

1991

## Remarkable Intellectual Independence and Honesty

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### Recommended Citation

O'Brasky, James S. (1991) "Remarkable Intellectual Independence and Honesty," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 44 : No. 1 , Article 9.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol44/iss1/9>

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# PROFESSIONAL READING



A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

## “Remarkable Intellectual Independence and Honesty”

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James S. O'Brasky

- Berquist, Ronald E. *The Role of Air Power in the Iran-Iraq War*. Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air Univ. Press, 1988. 104pp. \$3.75
- Dean, David J. *The Air Force Role in Low Intensity Conflict*. Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air Univ. Press, 1986. 142pp. \$4
- Mets, David R. *Land-Based Air Power in Third World Crises*. Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air Univ. Press, 1986. 186pp. \$5
- Mrozek, Donald V. *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam*. Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air Univ. Press, 1988. 211pp. \$9

**T**hese four books are products of the Air Power Research Institute of the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education of the Air University. Each author uses carefully researched case studies to illustrate the development and employment of air power doctrine and each provides a scholarly analysis of the doctrinal strengths, fallacies, and organizational pressures illuminated in each study. One of the major strengths of the Air Power Research Institute program as seen in these four publications is the remarkable degree of intellectual independence and honesty exhibited by the

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authors. The administrators of this program have much cause to take pride in these publications.

The common theme of these four books is the role of land-based air power in low intensity conflict and regional war.

In *The Air Force Role in Low Intensity Conflict*, David Dean treats the reader to a definition of low intensity conflict, a short historical account of "air control" in small wars, and an excellent treatise on the little known military assistance effort provided by the U.S. Air Force to the Royal Moroccan Air Force in its conflict with the Polisario separatist movement. Although the author contends that the U.S. Air Force was unable to assist the Moroccans effectively, from a later perspective, the overall military assistance effort to Morocco has to be considered a signal success of U.S. foreign military policy. Morocco has effectively neutralized and isolated the Polisario movement while pursuing the development of a vigorous national life.

Dean's account of the Moroccan-Polisario air war and the ad hoc U.S. Air Force military assistance effort well illustrates the frustrations of such activity. Much of the difficulty is embedded in the relationship between the recipient country's geopolitical military culture with the representatives of a superpower's political-military culture. Much in U.S. military procedures inhibits assistance efforts. Mr. Dean offers some basic requirements for assisting a third world air force: a deep knowledge of third world countries in general and their military forces in particular; the ability to transfer knowledge and technique (i.e. appropriate training packages); cross-cultural awareness, and the capability for speedy reaction.

*The Air Force Role in Low-Intensity Conflict* is not especially well written, but the research is sound and the analysis and recommendations are excellent.

*Land-Based Air Power in Third World Crises* by David Mets was written to demonstrate the utility and limitations of U.S. land-based aircraft when supporting political objectives in third world crises. The author's perspective is strictly that of the Air Force. It is clear from this study that land-based air power (and indeed air power in general) can signal intentions, demonstrate support, modify behavior and terminate conflict. The principal limitation on land-based air power lies in the projection of power far from main operating bases. Under such conditions, a high level of effort is needed to place small amounts of combat power on target in a timely manner. This reviewer wonders about the implications for the U.S. Air Force in a world filled with heavily armed and capable adversaries, diminishing basing rights and access, and increasing overflight restriction.

The last two studies under review concern regional wars, that between Iran and Iraq and that in Vietnam. Both wars were waged at mid to high intensity levels.

In *The Role of Air Power in the Iran-Iraq War* Ronald E. Berquist shows why neither side chose to use its air power decisively. This is one of the first

explorations of air strategy and doctrine for regional powers (a different perspective from familiar global power considerations). Mr. Berquist begins with a treatment of the Arab air warfare experience and the institutional foundations of the two opposing air forces. He then examines the events of the air war. His basic conclusions are the following: (1) Political constraints heavily influenced the air strategies. Deterrence and conservation of force structure seemed to be major influences. (2) Military lessons learned are largely dependent on the cultural lens through which they are viewed.

Unfortunately, the author did not examine what was militarily possible for these two air forces. Compared to their ground arms, both air forces were seriously constrained in their options by their small size. Even if either had gained regional air supremacy by destruction of the opposing air force, this by no means could be translated into air superiority over the battle area, cities, or industrial complexes (due to each country's air defense system), or to the ability to conduct a decisive battlefield interdiction or strategic bombing campaign (due to each country's lack of throw-weight/aggregate lethality).

The centerpiece of this review is *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam* by Professor Donald J. Mrozek. This treatise deals with only one quarter of the air war in Vietnam, focusing tightly on an analysis of the Air Force's campaign in support of the ground war within South Vietnam with minor excursions into trail interdiction and the secret bombing in the neighboring countries. The U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy's "strategic" air campaign over North Vietnam is conspicuous by its absence. Even the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine air operations in South Vietnam are treated only in the sense of their impact on joint doctrine. Having limited the scope of the treatise, the author then proceeds to create a minor jewel of analysis.

Dr. Mrozek contends that not only did the United States' commitment to the war in Vietnam lack unity, clarity and coherence, but also that the commitment of the various parties (i.e. U.S. military institutions) to the war was similarly flawed. On the relatively simple matter of the application of air power to the ground war, the myths of each institutional position produced intraservice and interservice rivalries which had serious effects: "(1) efforts to resolve conflict over command and control and strategy went on far too long, perhaps too long to come to grips with the real problems; (2) a decision once agreed upon could not easily be overturned, since it represented either a delicate political compromise or too much invested effort and sunk cost; and (3) whatever the reality behind the services' motivations, the military seemed so self-serving as to undermine the authority they could have mustered with the executive branch in the moments when it was open to advice, or with Congress." Each of the points is starkly illustrated in carefully researched chapters. Mrozek illustrates well both the command and control rivalry and the limits of technology. The reading is often bitter; yet more than adequate confirmation for the contents are available from other sources.

Dr. Mrozek makes several observations which are an essential basis for future joint doctrine development:

- Americans are not only affected by war, they also *affect* war, altering and influencing its characteristics and course. The risks and dangers generated by America's own ways of thinking and behaving will almost inevitably become an element in a future conflict, especially if those ways are left to the unconscious.

- Embedded ways of thinking guide the armed forces. Differing doctrines make for durable rivalries. In the Vietnam conflict, without unswerving direction from civilian authorities, conflict arising from practice embraced by one service but dismissed by another could linger without adjustment or resolution.

- Technical proficiency, operational effectiveness and technological capabilities will not suffice in war. Without a correct strategic vision, these may bring victories to the side better endowed with them, but they will be phantom victories leading to final defeat or stalemate.

- Limited war does not necessarily represent limited commitments by all the participants. Differences in perception about a war's limits are born of difference between the means and objectives of conflict. Political considerations (assessments of national interest—a set for each participant) thus drive the nature and character of the limitations.

Much of Dr. Mrozek's analysis appears to state his position a bit too starkly. While it is certainly true that unsightly interservice rivalries punctuated the establishment of the command and control structure for the American participation in Vietnam, let us not forget that many good men from all services, at considerable personal and professional risk, attempted to make these doctrinal and structural monstrosities work. Let us also not forget that the doctrine of air-land campaigns, precision guided munitions, and precision bombing systems grew out of the Vietnam experience.

A second criticism of this work might well be that Mrozek ignores a whole dimension of force projection. In Vietnam and in any future regional war, the U.S. Air Force's participation was, and is, largely at the mercy of the theatre infrastructure. This dependency on the availability of main operating bases in theatre implies that except when, as in the case of Saudi Arabia where there were plenty of bases ready for aircraft, the maritime and expeditionary services will usually carry the "air power" burden until U.S. Air Force base development can occur. The implication of this observation is that over time the dominant service source of air power in an undeveloped theatre will change several times. This transition is rarely admitted, much less recognized and planned for in joint service doctrine.

To the naval community, the series of writings should contain some disturbing implications. The first of these is that the roles and limitations of doctrine in regional and low intensity warfare is hardly studied in naval

professional schooling, and the second is that even though naval participation in joint doctrine development activity has not been enthusiastic, it appears to be essential.

The general lack of naval interest in doctrine as a topic is becoming dangerous, partly because most future operations will be of a joint nature, and partly because doctrine is becoming embedded in staff planning tools. This embedded doctrine should be that desired by the professional military community rather than that most convenient to the software engineer however well intentioned. Such embedded doctrine is especially pernicious because it subtly teaches its operators specific thought patterns and continuously reinforces them.

This reviewer recommends all these books to a broad professional audience.

Lupton, Donald E. *On Space Warfare: A Space Power Doctrine*. Alabama: Air Univ. Press, 1988. 149pp. \$7

Even before space flight became feasible, the more foresighted strategic thinkers had already recognized its potential military use. This recognition, however, rested more on instinct than on a sound understanding of what could and couldn't be done in space. Space is a very different environment from the earth's atmosphere, though the Air Force insists that the two form a continuous medium, and vague analogies drawn from the history of air power have often misled those who would speculate on the nature of space power.

From the many conflicting currents in the ongoing debate about military space, Lt. Colonel Donald E. Lupton isolates four major trends: the Sanctuary School, which wants to keep space free of weapons in the belief that reconnaissance activities conducted there, left unhindered, strengthen deterrence; the Surviv-

ability School, which stresses the vulnerability of space assets and portrays space war as a tit-for-tat, beggar-thy-neighbor enterprise likely to leave all parties the poorer; the High Ground School, which favors space-based ballistic missile defense, insisting that these systems could decisively affect the outcome of a terrestrial conflict; and the Control School, which stops short of the claims of the High Ground advocates, yet regards victory in space in a future war as a probable precondition for success in other mediums.

Colonel Lupton strongly favors the Control School. He dismisses the sanctuary theorists as unrealistic: asymmetries in the combatants' degree of dependence on satellites would make them almost certain targets in any protracted war. The survivability school, Lupton argues, overstates the vulnerability of space systems. These systems, he contends, are defensible. In fact, they are no more at risk than fixed assets on