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The U.S. Air Force after Vietnam: Postwar Challenges and Potential for Responses

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Mrozek, Donald J. *The U.S. Air Force after Vietnam: Postwar Challenges and Potential for Responses*. Air University Press, 1988. 126pp.

Che Guevara's prediction that the United States would soon face several Vietnams has come true in a way he never intended. As a result of Vietnam, the United States has refrained from direct involvement in any new Third World insurgencies since 1975, but the war has proved to be a multifaceted experience with varied and sometimes contradictory meanings for different constituencies. For the nation's traumatized military services, the war set in motion a process of perhaps unprecedented self-evaluation. This travail of reexamination is the subject of Donald J. Mrozek's *The U.S. Air Force after Vietnam*. The title is misleading. A professor of history at Kansas State University, with an interest in the cultural roots of defense policy, Mrozek has produced a work that goes beyond the Air Force, equally encompassing the postwar reactions of the Army, the Navy, and Congress.

The text traces the evolution of responses to the war from initial rejection to hesitant assimilation, from dismissal of the conflict as an aberration to a nuanced appraisal from which a few generally accepted lessons can be drawn. At first, military leaders tended to disregard the war, seeing it as a freak failure that resulted either from the misapplication of sound military principles or from the irrelevance of those principles to an eccentric case.

Mrozek aptly calls this "validating doctrine by invalidating experience." Its effect on military planners was to produce a "back-to-basics" conservatism that neglected counterinsurgency for a renewed emphasis on conventional war. Recent years, however, have witnessed an increased interest in Vietnam and a greater willingness to confront its ambiguous meanings. From these soul-searchings, a tentative, limited consensus has emerged (that includes both "Hawks" and "Doves"), that stresses the need for open, explicit public support in future conflicts, matching clearly designated ends to equally specific means; and the necessity to view each potential conflict in its unique context with due regard for the peculiarities of the regions and issues involved.

The most original portion of Mrozek's study is a survey of congressional opinion on national security policy under the Reagan administration. Some of the results of his survey are underwhelming. Supporters of Reagan policies, for example, see Russia and Cuba as aggressors in Central America and elsewhere, while opponents are much concerned with adhering to the War Powers Act. But at a more sophisticated level, the survey's respondents provide further evidence of the limited agreement on the proper approach to foreign policy formation that our efforts to understand Vietnam may at last be producing. Although administration proponents and opponents were quick to craft Vietnam metaphors

with meanings to meet their divergent needs, both "Hawks" and "Doves" evinced a concern for caution, limits, a proper sense of context, and an awareness of inseparability of means and ends.

Some of the company grade officers who served in Vietnam are now arriving at the highest levels of command and the lessons that they have learned in Southeast Asia will be institutionalized in the structure and doctrine of our armed services. In this sense Vietnam will continue to exert an influence, perhaps unrecognized, on the future generations of military leaders.

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Hooper Edwin Bickford. *United States Naval Power in a Changing World*. New York: Praeger, 1988. 294pp. \$47.95

Few writers of the history of the U.S. Navy have attempted to cover this subject in one volume. One who has, in a most capable fashion, is the late Vice Admiral Edwin B. Hooper, U.S. Navy. His book begins in the year 1775 when Rhode Island's sloop *Katy* sailed from our Narragansett Bay to become the *Providence* in the first squadron of the new Continental Navy forming at Philadelphia. It ends in the year 1986 when the keel of Aegis cruiser *Normandy* (CG-60) was laid down at Bath, Maine. This most sophisticated of cruisers was

commissioned in Newport, Rhode Island in December 1989.

Admiral Hooper, a distinguished surface warfare officer, whose 45 years of active service concluded with six years as Director of Naval History (1970-1976), has produced a scholarly and readable work that emphasizes the importance of the Navy in the birth and growth of the United States. His background at sea included assignments in all types of surface combatants; four of these were command tours. Ashore he earned a master's degree in engineering from M.I.T. and attended the National War College. He was the first head of the Long Range Studies project at the Naval War College. As vice admiral he commanded the Pacific Fleet's Service Force and later was Senior Navy Member of the Joint Logistics Review Board in the Pentagon. Director of History for the Navy, he was able to review in-depth the role of the Navy in U.S. history.

In his book he concludes that in recent years there has often been an imbalance between consideration of technological improvements in forces afloat and lessons of the past regarding U.S. actions that involved the use of sea power. Unfortunately, the author died suddenly in September 1986, just after his first draft had been accepted for publication. Further editing and footnoting was then undertaken and done, most capably, by his sons, William and Edwin, Jr., along with Dr. Dean Allard, Senior Historian of the Naval Historical Center.