (AEI), repeated the lecture in Turin and had it published in its journal.<sup>10</sup> The paper eventually became a short book and spawned a ten-page French version by G. Clément – quite possibly a pseudonym for Douhet himself.<sup>11</sup> In 1905 Douhet complained that he had been forced to fight “merely to have [the lecture] published”, but the episode is interesting chiefly in that it seems to set what would become a pattern for Douhet: strong statement of an as yet imperfect idea, private rejection by official structures, new attempt through unofficial channels, public criticism by other experts, fierce reaction.

- 9 This was very much in evidence in the development of the trimotor bomber later known as the Ca.3.<sup>12</sup> Seeking a heavier-than-air aircraft with range, payload and reliability comparable to that of lighter-than-air aircraft, Douhet first mentioned the need for a “new extra powerful aircraft to fight airships” to Gianni Caproni on April 21, 1913.<sup>13</sup> A few months later, after weathering a minor storm for recommending that the Army acquire the Caproni workshops,<sup>14</sup> Douhet put the Aviators’ Battalion new experimental department to good use to explore novel designs. These included a “three-engine aircraft with large load-carrying capability (1,500 kg of disposable load)”, undertaken “with the valuable contribution of Ing. Caproni”.<sup>15</sup> Preliminary design was complete by January 27, 1914 and Douhet, now in command of the Battalion, requested 15,000 lire to build the prototype; Colonel Mario Maurizio Moris, the head of Army aviation, granted approval three weeks later.
- 10 Construction started in earnest, but things took a different turn when the authorities understood that the project would deal a severe blow to airships and score points for Douhet in the lighter *vs* heavier than air debate. According to Caproni

Moris appears to want to take back the authorization Moris no longer wants to build the 300 HP [aeroplane]. This mainly to block Douhet. Douhet advises running to Rome and making noise. Moris, if one shouts, caves in. This opposition is also caused by the fact that large aircraft, far from being “children of a sick mind”, work well and kill airships.<sup>16</sup>

- 11 This latent hostility slowed work. Engine selection remained contentious even after Captain Ottavio Ricaldoni asked Caproni to abandon the envisaged cumbersome gearing arrangement for much simpler direct drive; the issue was only solved in August, when Douhet instructed Caproni to install a single 100 HP and two 80 HP Gnome rotaries drawn from Battalion spares. The trimotor eventually flew on November 20, 1914 – by coincidence, the same day as Moris submitted to the War Ministry an aviation programme based on Blériot XIs, Farman MF.14s, Caproni Parasols, unknown Nieuports and Voisins.<sup>17</sup> Initial testing revealed good performance by the standards of the time, but there was no military requirement for the “300 HP”, as the large aircraft was then known. Technical success thus led to a new clash over production. Arturo Mercanti, the pioneer motorist who had, among other things, created both the Mille Miglia and Brescia Air Circuit, witnessed an early test and immediately understood its potential. This led Mercanti to seek investors in a company to build the bomber. A demonstration was arranged for *commendatore* Alberto Johnson, director-general of the Touring Club and senators Giuseppe Colombo and Carlo Esterle, both prominent industrialists.<sup>18</sup>
- 12 A story published by *Corriere della Sera* on December 9 precipitated a shouting match over the dissemination of military secrets, industrial interests and circumvention of military hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> Within a few days, rumour had it that Colonel Giuseppe Buffa would replace Douhet as Battalion commander. With Douhet out of the way, on December 26, 1914 Mercanti extracted from Moris and Buffa the commitment to purchase 12 trimotors from his still non-existent industry team, which proposed to build them in military workshops at Vizzola, Cameri and Taliedo at a unit price of 135,000 lire. By then Douhet had been informed that he would become divisional chief of staff in Cagliari, Catanzaro or Chieti, later amended to Ancona, possibly considered more amenable being a mere 40 kilometres from Potenza Picena. The transfer led Douhet to submit his resignation from the Army, only to withdraw it and resubmit it again.<sup>20</sup> By mid-February, the destination became Milan, with a two-month leave to allow spirits to cool off.
- 13 The episode undoubtedly stemmed from the long-running feud between Moris and Douhet over the role of airships, and did not benefit from Douhet’s own brusque handling of the affair and the early

intromission of business interests. The Caproni case had permanent consequences for Douhet, thrusting him out of the fledgling aviation world he was contributing to shape with passion and vision. From an aviation perspective, this goodbye turned the recalcitrant insider into a noisy outsider.

## 4. The noisy outsider

- 14 For all practical purposes the Caproni case spelled the end of Douhet's active role in military aviation – to the point where, from a psychological point of view, his innumerable petitions to be reinstated as head of aviation might be described as the quest to return to a lost golden age. To a certain extent, this ambition was blocked by widespread hostility and notorious reputation; in turn, this started the chain of events which ultimately led to the Bissolati affair.
- 15 Throughout 1915-17, Douhet continued to mull over aviation issues, sending proposals to military authorities through his chain of command but also pursuing alternative paths through his social, industrial and political contacts – in essence acting as both insider and outsider, without appreciably different results. The conviction for the Bissolati affair did not stop this interest, but moved Douhet firmly into the outsider category. Indeed, the theorist conceived and wrote his first plan for a strategic air offensive in June 1917, while incarcerated at Fenestrelle. Titled *La grande offensiva aerea* and replete with detailed calculations, it called for the Entente to strike at Germany with a massive bomber fleet. Remarkably, the plan was forwarded to the Supreme Command. In early August Cadorna turned it down, arguing sensibly that there was insufficient industrial capacity to build the huge number of large aircraft it required.<sup>21</sup> This common-sense observation reflected the radical change that war had brought about in aviation and showed how quickly the prewar aviation expert had turned into a naïve outsider. Whether measured by size, organization, technology or doctrine, the embryonic stage of military aviation in 1912-14 allowed individuals to play disproportionate roles in every aspect without specific experience or training. Wartime experience expanded and transformed aviation, making such concentrations of knowledge and power all but impossible.



- 16 Colonel Douhet learned this at his expense when, following the removal of Cadorna as scapegoat for the Caporetto disaster, he briefly returned to aviation in Autumn 1917-18 as Central Director for Aeronautics (DCA). This was by no means a friendly homecoming. As Luigi Albertini found when he met Angelo Gatti at the Supreme Command in mid-November 1917, aviation officers would not countenance a Douhet appointment.<sup>22</sup> But the opposition was eventually overcome. As DCA, Douhet tackled with great energy the failure of the SIA 7 reconnaissance aircraft and drafted interesting production requirements for 1919; but he also discovered that the critical post-Caporetto situation made it impossible to change industrial priorities and that two years of intensive operations had largely shifted the debate from theoretical constructs to pressing practical considerations. Growing largely frustrated with the inability to influence strategy, Douhet resigned on June 4, 1918.<sup>23</sup> Although the postwar amnesty would erase the Bissolati conviction and clear the way for his promotion to flag rank, Douhet would never see active duty again, much less in aviation.
- 17 Now an outsider in the literal sense of the term, Douhet, as at other critical junctures in his life, escaped to writing. His *Come finì la Grande Guerra – La vittoria alata* fell somewhere between alternate history and technothriller, in which the Entente caused the collapse of German morale through massed aerial attacks on German cities, bringing war to an abrupt end.<sup>24</sup> The novelette was intended to bring the debate over airpower to a broad, non-technical audience, with the obvious intent of pressuring the military to rethink its strategies. While the approach was never put to test because war ended before publication, it is not difficult to see persuasion by communication as the somewhat desperate attempt of a restless outsider. In any case, *Come finì la Grande Guerra* never reached its intended audience. Like most Douhet works of this era, it was printed rather than published and actual circulation is difficult to ascertain.<sup>25</sup> Douhet was probably all too aware of this, at least judging from the efforts to publicise his books. At various times he asked D'Annunzio, without success, to preface *Come finì la Grande Guerra*, and suggested to Attilio Longoni to serialize *Il dominio dell'aria* [The Command of the Air] in the fiery *Gazzetta dell'aviazione*.<sup>26</sup> Evidently, Douhet believed that publication by the Ministry of War, brought about by the minister himself, Pietro

Lanza di Scalea, did not itself guarantee that the military community would accept his new book.

- 18 The gulf between Douhet's creativity and ability to build organizations is best exemplified by his abortive postwar attempt to create a political movement, the *Unione Nazionale Ufficiali e Soldati* (UNUS).<sup>27</sup> In March 1919 UNUS launched *Il Dovere*, a weekly written, edited and largely funded by Douhet. The tabloid engaged in fiery battles which did little to repair relations with the military establishment. From the beginning, *Il Dovere* reported and commented on the work of the Caporetto inquiry board, denouncing the attempt to blame General Cavaciocchi and blasting politicians for failing to remove Cadorna and stop his bloody approach.<sup>28</sup> In July the newspaper introduced the concept of a memorial to the Unknown Soldier, setting in train the events which would lead to the solemn inauguration of the monument in Rome on November 4, 1921.<sup>29</sup> Despite its fiery campaigns, *Il Dovere* led a precarious existence. Unlike Mussolini with fascism, Douhet put his personal agenda before the pressing social and economic issues felt by rank-and-file veterans, whose widespread unhappiness he failed to intercept. After reducing pagination and missing issues, the magazine collapsed in December 1921 and UNUS disappeared quietly. This sealed Douhet's political ambitions.
- 19 Douhet remained an outsider even when he shifted his approach from the development of a strategic air force to the broad rethinking of the Italian defence organization, a much debated topic in the early 1920s, particularly in terms of Army structure.<sup>30</sup> The generally forgotten book *La Difesa Nazionale* is a case in point: the original 1923 edition was an attempt to frame his "independent Air Army" proposal in terms of national defence priorities, with direct impact on the ongoing Army reform discussion.<sup>31</sup> The booklet was reviewed by *La nuova politica liberale*, a journal falling squarely in the field of philosopher Giovanni Gentile – but only after the Army structure debate was over.<sup>32</sup> Two years later, Douhet re-used the title for a much shorter publication intended to drum up interest in a similarly-titled illustrated weekly which aimed to debate military issues, defend "all national interests" and support defence firms.<sup>33</sup> The project was blessed by Fascist National Party (PNF) secretary Roberto Farinacci, whose supportive letter was duly printed in the booklet, but tellingly the contact address given for the magazine was Douhet's own resid-

ence. The attempt to court party favour to overcome military opposition is also evident in his collaboration with the Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura (INFC), an organization created by the PNF and chaired by Gentile; Douhet stood out as one of only three members of the first INFC board who came from neither academia nor politics.<sup>34</sup> Writing for the INFC journal *L'educazione nazionale*, Douhet described national defence as a field that politicians without specific knowledge left to military bureaucrats obsessed with secrecy and convinced that rank bred truth.<sup>35</sup> Implicitly comparing himself to Napoleon, Douhet went as far as writing that if the French general “had found himself channelled in the narrow confines of a modern military hierarchy, he most likely would have run the risk of being retired on age grounds as a Lieutenant Colonel, after having been declared, by some promotion Board, unfit for higher rank, for his character if nothing else”.<sup>36</sup>

- 20 When the *Difesa nazionale* project collapsed, Douhet donated to INFC 17,894.80 lire, a sum whose enormity is best understood in comparison with journal subscriptions (almost 450 times the annual *Educazione fascista* membership), salaries (nine months of a Major General's pay) or even government support (almost twice the initial funding Mussolini had granted to the INFC).<sup>37</sup> Embracing INFC did not help Douhet overcome Farinacci's defeat in the PNF power struggle: ousted from the INFC board, he was an outsider once again.<sup>38</sup>
- 21 The 1926 decision not to award Douhet the coveted third star, a largely honorific rank given that he was no longer on active duty, at once stemmed from, confirmed and fuelled his status as noisy outsider. Douhet had been made a Brigadier General in 1922, one year after publishing *The Command of the Air*, and had received his second star in 1925; neither was followed by the return to active duty. Because the new promotion would have been equally symbolic, what made the board's veto so painful for Douhet was that it certified his exclusion from the highest career level. In all fairness, the airpower theorist was not the only officer denied promotion. The same board meeting reached similar conclusions with 24 other generals, including Douhet's former commander Cordero di Montezemolo and Brig Gen Emilio Giampietro, who in 1922 had taken part in the “march on Rome” that brought Fascism to power. Those not promoted were placed on *Aspettativa per Riduzione Quadri* – in other words, they

were accorded leave of absence, with salary, until reaching the prescribed retirement age. After 44 years in uniform, Douhet was officially outside the military.

## 5. Outside the Air Force

- 22 When, following the March on Rome, Mussolini decided to put aviation on a stable footing, he initially tapped Douhet as Undersecretary for Civil Aeronautics in a newly-minted Commissariat for Aeronautics.<sup>39</sup> The appointment lasted from October 31 to November 11, when Army opposition succeeded in having it countermanded.<sup>40</sup> The government next considered creating within the War Ministry two General Directorates, respectively for operations and procurement, with the former to be run by Douhet to prepare the independent Air Army and train and oversee air units for the “other ministries”.<sup>41</sup> This arrangement foundered against Navy opposition.<sup>42</sup> Mussolini eventually created the Commissariat for Aeronautics on January 24, 1923 and the Regia Aeronautica [Royal Italian Air Force] on March 28, but never appointed Douhet to any position in the new organisation. Bending to pressure, he chose Brig Gen Pier Ruggiero Piccio as the first commanding general of the new service.
- 23 According to a possibly apocryphal story told by Carlo De Biase, Badoglio had reacted to the publication of *La difesa nazionale* by describing Douhet to Mussolini as “a madman” and stressing his war-time conviction.<sup>43</sup> Whether the anecdote is true or not, it is hardly surprising that the heavily Army-dominated Regia Aeronautica should inherit the Army’s perception of Douhet as a noisy troublemaker, ensuring that there would be no place for him in either organization. This was achieved, first and foremost, by not transferring Douhet from the Army reserve to the Air Force reserve; the mechanism was frequently used in those years to bolster the new service, most notably with aviators discharged after the Great War.<sup>44</sup> Because Douhet was older than serving Regia Aeronautica leadership, keeping him out of the Air Force reserve ensured that he could not outrank serving generals should he be recalled to active duty.<sup>45</sup> Over the years, Douhet would make frequent attempts to gain entry, but was rebutted every time. In June 1924, when Deputy Commissioner for Aeronautics Aldo Finzi was dismissed for his ambiguous role in the Mat-

teotti affair, Douhet attempted to replace him.<sup>46</sup> The job went to Maj Gen Alberto Bonzani. Two years later, Douhet was still trying to enlist the support of Gabriele D'Annunzio to oust Bonzani and, presumably, take his place.<sup>47</sup>

- 24 Force structure is perhaps the strongest indicator that Douhet and his ideas remained “outside” Regia Aeronautica planning and thinking. The 1923 aviation programme prepared by Riccardo Moizo in his capacity as director-general for military aviation specified clearly that the Regia Aeronautica would perform first and foremost duties auxiliary to the Army and Navy (particularly in terms of reconnaissance), coastal defence and colonial policing.<sup>48</sup> The independent (or strategic) Air Army was pushed over to a later moment, explicitly stating that in the budget “little margin is left for independent aviation – without excluding the forming of an initial nucleus”. This position prompted Douhet to warn that the new Regia Aeronautica was not what he had fought for.

Now, for that sense of seriousness that dictates that Caesar be given his due, I must say that, despite an outer appearance, the R. Aeronautica, as provided for in the recent decrees, is even farther away from what I have always advocated than the previous organization had been [...]. Unit types – at the end of which there appears an airship group – point to a war concept similar to that which took place in the past war. Now I believe that the Great War only saw a messy aerial guerrilla while the future will see true air war, calling for masses rather than specializations. The present organization is thus, in both its general lines and specific details, and particularly in the underlying concepts, at the antipodes of my ideas. And I wanted to say this merely to state a fact.<sup>49</sup>

- 25 The prejudice against Douhet extended to his writings. In 1923 *Il dominio dell'aria* and *La difesa nazionale* made the shortlist prepared by the Regia Aeronautica General Command for unit libraries, but were rejected by units.<sup>50</sup> While the intellectual debate over airpower raged, *Rivista Aeronautica*, the official Air Force monthly, initially ignored Douhet, his books or his ideas. Whereas tactical bombing advocate Amedeo Mecozzi was readily accepted in its pages, Douhet was first mentioned in June 1926 (and in a footnote, at that) and the first full discussion of his thinking only came a year later.<sup>51</sup> His first

signed article followed in December 1927, accompanied by a disclaimer in which Colonel Aurelio Liotta at once lauded Douhet and underscored that *Rivista Aeronautica* also published “writings espousing ideas which do not always match those shared by the majority of those who study the use of aircraft”.<sup>52</sup>

- 26 This change was brought about by Balbo. Appointed undersecretary for Aeronautics on November 6, 1926 to replace Bonzani, Balbo probably considered Douhet one of the main challenges to be faced in the new office, doubly so after receiving a belligerent memo from the strategist.<sup>53</sup> To a large extent, Balbo faced with Douhet the same alternative which Lyndon B. Johnson would later face with J. Edgar Hoover – and like him, reasoned that “Well, it’s probably better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside pissing in.”<sup>54</sup> The two men were as different as they could be: the 57 year-old general had received 11 years of structured military education and could have been the father of the 30 year-old revolutionary commissioned as Second Lieutenant after a few months of training; but on the other hand, the illustrious theoretician had never seen combat, never considered becoming a pilot and seldom flown, whereas the great organizer was a decorated combatant, enjoyed using aircraft in conjunction with his office and was considering flight training. The main difference lay probably in their relationship with politics. Douhet was the outsider who shamelessly courted those in power in order to achieve personal goals; Balbo was the insider who shaped policy with a strong sense of loyalty to the party he had helped rise to power. It was possibly just this difference that made it possible to reach a mutually agreeable arrangement, for even the politically naïve Douhet must have clearly understood there was virtually no chance of his overturning a national political figure. On the other hand, Balbo guessed correctly that Douhet craved recognition for his role as airpower prophet. By giving him free rein to write in the official *Regia Aeronautica* journal, Balbo managed to redirect Douhet’s logic against those who still opposed the very existence of the fledgling Air Force.<sup>55</sup> In exchange for remaining firmly outside the policy and decision-making realm, Douhet could point to his articles in official publications as vindication of his vision – and, by extension, as condemnation for his many critics and opponents. It is perhaps not by

coincidence that after 1926 there is no trace of any further attempts by Douhet to achieve a leadership role.

## 6. Conclusions

- 27 The enduring intellectual fascination with his sweeping, if simplistic, claims for airpower supremacy has led to an equally exaggerated and simplistic perception of the influence Douhet exerted upon the Italian military in general and the Air Force specifically. Despite its necessary brevity, our analysis suggests that Douhet had a mostly uncomfortable relationship with the Army and that he chafed at the limitations that military service imposed upon his thinking and ability to influence policy.
- 28 While Douhet enjoyed a promising early career, the question must be asked about his long-term prospects in an Army in which aristocracy and social connections trumped brightness and academic performance. De Rossi attests to the widespread belief that General Staff officers needed to be “noble, blond and artillerymen”.<sup>56</sup> To the extent this was true, Douhet possessed only the third requirement. His marriage to Gina compensated in part for his small bourgeois origins. Her father Bartolomeo Casalis (1825-1903) had been a significant *Risorgimento* figure. His close connections to future Finance minister Quintino Sella, ambassador Costantino Nigra (with whom Casalis shared membership in the influential Masonic lodge Ausonia) and the journalist Giovan Battista Bottero, translated into a 30-year career first as prefect and eventually Director of Pubblica Sicurezza at the Ministry of the Interior (1885-1888). But Giulio and Gina only married in 1905, two years after Bartolomeo had passed away. Whether this indicates that the *paterfamilias* did not fully approve of their relationship is a matter of speculation; but it is undisputable that such contacts from a previous political era did not automatically transfer to Douhet or his time. At the same time, there is no doubt that Gina brought wealth beyond what Giulio could have ever achieved on his Army salary, particularly considering the social obligations which came with higher ranks; in fact, Major Douhet had pointed this out in his 1912 application for military attaché at the Italian embassy in Paris – a post he did not get. Perhaps more importantly, Gina’s resources meant Giulio no longer depended on his Army salary and career. It is

likely, albeit impossible to prove, that this new status changed his perspective and emboldened his latent opposition to what he not unreasonably considered military conservatism. Paradoxically, the marriage which helped Douhet overcome his limited social status might have been the first step towards becoming an outsider.

- 29 By attempting to create a political movement and courting PNF support, Douhet made painfully clear his position as being outside – indeed, opposed by – Army structure and hierarchy. Due to a mixture of factors ranging from an abrasive personality to limited situational awareness, this approach, which in military terms might be described as manoeuvring along external lines, failed miserably. In turn, non-acceptance created a vicious circle which led Douhet to make increasingly extravagant claims and further reduced his ability to influence policy.
- 30 The situation was not improved by the creation of the Regia Aeronautica, which remained under strong Army influence. While it can be fairly argued that Douhet ceased to be a Regia Aeronautica outsider when he became a frequent contributor to *Rivista Aeronautica*, the vigorous debate that followed each article suggests that hospitality did not equate with unreserved acceptance or, much less, official sanction of his doctrine. Douhet probably enjoyed his new role as father of airpower theory, but had to remove all references to the Regia Aeronautica, whether in terms of people, equipment or policy. The Balbo compromise did not, in fact, make douhetism the guiding principle of the Italian Air Force. Except for the half-hearted evaluations of heavy bomber prototypes by the 62<sup>a</sup> Squadriglia, the arrangement hammered out by the Army and Navy in late 1922 ensured that the bulk of Air Force strength remained dedicated to Army and Navy support duties.
- 31 Douhet remained an outsider even after his death in 1930. Although his writings had ignited the debate over the role of airpower in national defence, they never enjoyed commercial success. The 1931 anthology *Le profezie di Cassandra*, started by Douhet but completed by his friend Gherardo Pàntano, was subsidised by Gina, as was probably another anthology, *La guerra integrale*, prepared by Emilio Canevari and published in 1936;<sup>57</sup> nothing is known at present about the circumstances of the 1932 edition of *Il dominio dell'aria*, published by



Mondadori in a volume with some other writings.<sup>58</sup> Balbo contributed prefaces to the Douhet collections, but by and large he confined his praise to recognising Douhet's early interest in air war. In 1931, announcing his intention of holding large-scale air force manoeuvres, Balbo stressed the need to "form clearer ideas than those proclaimed by the many who write about military aviation and which have been debated for many years with great dialectics, but unsupported by experience".<sup>59</sup> In the 1932 preface Balbo stressed that Douhet had only "sketched" the issues and lamented that "unfortunately there is still only limited interest in these studies". In 1936 he went even further, writing that "Generalizations are not possible: air war in its proper sense cannot be applied always and everywhere and in every circumstance: it is absolute only in conflicts between countries with modern means." In 1938 his "Guerra aerea" entry for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* update volume was similarly nuanced. Other leading Air Force figures spoke differently: in 1938 Lt Gen Francesco Pricolo identified "terror" as the main armament of air forces.<sup>60</sup> But rhetoric told only part of the story. The five Regia Aeronautica expansion plans drawn up between June 1937–November 1939 never envisaged more than 12 heavy bombers (two squadrons), equivalent to 1.2–1.6 per cent of the bomber force and 0.54–0.4 per cent of the total Regia Aeronautica.<sup>61</sup> The ground support and interdiction force conceived by Mecozzi, fared much better, being allotted in those same plans 129–165 aircraft, or 16.9–13.75 of the fighter force and 5.75–5.6 per cent of Air Force strength.<sup>62</sup>

- 32 Arguably, the most telling indication of the limited acceptance of the Douhet and his thinking by the Italian military can be found in the fact that the Italian Air Force never achieved a status or role remotely comparable to the senior services. During Douhet's life – indeed, throughout the Balbo era – the Air Ministry averaged roughly one-seventh of overall Italian military spending, the Navy two-sevenths and the Army four.<sup>63</sup> Even more explicitly, the Army continued to supply the supreme commander throughout the Second World War and the Chief of the General Defence Staff until 1972.

## NOTES

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1 Douhet personal file, Ministry of Defence (hereafter, PF). For general biographical information I rely on: E. Canevari, "Vita e idee del generale Douhet", *La Stampa*, July 17-20-24-29 and August 2-4-9-12, 1938; F. J. Cappelluti, *The Life and Thought of Giulio Douhet* (Rutgers University: Ph.D thesis, 1967); G. Douhet (A. Curami and G. Rochat, eds.), *Scritti 1901-1915* (Roma: Stato Maggiore Aeronautica/Ufficio Storico, 1993), 17-24 (henceforth cited as *Scritti I* for Douhet's writings and as Introduction for the editors' comments); P. S. Meilinger, "Giulio Douhet and the Origins of Airpower Theory", in P. S. Meilinger (ed.), *The Paths of Heaven. The Evolution of Airpower Theory* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1997; reprinted, with slight changes, in P. S. Meilinger, *Airwar. Theory and Practice*, London: Cass, 2003); G. Alegi, "Douhet", in V. De Grazia and S. Luzzatto (eds.), *Dizionario critico del fascismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002); E. Lehmann, *La guerra dell'aria* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013).

2 PF.

3 For Giulio Douhet senior, I rely on his military record in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), MG, Direzione Generale Leva e Truppa, Divisione Matricola, Stati servizio degli ufficiali, decennio 1871-1880, b. 8.

4 For life at the Florence military school, see E. De Bono, *Nell'esercito nostro prima della guerra*, (Milano: Mondadori, 1931), 66-73; see also E. De Rossi, *La vita di un ufficiale italiano sino alla guerra*, (Milano: Mondadori, 1927), 19-24 for another school and different period.

5 PF.

6 PF.

7 G. Douhet, *Diario critico di guerra* (Torino: Paravia, 1922) II, 99.

8 G. Douhet, September 18, 1916, in *Scritti I*, 17-24.

9 PF.

10 G. Douhet, "L'automobilismo sotto il punto di vista militare. Schema di un sistema automobilistico per uso militare", *Atti dell'Associazione Elettrotecnica Italiana*, vol. V/n° 25 (1901), 246-274, republished with variants until 1904 and now in *Scritti 1901-1915*, op. cit., 5-24. The same journal had already published Douhet's electro-technics thesis "Calcolo dei motori a campo

rotante" (*Atti dell'Associazione Elettrotecnica Italiana*, vol. V/n° 2 (1901), 85-139).

11 G. Douhet, "L'automobilisme au point de vue militaire", in *Revue du cercle militaire*, vol. 31/n° 46 (1901), 529-532; n° 47, 553-555; n° 48, 584-586; G. Clément, *L'Automobilisme au point de vue militaire, d'après la conférence faite le 29 juin 1901, par le capitaine d'artillerie italienne Giulio Douhet, à l'Association électrotechnique section de Turin, et publiée dans les "Actes" de cette association*, Parigi, Charles-Lavauzelle, 1903.

12 On the genesis of the Ca.3, see G. Alegi, *Caproni Ca. 3 at War* (Berkhamsted: Albatros Productions, 2010-11), vol. 1, 12-26. For critical, and, in my opinion, somewhat biased descriptions, see Camera dei Deputati, "Relazione sulle spese di guerra per l'aeronautica", *Atti Parlamentari*, leg. XXVI, 1921-23 session, doc. XXI (hereafter *Relazione*), 257-258; Introduction, pp. XXIII-XXIX; A. Curami, "L'industria aeronautica a Varese, dalle origini al 1939", *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, vol. 17/n° 4 (1988).

13 Quoted in A. Pelliccia, *Nessuno è profeta in Patria* (Roma: Stato Maggiore Aeronautica/Ufficio Storico, 1981), 35. The four-engine Sikorsky Grand was widely, albeit superficially, reported in the Western press (e.g., *Flight* June 21, July 5, August 9 and 30 and November 8, 1913), but note that Douhet and Caproni discussed large aircraft several weeks before the Sikorsky flew. This points to an independent line of development. Cf. M. Maslov, *Russian Aeroplanes 1914-1918* (Old Saybrook: Icarus Aviation Publications, 2002); H. Woodman, "The Big Ilya", in Paul S. Leaman (ed.), *25th Anniversary Seminar Papers* (London: Cross & Cockade, 1996); D. Cochrane, V. Hardesty and R. Lee, *The Aviation Careers of Igor Sikorsky* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989).

14 *Relazione*, *op. cit.*, 257.

15 Now in *Scritti I*, 292.

16 Caproni diary (hereafter CD), March 15, 1914. I am grateful to the late Giovanni Caproni and Maria Fede Caproni, who over the years granted me access to their father's diary.

17 G. Pesce, *Maurizio Mario Moris* (Roma: Stato Maggiore Aeronautica/Ufficio Storico, 1994), 80.

18 CD, December 5, 1914.

19 "Un nuovo grande aeroplano militare", *Corriere della Sera*, December 9, 1914.

20 G. Douhet, "Douhet all'ufficiale istruttore del tribunale militare di Codroipo", in Antonio Monti (ed.), *Scritti inediti* (Firenze: Scuola di Guerra Aerea, 1951), 210-223. The chronology is supported by the note of September 21, 1916, *ibid.*, 25.

21 P. Boselli to G. Giardino, July 18, 1917; G. Giardino to P. Boselli, prot. 19464, August 9, 1917, both in ACS, PCM, GE, 19.4.1.45; for the origins and transmission of the idea, see G. Alegi, "Il mutilato morale: Giulio Douhet a Fenes-trelle", in *I quaderni della Rivista Aeronautica*, vol. 5/n° 6 (2010), *passim*.

22 A. Gatti, *Nel tempo della tempesta* (Milano: Mondadori, 1924), *op. cit.*, 398-399.

23 FP.

24 G. Douhet, *Come finì la grande guerra: la vittoria alata* (Roma: L'Elo-  
quenza, 1919).

25 Other Douhet works in this category include *Documenti a complemento della relazione d'inchiesta per Caporetto* (Roma: Ed. Il Dovere/Tip. La Rapida, 1919); *L'autodifesa del colonnello di S. M. Giulio Douhet al tribunale di guerra di Codroipo il 16 ottobre 1916* (Città di Castello: Soc. Tip. L. Da Vinci, 1919); *L'onorevole che non poté più mentire* (Roma: Tip. La Rapida, 1921).

26 G. Douhet, *Il dominio dell'aria* (Roma: Stab. Poligrafico per l'Amministrazione della Guerra, Roma, 1921; second ed., Roma: De Alberti/Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura, 1927).

27 On UNUS and *Il dovere*, see A. Ungari, "Tra mobilitazione patriottica e suggestioni eversive", in *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 5/n° 5 (2001), 41-76; A. Ungari, "Il pensiero aeronautico di Douhet ne *Il Dovere*", in *Studi storico-militari* 2003 (Roma: Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore Esercito, 2005), 127-136. For the overall context, G. Sabbatucci, *I combattenti nel primo dopoguerra* (Bari: Laterza, 1974).

28 Douhet gave testimony to the parliamentary board of inquiry on Caporetto on June 21, 1918 (transcript in Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore Esercito, fond H-4, b. 9, f. 100). He also presented the board with copies of the 1916 memos leading to the Bissolati affair, now in G. Douhet, *Documenti a complemento della relazione d'inchiesta per Caporetto* (Roma: La Rapida, 1919). For an overview of the inquiries see A. Ungari, "Le inchieste su Caporetto", in *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 3/n° 2 (1999), 37-80.

29 B. Tobia, *L'altare della Patria* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998); L. Cadeddu, *La leggenda del soldato sconosciuto all'Altare della Patria* (Udine: Gaspari, 2001);

A. Miniero, *Da Versailles al Milite Ignoto. Rituali e retoriche della Vittoria in Europa (1919-1921)* (Roma: Gangemi, 2008); G. Alegi, "In volo sul Milite Ignoto, *Rivista Aeronautica*", vol. 68/n° 1 (2011), 94-99.

30 On the Italian Army in the early postwar period, see G. Rochat, *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini (1919-1925)* (Bari: Laterza, 1967); J. Whittam, *Storia dell'Esercito italiano*, (Milano: Rizzoli, 1979) 325-349; L. Ceva, *Le forze armate* (Torino: UTET, 1981), 183-200.

31 G. Alegi, "'Resistere sulla superficie per far massa nell'aria': nazione, difesa nazionale e armata aerea in Giulio Douhet", in R. H. Rainero and P. Alberini (eds.), *Le forze armate italiane e la nazione italiana (1915-1943)* (Roma: Commissione Italiana di Storia Militare, 2004), 251-272.

32 G. Douhet, *La Difesa Nazionale* (Torino: Anonima Libreria Italiana, 1923); Gaetano Simoni, review, *La Nuova Politica Liberale*, vol. I/n° 3-4 (1923), 317-319.

33 G. Douhet, *La Difesa Nazionale* (Roma: Berlutti, 1925).

34 For INFC history, see G. Longo, *L'Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura. Gli intellettuali tra partito e regime* (Roma: Pellicani, 2000).

35 G. Douhet, "Per la diffusione della cultura bellica", *Educazione politica*, a. III/n° 7 (September 1925), 305-314.

36 G. Douhet, *ibid.*, 312.

37 INFC, "Elenco delle deliberazioni prese nella seduta 24 febbraio [1927] dal Consiglio di amministrazione dell'Istituto", in ACS, Presidenza consiglio dei ministri (PCM) 40.43, prot. 1060, f. 3.3/5. I owe this document to Gisella Longo.

38 G. Longo, *ibid.*, 57-58.

39 For an overall view of the political debate, see A. Ungari, "Il dibattito politico precedente la nascita dell'aeronautica italiana", in R. H. Rainero and P. Alberini (eds.), *Le forze armate italiane e la nazione italiana (1915-1943)* (Roma: Commissione Italiana di Storia Militare, 2004). ACS, PCM, 1922, b. 652.; "Douhet to Mussolini, August 31, 1924", in *Scritti inediti*, op. cit., 240; A. Lyttelton, *La conquista del potere. Il fascismo dal 1919 al 1929*, (Laterza: Roma-Bari, 1974), 395, which notably indicates that Diaz was no less opposed to Douhet than his old nemesis Cadorna; G. Rochat, *Italo Balbo*, (Ferrara: Bovolenta, 1979), 20, note 22; F. Stefani, *Storia della dottrina e degli ordinamenti dell'Esercito Italiano* (Roma: Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore Esercito, 1985), vol. 2, t. I, 91.

40 Richard Overy overstates the brief appointment by describing Douhet as “Mussolini’s first Air Minister” (R. Overy, *The Bombing War* (London: Penguin, 2014), 488).

41 G. Douhet to G. D’Annunzio, November 14, 1922, in Fondazione Vittoriale degli Italiani, Archivio Personale.

42 Although there is little evidence of any specific Douhetian animosity against the Navy in 1922-23, the sea service opposed Douhet in principle for fear that an independent air force would lead to the loss of its air component. G. Rochat, *Italo Balbo*, *op. cit.*, 20, note 22; G. Giorgerini, *Da Matapan al Golfo Persico. La Marina militare italiana dal fascismo alla Repubblica* (Milano: Mondadori, 1989), 124-140.

43 C. De Biase, *L’aquila d’oro* (Milano: Il Borghese, 1969), 381.

44 There is no systematic study of Air Force careers, but an analysis of the biographies of 33 fighter aces who survived the First World War indicates that 13 continued into the new service, 11 transferred to the Air Force reserve and 9 left the military altogether (G. Alegi, N. Franks and R. Guest, *Above the War Fronts*, London: Grub Street, 1997, *passim*); G. B. Guerri, *Italo Balbo*, (Milano: Bompiani, 2013, 1st ed., 1984), 518-519 describes the case of Captain Antonio Mecchia.

45 Among those who used such a mechanism was Italo Balbo. Balbo was discharged as Lieutenant on May 22, 1920 and promoted Captain in the reserve by seniority in May 1927. By then, he had become Consul General in the Fascist Militia rank converted to the equivalent Army rank; on August 10, 1928 he was transferred to the Air Force reserve, from which he was immediately recalled to active duty as Lieutenant General. Cfr. G. Rochat, *Italo Balbo*, Torino, UTET, 1986, 341-342; G.B. Guerri, *Op. Cit.*, 381.

46 Douhet to Mussolini, 17 June 1924, in *Scritti inediti*, *op. cit.*, 238.

47 The detailed Rizzo report to the Chief of Police is in ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservato, b.16.

48 R. Moizo, Programma di aviazione, [1923], in Italian Air Force Historical Office (AUS/AM), Fondo Cronologico, b. 272 Anni 1921-22-23, fasc. 365/3. The document, initialled by Arturo Mercanti in his capacity as director-general of civil aviation, was addressed to Eugenio Casagrande, chief of cabinet at the Commissariat. The narrow view of aviation held by the Army is evident in the 1926 Pariani memo signed and commented by Grazioli and Badoglio quoted by G. Rochat, *Italo Balbo*, *op. cit.*, 91-94.

49 G. Douhet, "Critiche del gen. Douhet all'ordinamento aeronautico", *Il Mondo*, April 7, 1923. The text became note XII of *La Difesa Nazionale* (1923 version).

50 Major Giuseppe Valle to officers, 20 July 1923, in AUS/AM, Fondo Cronologico, b. 272 Anni 1921-22-23.

51 U. Fischetti, "Le operazioni autonome aeree e il dominio dell'aria", *Rivista Aeronautica*, vol. II/n° 6 (1926), 45 and 47; O. An. [Oronzo Andriani] reviewed *Il dominio dell'aria* in *Rivista Aeronautica*, vol. III/n° 6 (1927), 191-193. The Army's *Rivista Militare Italiana* also examined the *Dominio* in June 1927; the anonymous seven-page review was possibly written by the journal's former editor, General Ambrogio Bollati, who had already intensely debated air-power with Douhet.

52 "Ai lettori", *Rivista Aeronautica*, vol. III/n° 12 (1927).

53 G. Douhet to I. Balbo, Balbo family papers, quoted in G. B. Guerri, *op. cit.*, 294. The Balbo archive was donated to ACS, but at the time of writing was not yet open to the public.

54 The famous quote can be found online: [www.nytimes.com/1971/10/31/archives/the-vantage-point-perspectives-of-the-presidency-1963-1969-by-lyndon.html?searchResultPosition=1](http://www.nytimes.com/1971/10/31/archives/the-vantage-point-perspectives-of-the-presidency-1963-1969-by-lyndon.html?searchResultPosition=1) (accessed on June 30, 2020).

55 C. G. Segré, *Italo Balbo. A Fascist Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 152-155; *id.*, "Balbo and Douhet: Master and disciple?", in A. Gentile (ed.), *La figura e l'opera di Giulio Douhet* (Caserta: Società di storia patria di terra di lavoro, 1988), 53-60.

56 E. De Rossi, *op. cit.*, 72-73.

57 G. Douhet, *Le profezie di Cassandra* (Genova: Lang e Pagano, 1931); correspondence between G. Pàntano and Gina Douhet, in Museo del Risorgimento di Milano archive, Douhet papers, f. 26935/3004 and 26938/3004; G. Douhet, *La guerra integrale*, (Roma: Campitelli, 1936).

58 G. Douhet, *Il dominio dell'aria* (Milano: Mondadori, 1932.) This book was produced under the auspices of *Le vie dell'aria*, a magazine published by the Air Ministry, possibly indicating a measure of official sanction. At present there are no records to prove or disprove this hypothesis.

59 I. Balbo, "La conquista dell'aria e la crociera atlantica", April 27, 1931, in *Sette anni di politica aeronautica* (Milano: Mondadori, 1935), 194.

60 Cited in R. Overy, *op. cit.*, 488.

61 F. Minniti, “Il problema degli armamenti nella preparazione militare italiana dal 1935 al 1943”, in *Storia contemporanea*, vol. 9/n° 1 (1978), 32.

62 G. Garello, “Mecozzi: l'altro potere aereo e l'aviazione d'assalto”, in C. M. Santoro (ed.), *Balbo. Aviazione e potere aereo* (Roma: Stato Maggiore Aeronautica-Ufficio Storico, 1998), 393-398; R. Sganga, P. G. Tripodi, W. R. Johnson, “Douhet's Antagonist: Amedeo Mecozzi's Alternative View of Air Power”, in *Air Power History*, vol. 58/n° 2 (2011), 4-15. Although retired on medical grounds in 1940, Brig Gen Mecozzi continued to serve as president of the Royal National Aeronautical Union and editor in chief of *Rivista Aeronautica* (1945-1952).

63 For 1926-1933 Italian military budgets, see G. D'Avanzo, *Ali e poltrone* (Roma: Ciarrapico, 1976), 858; L. Ceva, *op. cit.*, 223; G. Alegi, “Italo Balbo, stato della ricerca e ipotesi di lavoro”, *Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 20/n° 6 (1990). Because the wars in Ethiopia and Spain increased operational expenditure and constrained investment, top-level comparisons from 1934 onwards become difficult to make and interpret.

## RÉSUMÉS

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### English

The paper explores airpower advocate Giulio Douhet (1869-1930) as member of the Italian Army and argues that he was a brilliant outsider whose strategic concepts were never accepted by either Army or Air Force. From 1905 Douhet followed a pattern of putting forward still imperfect ideas, of receiving rejections, of making fresh unofficial attempts, of being criticised by experts and of making strong public responses. The WW1 clashes over the development of Caproni bombers, the conquest of Gorizia and responsibility for the Caporetto disaster turned Douhet from brilliant cadet into controversial pundit and militated against the innovative ideas he proposed. While his theories are generally presented as Italian Air Force official doctrine, Douhet always remained an outsider and resorted to courting Fascism to re-enter military aviation. But although eventually promoted to general, Douhet was never recalled to active duty and remained a much-debated polemist with little impact on policy and strategy.

### Français

L'essai soutient que Giulio Douhet (1869-1930), le partisan de la puissance aérienne, était un *outsider* brillant dont les concepts stratégiques n'ont jamais été acceptés ni par l'armée de terre ni par l'armée de l'air italiennes. Dès 1905, Douhet suivit un schéma dans lequel il avançait des idées encore



imparfaites, celles-ci étaient rejetées et il développait alors des théories encore plus innovantes. Il était régulièrement critiqué par des experts auxquels il répondait publiquement et avec énergie. Les conflits de la Première Guerre mondiale sur le développement des bombardiers Caproni, la conquête de Gorizia et sa responsabilité dans le désastre de Caporetto ont fait passer Douhet de brillant cadet à un expert controversé et ont contribué à discréditer les idées nouvelles qu'il proposait. Alors que ses théories sont souvent présentées comme la doctrine officielle de l'aviation italienne, Douhet fut toujours un *outsider* et eut à courtiser le fascisme pour retourner dans l'aviation. Bien que finalement promu Général, Douhet ne fut jamais rappelé au service actif et resta un polémiste très controversé, avec peu d'impact sur la politique et la stratégie.

## INDEX

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### Mots-clés

Douhet (Giulio), Balbo (Italo), Bissolati (Leonida), Caproni (Gianni), puissance aérienne, la maîtrise de l'air, aviation italienne

### Keywords

Douhet (Giulio), Balbo (Italo), Bissolati (Leonida), Caproni (Gianni), airpower, strategic bombing, italian air force

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