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Airpower in Three Wars

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scholarship and a patriot's sensibility is needed.

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Momyer, William W. *Airpower in Three Wars.* Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1978. 358pp.

It is a delight to find that the former commander of Seventh Air Force in Vietnam had at least one thing in common with one of his aircraft commanders (this reviewer) in that we both wondered from time to time just who the heck was in charge of the war, or at least our part of it! In fact, the main theme of *Airpower in Three Wars,* and perhaps even the main theme of William Momyer's professional life, was the endless struggle to establish the principle of unity of command for airpower in any theater of war.

The author of *Airpower* has had a ringside seat to that struggle for 40 years now, and is thus an authority on the subject. He began in 1939, fought as a fighter pilot in the North African campaign of World War II, and has been constantly involved in the tactical fighter side of the USAF until he reached its pinnacle as the Commander of Tactical Air Command in the late sixties. Though the Air War College has not been as productive of airpower theory as was its pre-World War II predecessor, the Air Corps Tactical School, perhaps we can speculate that General Momyer's tour on its faculty not only gave him a firm grasp of doctrine, and a bent for the intellectual approach to war, but also the interest and the ability to write the book at hand.

The organization of *Airpower* could hardly be more conventional yet it is quite effective. At the outset there are two chapters on strategy and command and control. Then each of the roles of tactical airpower, except tactical airlift, is given its own chapter. In fact, they are presented in the same order as they appear in the basic Air Force doctrinal manuals. The penultimate chapter discusses some case studies: JUNCTION CITY, Khe Sanh, Tet and other battles. The conclusion is direct and to the point--and its main argument is that we have learned the fundamental lesson that the operational control of airpower must be centralized at the theater level too many times, and at the cost of too many lives.

The real heart of the book is the chapter on that subject, command and control. As with the other chapters, the author gives the historical background from World War II and Korea, and discusses the problem in Vietnam in great and fascinating detail. Strike airpower in Southeast Asia was controlled by a multitude of authorities. The helicopter gunships belonged to the Army. Fighters sent against North Vietnam were controlled from PACOM. Fighters (sometimes the same airplanes on different days) employed against targets in South Vietnam were commanded by 7th Air Force. The Ambassador in Thailand had a say about the way that the aircraft based there were used. The same was true in Laos. The B-52s coming in from Guam, in the last analysis, belonged to the JCS. Until 1968 the air resources with the III Marine Amphibious Force were dedicated to the support of their own troops alone--though the excess sorties were volunteered for the support of the units of other services as well. To this reviewer, who wearily raced odd-looking transports from all manner of semi-private air forces for parking spaces, the whole story seems quite credible and tragic, given the fact that it was but a replay of the painful lessons of both North Africa and Korea. In the name of what they used to tell us in the USNA naval history course about unity of command, and at the risk of stinging some of the readers of this journal, I quote Momyer:

> The route package system was a compromise approach to a tough command and control decision, an approach which, however understandable, inevitably prevented a unified, concentrated air effort. Within 7th Air Force and TF-77, aircrew ability to carry out assignments against heavily defended targets was outstanding. So the disagreement wasn't over the training and capabilities of crews, but over how best to control two air forces from two different services. The same issue arose in the Korean War, and my present fear is that our continuing failure to settle this issue may be exceedingly costly in some future conflict such as, for instance, a NATO war. Any arrangement arbitrarily assigning air forces to exclusive areas of operation will significantly reduce airpower's unique ability to quickly concentrate overwhelming firepower wherever it is needed most.

To that, general (or admiral), I say amen—especially the part about aircrew ability!

General Momyer takes some pains in many of his chapters to point out the degree to which the air war was constrained by the political requirements. In his conclusion he gives lip service to the notion that the soldier's duty is to explain the difficulties in the contemplated action to his political superior, but to salute smartly and move out once that is done. Yet the lament about the constraints is so often stated that it is worthy of comment here. Momyer compares the situation in Vietnam unfavorably to those in Europe and Korea. Yet he is too glib here. During Korea, though the U.S. monopoly in nuclear weapons was gone, we nevertheless had an overwhelming strategic superiority. During the Vietnam war the U.S.S.R. was rapidly approaching nuclear parity, and to compare it with Korea is to compare apples and oranges. I should make it clear, though, that whatever his implications, Momyer never explicitly states that the many constraints were not justified.

Airpower is not the polemic the preceding paragraphs may suggest. The memoirs of a general who did not win are generally a bore. Not so here. The book is extremely well-written, even artful. There is a host of material about the day-to-day running of the air war that should make the work a part of the personal library of every airman. Though the book relies very heavily on official publications and its few commercial sources are autobiographical items from people on our side of things, it is nonetheless heavily documented and thus a worthwhile addition to the library of the military historian.

Regrettably, the layout, design and artwork of *Airpower* does not do it justice. Some of the maps are reduced so much that the names are nearly illegible. The effects of many first-rate pictures are lost because of poor reproduction, excessive reduction, or even a missing caption. Running heads would have helped. The bibliographical information expected on the back of the title page is missing (hardcover edition). There is no indication at all of the publication date and the only thing that suggests that it might have been published by the Government Printing Office is the Air Force Seal on the cover. *Airpower* deserved better production work and one hopes it will appear in later, more attractive editions.

Even at the risk of appearing obsequious, I will say that *Airpower in Three Wars* is a work that should be read by everyone who aspires to high command and not just command of air units. Though there is not much that is surprising in the book, it *is* a competent statement of an important leader's views on a number of significant doctrinal subjects. It is quite clearly written and

not too polemical. It is a good restatement of some things that need restating. Now that the aircrew members of all the services have learned something about hanging together, isn't it about time that our generals and admirals and politicians got together enough to prevent us from hanging separately?

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Nitze, Paul H., Sullivan, Leonard Jr. and the Atlantic Council Working Group on Securing the Seas. *Securing the Seas: The Soviet Naval Challenge and Western Alliance Options.* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979. 464pp.

In 1976 at the behest of the Atlantic Council of the United States, Paul H. Nitze assembled a distinguished group of Americans knowledgeable in naval affairs to consider the Soviet Navy's projected threat to the free use of the sea by the West. Over 2 years later and after 14 meetings this Working Group on Securing the Seas has published its findings. The result is this balanced and exhaustive analysis of the Soviet naval challenge and the Western Alliance's options for meeting it.

One of its sobering conclusions is that, "There is a stark contrast between the momentum of Soviet naval development and the relative indecisiveness on the Alliance side." There is a clear message that maritime supremacy, as important to the West as ever, is slipping away from us at an accelerating pace. The situation is grim but can be corrected if Western security leaders move now with vigor and better considered direction. We must do some fast hard thinking about what we have to do to secure the seas, then do it with a will. Consideration of the options outlined in this book would be an excellent start in this urgently needed rationalization and revitalization of maritime and naval policy.

Former Secretary of the Navy Nitze's group assigns a top priority to improving Western Alliance naval counterforce capability. A strong Mahanist case is made that being able to destroy the Soviet and Pact Navies is the best and most direct way to ensure the security of the seas. This concept is advanced as the logical foundation for the formulation of a definitive Alliance naval policy.

The ambitious scope of *Securing the Seas* includes discussion of the evolution and probable wartime force allocation of both the Soviet and U.S. Navies, Western maritime interests, technology and force requirements, budget constraints, the sealane defense problems, and the overall naval/maritime balance. The study purposely does not address the effect of SALT or conventional arms limitation, the full consequences of an all-out nuclear exchange, the new Law of the Sea, and a few other topics. Still, it is a big book and the most complete coverage of maritime problems and opportunities to date.

The most useful chapters cover the Soviet Navy. The treatment by Michael MccGwire and Donald F.B. Jameson assisted by Norman Polmar is balanced, complete and up-to-date. Most significant and interesting is MccGwire's exposition of the Soviet Navy's pro-SSBN strategy in which a primary mission of many general-purpose forces may be to protect SSBNs withheld in home waters as a strategic reserve for war termination and for theater nuclear strikes. Although this theory is now generally accepted, its implications have not yet been reflected in Alliance naval policy. The set of tables on the Soviet Navy are an excellent, compact reference. A sound understanding of the Soviet naval challenge is prerequisite to building a definitive Alliance maritime policy. This is the best appraisal of the Soviet Navy and its role in peace and war currently available. *Securing the Seas* is an idea book by a group for which one selection criteria was creativity. Many logical, innovative concepts are advanced. The