

SAASS 628
Academic Year 2019

Air Power in an Age of Limited War

13 November-14 December 2018

Instructors:

Prof Thomas Hughes

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Syllabus Approved: _____

Date: _____

SAASS 628

Air Power in an Age of Limited War

Introduction:

This is a history course. It concentrates largely on the experiences of the United States Air Force from 1945 to the present. It aspires to balance the timeless and timely elements of historical study, and to be relevant for today's practitioners of air power, broadly conceived. Air power was born and passed its formative years in the milieu of total war. From 1945 forward, however, it has confronted the more normative form of war: limited conflict. This adjustment was uneven for military forces and political leaders in general, but perhaps even more so for airmen and air forces because they lacked substantial personal *and* institutional experience with limited war.

This course will examine this accommodation to limited war. In times of peace, the course asks how well did military officers grasp their present circumstances and see the future; in times of war, the course assesses how well civil and military authority related political objectives and military action—the nexus of military strategy. Intellectually, the course supposes there is no such *thing* as air power, or land or sea power for that matter. There *are* air forces, armies, and navies—and there *is* military aviation, which may or may not be *powerfully* employed. Many variables influence the effective employment of military forces; among these are technical proficiency, tactical prowess, operational skill, strategic aptitude, and political competence. This course addresses each of these, though it concentrates more on the latter than the former factors. In all of this, SAASS 628 hopes to foster a pattern of thought and a habit of inquiry that will contribute to sound judgments about the use of air and space power in the pursuit of national objectives.

Grading:

Two components will comprise your final grade: an essay due 14 December, 60%; seminar participation and contribution, 40%. Details of both components will be provided by your instructor.

Faculty:

SAASS 628/1, 13 November: Making the Cold War Cold
Cherny, *The Candy Bombers*

The Cold War defined much of the post-World War II period, and its force and effect extends to this day. In the five years following World War II, the East and West moved from the Grand Alliance to the brink of another global conflict. This transformation, quick in pace and perhaps preordained in some form, was nevertheless uneven. Its final outcome was not inevitable, and along the way events helped shape the basic relationship between the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and their respective allies and adversaries. The Berlin blockade and subsequent airlift was one such signal incident. The Cold War's first major military contest between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Berlin crisis helped set important trends, among them the limited nature of direct East-West confrontations, the migration of Cold War struggles to peripheral areas of the world, and the search for non-lethal, or at least non-nuclear, means of competition. In other words, the Berlin airlift helped make the Cold War cold. As such, this non-lethal use of military aviation stands as a sentinel example of air power's strategic employment and remains an important reminder that aviation—in varied forms—can yield strategic and political success.

SAASS 628/2, 15 November: Air Power and Straitjackets
Crane, American Airpower Strategy in Korea

Measured military action for measured political gain was an exercise in statecraft for which few Americans had any personal familiarity in 1950. The Air Force—born of, nurtured within, and bolstered to preeminence by total war—also lacked any corporate experience with such endeavors. American airmen entered the Korean War with established theories of military aviation, a proud record from World War II, and an ever-clearer vision of their particular place in the pursuit of national security. But in Korea the Air Force ran into a political and diplomatic topography not ideally suited to its brand of air power. Fighting in Korea presented distinct challenges to every American combat arm, but for the newly independent Air Force it was truly a baptism of fire. In the end, the war challenged established beliefs about the efficacy of military aviation, the nature and condition of strategic air attack, the precepts of aviation doctrine, and the administrative and force structure of the Air Force. These challenges never rose past low ebb, however, partly because aviation did enjoy general tactical success in the war, and partly because airmen could claim some credit for the negotiated settlement. As a result, in Korea the strangeness of limited war bred discontent rather than disgust. Still, how best to apply a military instrument, conceived in total war, in conflicts of limited means for limited ends, was a question that long survived the Korean War.

SAASS 628/3, 16 November: Air Power, Chinese Style
Zhang, Red Wings Over the Yalu

Many of the operational limits placed on the U.S. Air Force in Korea sprang from American political concerns of wider war with the Soviet Union and/or China. Communist perspectives of the air war can help inform judgment about the validity of such sensitivities, as well as help illuminate certain operational and strategic aspects of the aerial fighting over Korea. Like their counterparts in the United States, Soviet and Chinese airmen entered the war in Korea with particular theories, attitudes, and objectives—and like American flyers, these men found limits to

the employment of aviation in Korea. For the Soviet Union, the air war offered a way to engage the West short of direct confrontation and to assist North Korea and China in a manner consistent with Russian policy objectives. For China's new communist regime, the air war offered an opportunity to acquire an air force and to stake out a place among the established nations of the world. For the Chinese air arm, the Korean War was a formative event, and other nations may use the Korean air war to help understand China's contemporary attitudes toward the employment of military aviation in the pursuit of national objectives.

SAASS 628/4, 19 November: Strategy and Change
Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*

The advent of nuclear weapons challenged long-held assumptions and conceptions of warfare. Paradoxically, these awesome weapons promised a break from established patterns *and* a return to some of war's oldest stratagems. In an age of great change and emergent turmoil, distinguishing which developments mattered, and how, from which did not, and why, became a paramount responsibility for strategists. This task required them to identify what of modern war remained constant, and what constituted revolution, judgments which would then offer a foundation upon which to synthesize a view of war consonant with the times. In doing so, Cold War defense intellectuals grasped war's changing grammar while seeing its unyielding logic, offering to subsequent strategists an example of judicious thought.

SAASS 628/5, 20: Relating Policy, Strategy, & Operations
Kaplan, *To Kill Nations* & Craig, *Destroying the Village*

The Cold War and the U.S. Air Force were well suited to each other: the Cold War presented to the United States a known enemy with an industrial economy suitable to strategic air attack; the total nature of the struggle translated into few constraints in either the theoretical or practical application of force; and World War II had bequeathed to military aviation a reputation for strategic efficacy and—for a time—a monopoly on the capacity for nuclear delivery. For both policy makers and air power practitioners, these factors suggested a force posture that stressed military aviation as a response to Cold War security threats—and the fit between national policy, strategy, and air power was especially tight in the early Cold War. But operationalizing concepts like nuclear deterrence and massive retaliation posed challenges. For the defense community, contentious matters of apportionment among the services bedeviled efforts to harmonize national policy, military strategy, and force structure. For military aviation, translating deterrence and massive retaliation into a plan at the operational level of war required choices in doctrine, procurement, and targeting. And for the Air Force, new developments in intercontinental ballistic missiles and a growing civilian interest in military strategy foreshadowed future frustrations and growing pains. Through it all—as East and West developed capacities to waste the world in an instant—sheer destruction threatened to overwhelm more discerning matters of strategy. Although the world of the early Cold War is long over, the imperative to relate military posture to national policy and strategy remains timeless.

SAASS 628/6, 26 November: Space: Science, Technology, and the Frontier
McDougall, *the Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age*

Military strategy, often difficult to execute, stemmed from a relatively clear equation up through World War II, at least in the United States. Until that time, marrying military means to political ends generally encompassed the competing interests and close coordination of two institutional actors—the military and the state—and relating them to the interests of a third body politic: the people. In the Cold War other institutions, with other prerogatives and other perspectives, bore on this strategic equation with novel vigor. These institutions, which included the university, the think tank, and the defense industry, exerted ever more influence at each point in the strategy making process: they participated in the development of military means; they helped formulate political policy; and they came to dominate the theoretical ground that sought to link military operations to political goals. This dramatic change in the strategic landscape alternately enriched or corrupted the strategic process; in every instance it complicated it. The Cold War space race was one development that reflected this new strategic age. This shift, consequential then, remains important because the new demands it placed on individuals in a complex strategic environment continue to challenge military officers and civil officials as they relate military means and political ends.

SAASS 628/7 & 628/8, 27 & 29 November, in turn: Strategic Air Power
Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power* & Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, in turn

The Vietnam War presented a rich, if frustrating, strategic environment for American policy makers and military leaders. A product of Cold War containment and domestic political calculations—which together prohibited inaction yet proscribed action—the war bedeviled efforts to link the efficient use of military force to the effective pursuit of political goals. For the U.S., the war's policy objective of an independent government in South Vietnam presented difficult challenges, and even a broad range of military operations may not have offered a clear path to the goal. As it was, American leaders looked increasingly to air campaigns to meet their strategic aims. These campaigns took different names, from Rolling Thunder in 1965 to Linebacker II in 1972; had different goals, from attempts to coerce Hanoi to cease its sponsorship of the war to efforts to reassure Saigon of American commitment; and met with different degrees of success. Overall, though, for the U.S., the Vietnam War produced at best an uneven record of influence through air power. American frustration with the war in general and the air war in particular helped shape attitudes toward air power efficacy and helped shape civil-military relations for decades following the war.

SAASS 628/9, 30 November: Air Power in Limited War
Corum & Johnson, *Air Power in Small Wars*
Cooling, *Case Studies in Close Air Support*

Important as the strategic air war over North Vietnam was, in a numerical sense sorties over northern skies constituted a fraction of the total air effort during the conflict. In the south, military aviation focused upon interdiction, close air support, transport, and humanitarian roles against a backdrop that more resembled insurgency or civil war than it did state-on-state conflict. The use of air power in such ways and within such circumstances has recurred persistently across time, and presents particular challenges for air forces. How, and how well, these tasks have been accomplished, and what impact they have had overall efforts, are and remain important components to any comprehensive judgement about ‘air power’—not only in Vietnam but across the entire history of military aviation.

SAASS 628/10, 3 December: Air War, Renewed
Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers*

The nadir following the Vietnam War proved fertile ground for three essential and related tasks which confront every generation of military officers: to assess recent experience, to situate present circumstance, and to imagine future conflict. In the years after the Vietnam War, the United States military adopted a number of changes, only some of which were of its own choosing. At the political level, Total Force policy and the Weinberger-Powell doctrine aimed to restrict the use of force to circumstances involving threats to vital U.S. interests, with attendant public and Congressional support, and with clear odds for overwhelming victory. At the strategic level, the Goldwater-Nichols Act changed the interaction among military commands and between military and civilian authority—the loci of military strategy making. And at the operational level, the Army developed and the Air Force adopted AirLand Battle doctrine, reflecting a reorientation of strategic posture toward favored battlefields in Europe—and in the process making the U.S. war machine highly tuned to a particular kind of battle that harnessed the modern lethality of weapons to an integrated approach to fighting. In many ways these developments remain, and the experiences of this earlier generation of officers illuminate one path for officers today facing the same essential and related tasks which confronted this earlier generation of uniformed servants.

SAASS 628/11, 4 December: Gulf War: Strategic Air Attack
Olsen, *Strategic Air Power in Desert Storm*

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait came at a time of strategic fluidity. The Cold War was ending, and existing strategic and security relationships sat at the precipice of the unknown, not only for both the East and the West. The war’s timing also coincided with a period of change within the U.S. Air Force, as AirLand Battle doctrine mixed with notions of strategic attack. As a result, the Air Force conducted its part in the conflict with doctrine that suggested one thing about aviation’s place in war, and aspirations that, in part, envisioned a somewhat wider role for air power. Desert Storm, the name given to a notional strategic air campaign aimed at Iraq, encapsulated these new ambitions, which in many respects recalled the claims of the very earliest air power thinkers. Strikes deep within Iraq certainly played an important part in the war’s conduct and conclusion. Just as importantly, however, memory of the Gulf War strategic air war came to dominate perceptions about combat’s cost and risk that continue to shape political considerations about war and peace to this day.

SAASS 628/12, 6 December: Gulf War: AirLand Battle

Putney, *Airpower Advantage: Planning the Gulf War Air Campaign, 1989-1991, 227-362;*

Keaney, Thomas, and Eliot Cohen, et al. *Gulf War Air Power Survey, Volume 2: Operations and Effects and Effectiveness, Part One, 249-326;*

Cohen, Eliot. "The Mystique of Air Power," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1994, 109-124

Whatever the accomplishment of the strategic air campaign in the Gulf War, the air war comprised more than operations informed by strategic attack. Other aspects of the air campaign aimed to reduce Iraqi fielded forces and to shape a battlefield conducive to ground operations. These strikes generally conformed to AirLand Battle doctrine, and in a quantitative sense, constituted a much larger share of the air campaign than strategic attack. At the same time, the exigencies of war pushed the air effort into a search for scud missiles in the Iraqi desert, a chore few air planners wanted but political considerations mandated. Any full review of the Gulf War air campaign, then, must reckon with these other aspects of the air war, and must consist of careful judgments about the relative contributions of each feature of air operations. In retrospect, the Gulf War reawakened the Air Force to the long-standing task of achieving strategic effect, whether this is accomplished through strikes at the center of enemy systems, on their peripheries, or at fielded forces. This was a challenge the nation asked the Air Force to meet more than once in the last decade of the Twentieth Century, and a challenge the nation will ask the Air Force to meet again.

SAASS 628/13, 7 December: Kosovo: Revival or Retreat

Henrikson, *NATO's Gamble: Combining Diplomacy and Air Power in the Kosovo Crisis*

In 1998 ongoing civil war in the former Yugoslavia created a crisis born of political and humanitarian concerns. In the air war that followed, a variety of political, diplomatic, and strategic factors served to limit both ends and means. Coalition imperatives meant there was no purely American national or military strategy in the struggle for Kosovo, and the war underscored the challenges of combined warfare. Although these matters complicated the prosecution of the air war, the result was still a victory that some saw as a confirmation of air power's historic promise to win wars alone. Other observers, concentrating on the myriad difficulties in prosecuting the war, saw not a revival of air power's basic premise but a retreat from the operational conduct of the Gulf War, where military forces had had a relatively free hand in the conduct of combat. Revival or retreat, the USAF experience in Kosovo served to initiate and accelerate numerous organizational and intellectual reforms, shaping the Air Force into the service it was at the turn of the century and beyond.

SAASS 628/14 & SAASS 628/15, 10 & 11 December: Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, in turn

Lambeth, *The Unseen War & Henriksen, Airpower in Afghanistan*

The turn of a new century witnessed a pivot from carefully calibrated operations and a return to major combat operations. How well Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom met their goals helps inform how well strategists made this transition. Both conflicts also invite political, strategic, operational, and tactical comparisons to Desert Storm. Relating the three conflicts can help delineate the strength of whatever patterns that might have emerged in air war across the last quarter century, and assist contemporary strategists in their judgments about such patterns into the future.

SAASS 628/16, 13 December: Operation Odyssey Dawn
Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*

If Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom evoke Desert Storm, Operation Odyssey Dawn echoes Allied Force. Operations over Libya carried with them relatively modest aspirations for success, cost, and involvement, for US forces anyway. Like the comparative nexus across recent major combat operations, Odyssey Dawn and Allied Force suggests patterns and characteristics of contemporary air operations in more limited war, though these trends may be somewhat different from those stemming from larger operations. Which tendencies are most likely to carry forward into the near and mid-term future is a central question for today's air strategists.

SAASS 628/17, 14 December: Limited Nuclear War
Larsen & Kartchner, *On Limited Nuclear War*

Nuclear weapons were a matter of near theology for the US Air Force across much of the Cold War. For many years, the service's culture, organization, and doctrine were shaped by the study of, and preparation for, nuclear warfare as much as there were by any other concern. With the rise of AirLand Battle doctrine and the end of the Cold War, however, the Air Force adopted an agnosticism of things nuclear; these matters were important and ever present, certainly, but not thought much about. With potential return to near-peer competition, the kinetic and latent use of nuclear weapons once again requires careful and sustained study.