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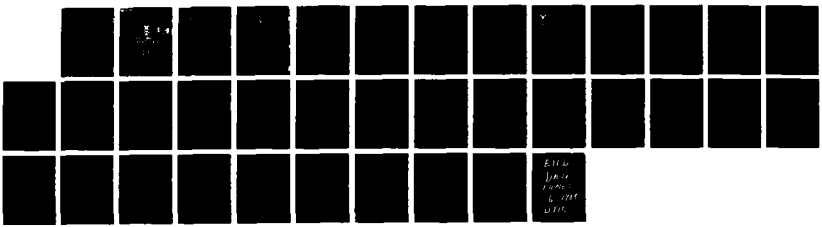

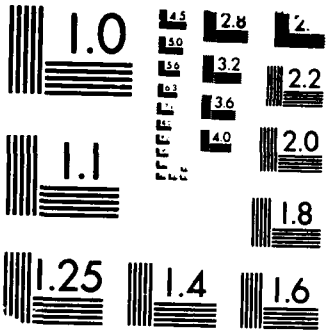

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ADMIRAL SHARP, AIR POWER AND VICTORY
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF STRATEGY FOR DEFEAT: VIETNAM IN RETROSPECT, BY ADMIRAL U.S.G. SHARP, USN

MAJ JAMES W. EWING, USAF 88-0875

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TITLE ADMIRAL SHARP, AIR POWER, AND VICTORY--A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF STRATEGY FOR DEFEAT: VIETNAM IN RETROSPECT, BY ADMIRAL U.S.G. SHARP, USN

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of requirements for graduation.

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This analysis examines the utility of Admiral U.S.G. Sharp's book, Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect, as a guide to the future employment of air power in a limited war. Admiral Sharp asserts that by showing how U.S. air power was misused in Vietnam he can justify its utility in future wars. The first part of the analysis examines Admiral Sharp's conclusions using the works of Carl von Clausewitz (On War) and Sun Tzu (The Art of War) to determine their theoretical validity as basic principles applicable to air power. The second part of the analysis examines Admiral Sharp's conclusions about the effectiveness of air power by reviewing the results of air actions in World War II, Korea, as well as Vietnam. The analysis concludes that Admiral Sharp's book is not a useful guide to future air power employment.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this analysis is to determine if Admiral U.S.G. Sharp's book, Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect, is a useful guide to the future employment of U.S. air power in a limited war.

Admiral Sharp's book, like many that followed the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, attempts to examine the successes and failures of the U.S military--air power in specific. Admiral Sharp attempts to show how air power should be used in the future by examining what he calls its "misuse" in Vietnam. However, Admiral Sharp fails to appreciate the real nature of the Vietnam War and so he assumes his conclusions about air power are valid in any circumstances.

This analysis examines Admiral Sharp's essay from both a theoretical and a historical context. Using the widely accepted works of Carl von Clausewitz (On War) and the Chinese master Sun Tzu (The Art of War) as a theoretical foundation for examination, the book presents some important, fundamentally sound principles applicable to air power in general. However, Admiral Sharp draws several specific conclusions about the utility and effectiveness of air power that cannot be supported by history and that apparently ignore the inherent limitations of a war with limited political objectives.

While Admiral Sharp's essay provides an interesting insight into much of the thinking of the 1960s, the fundamental truths he uncovers are all but lost within many unsupported conclusions about the effectiveness of air power. As a result, the book is of little value as a guide to the future application of air power.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major James W. Ewing's operational experience include six years as a pilot, instructor pilot, and evaluator pilot in the B-52H aircraft. While flying the B-52H at Minot AFB, North Dakota, Maj Ewing was a part of the Strategic Projection Force, the B-52 arm of the former Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF). In this capacity he helped plan, and flew in support of, the B-52 activities for the first of the "Bright Star" RDJTF exercises. His most recent assignment was as a Systems Staff Officer at Headquarters Air Force Systems Command, Deputy Chief of Staff for Systems. There he provided headquarters management for the B-1B bomber program, the KC-135R re-engining program for both the USAF and French Air Force, the KC-10 follow-on tanker/cargo aircraft procurement, and the Advanced Technology Bomber program.

Major Ewing is a 1977 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautical Engineering. In 1987 he received a Master of Aeronautical Science degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. A Distinguished Graduate from the Squadron Officer School class 84-D, Major Ewing has also completed Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) by correspondence and is currently attending ACSC in residence.

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REPORT NUMBER 88-0875

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR JAMES W. EWING, USAF

TITLE ADMIRAL SHARP, AIR POWER, AND VICTORY--A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF STRATEGY FOR DEFEAT: VIETNAM IN RETROSPECT, BY ADMIRAL U.S.G. SHARP, USN.

I. Purpose: To determine the utility of Admiral U.S.G. Sharp's book, Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect, as a guide to the future employment of U.S. air power in a limited war.

II. Objectives: To use accepted works of military theory to determine the validity of Admiral Sharp's conclusions and recommendations regarding air power direction and application as non-conflict-specific principles, and then to examine them against the historical results of air power in warfare.

III. Discussion of Analysis: This analysis examines Admiral Sharp's book in the context of military theory and then in light of the results of U.S. air power actions in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. The first part of the analysis will use the widely accepted works of Carl von Clausewitz (On War) and the Chinese master Sun Tzu (The Art of War) as a foundation to establish the fundamental theoretical credibility of Admiral Sharp's conclusions. Admiral Sharp criticizes the U.S. political leadership for employing a timid political/military strategy of gradual force application that escalated the war and prolonged the direct U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He also criticizes the Johnson Administration for ignoring military advice urging aggressive air actions over North Vietnam. Finally, Admiral Sharp asserts that the U.S. national will to support strong military actions in Vietnam was undercut by poor articulation of U.S. goals in Vietnam. The works of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu provide important insight into the fundamental theoretical value of Admiral Sharp's conclusions and their utility as basic

guides to future air power application. Using history as a backdrop, the second part of this analysis will look at the validity of Admiral Sharp's conclusions about the effectiveness of air power in warfare. Admiral Sharp asserts that air power is an effective instrument to destroy the enemy's capacity and will to continue the war effort. Had the U.S. aggressively pursued this approach in Vietnam, he asserts, the outcome would have been much different. This analysis examines these assertions and looks at how limited war impacts the use of air power, how the nature of the enemy impacts its effectiveness, and its potential as a decisive weapon.

IV. Conclusions: The tools of theory and history indicate that while Admiral Sharp highlights some important principles applicable to air power employment, he fails to understand many of the political and military realities of the Vietnam War, and war in general. The "theoretical" truths available in Admiral Sharp's book, are, however, buried within many unsupported conclusions about the effectiveness of air power. Without careful examination, the reader could draw the faulty conclusion that Admiral Sharp's book is a sound blueprint for air power employment in future wars.

V. Recommendation: While this book provides some interesting insights into the military thinking of the era, it should not be used as a guide to the future employment of air power in a limited war.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

"Therefore it is said that one may know how to win, but cannot necessarily do so." (10:85) These words from Sun Tzu's famous treatise, The Art of War, describe the thought that lies behind Admiral U.S.G. Sharp's book, Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect. Dealing almost exclusively with what he calls the "misuse" of U.S. air power during the Vietnam War, Admiral Sharp says the purpose of his work, ". . . is primarily to tell those who will listen, how air power could have done the job if only it had been used properly, and also to justify, thereby, its future use." (8:xvii) The purpose of this paper, then, is to examine Admiral Sharp's essay in an attempt to determine its merit as a guide to future employment of military air power in a limited war.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

This analysis of Admiral Sharp's essay will begin with a brief look at the author, his rise to become Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) during the most intense years of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and by way of this review, establish his credibility as a critic of the use of U.S. air power in Vietnam. This paper will then provide a synopsis of the book, Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect, outlining Admiral Sharp's stated purpose and scope, his use of sources, and the overall flow of the book. From this synopsis, a summary of Admiral Sharp's conclusions about the direction, application, and potential of air power will serve as a point of departure for analysis of the real utility of his work.

The actual book analysis will be twofold in scope. The first part of this analysis will use the accepted works of the great military thinkers Carl von Clausewitz (On War) and Sun Tzu (The Art of War) to establish the fundamental theoretical credibility of Admiral Sharp's criticisms. By examining Admiral Sharp's conclusions about the gradual application of force, the role of the military in the war planning effort, and the tie between objectives and will; their validity as basic, transferable principles can be determined.

The second part of the analysis will build upon this theoretical foundation and then look at the validity of Admiral Sharp's assertions about the potential effectiveness of air power. While not intended to be an analysis of the air war in Vietnam, this part of the examination will look at the use of air power in limited warfare, its effectiveness as a tool of warfare, and its potential as a decisive weapon.

The utility of Strategy for Defeat as a guide to the future employment of air power is the important issue at hand. Admiral Sharp assumed that by showing how air power was "misused" in Vietnam he could justify its future use. Clausewitz warned, however, "It is legitimate to judge an event by its outcome [but] judgement based on the result alone must not be passed off as human wisdom." (13:627)

By combining an examination of the actual results of the employment of U.S. air power with an examination of Admiral Sharp's fundamental criticisms of the direction and application of military forces, the lessons available in this book will not be overlooked or dismissed simply because of the outcome of the Vietnam War.

Chapter Two

ABOUT THE BOOK

AUTHOR

Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, United States Navy, was born on April 2, 1906, and upon graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy class of 1927, began what would be by any standards an impressive military career. (7:226-227) Following graduation, Admiral Sharp began a series of shipboard tours that spanned from 1927 to 1940 with a only a brief return to the Naval Postgraduate School in Annapolis for a course in Operating Engineering. A subsequent two year tour in Washington D.C., in the Navy Bureau of Ships, was followed by additional shipboard duty from 1942 to 1944 that included involvement in virtually every phase of naval operations during World War II. Admiral Sharp commanded the destroyer USS Hogan that participated in the Casablanca landings in North Africa followed by command of the USS Boyd that was involved in the Gilbert Islands invasion in 1943, the shelling of Truk Island in 1944, as well as the shelling of the Marianas Islands, Iwo Jima, the Philippines, and Okinawa. During the highly successful U.S. operations in the Pacific, Admiral Sharp became intimately familiar with the effectiveness and utility of air power. From 1944 to 1950 Admiral Sharp held stateside command and staff positions that culminated in graduation from the Naval War College in 1950. He returned to sea duty as the commander of Destroyer Squadron 5 and was subsequently assigned to Korea. While assigned to the Korean theater, Admiral Sharp was attached to the staff of the Commander, Seventh Fleet, where he served as Fleet Planning Officer for General MacArthur's famous Inchon Invasion. Once again, Admiral Sharp was witness to the tremendous potential of air power to support military operations. Additional senior command and staff tours followed beginning in 1951 and in 1959 he assumed command of the Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific. In 1960 Sharp became Commander, First Fleet, followed four months later by assignment as Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Plans and Policy), Naval Department. In September 1963, he was appointed Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet. (7:226-227) Admiral Sharp's final duties began in June 1964 when he assumed the duties of Commander in Chief, Pacific, where he was in command of all operations in the Pacific to include U.S. military operations in South Vietnam, until his retirement in July 1968. (8:xv)

OBJECTIVITY

Author's Bias

Using Webster's definition of bias as a "mental leaning or inclination" (14:137), it is natural that Admiral Sharp's essay is at least partially dependent on the impact of a "mental leaning" gained from 41 years of active military duty that included his tour as CINCPAC. Calling his book ". . . a review from the unique position of personal association," it is obvious that he intended to tell the story from *his* view,

Like Korea, Vietnam became a painful experience as the U.S. once again trudged through the unfamiliar soil of limited warfare. Unfamiliar, because, despite the "Korean aberration," the United States was still of the mentality that wars were total in nature and would require all the benefits that technology and massive firepower could bring to them. The U.S. involvement in Vietnam once again frustrated this American ideal. Clausewitz recognized one of the key frustrations that would attend limited war: ". . . the less intense the motives, the less will the military element's natural tendency to violence coincide with political directives. As a result, war will be driven further from its natural course, the political object will be more and more at variance with the aim of ideal war, and the conflict will seem increasingly *political* in character." (13:88)

Admiral Sharp would agree with Clausewitz' statement based on his own critique of the political decision making process during the war. ". . . [i]n fact [it] effectively throttled the military's ability to conclude successfully the commitment into which that leadership had drawn us." (8:4) This apparent disdain for the way the civilian leadership handled the war in Vietnam was, and is still, shared by many in uniform today. However, Clausewitz would likely critique such views as lacking in understanding. "[W]hen people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not saying what they really mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not with the influence." (13:608)

The tie between the political and military is real and necessary. "War cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense." (13:605) It is important for the military man to realize that war without political aim has no purpose. Even Sun Tzu, while he spends little time expounding on the nature of the political-military relationship, recognized the supreme position of the civil ruler. "[T]he system of employing troops is that the commander receives his mandate *from the sovereign* [the civil leadership] to mobilize the people and assemble the army." (emphasis added) (10:111) Underlying Sharp's work is the belief that the war should be left in the hands of the military once military force is called upon by the political leadership. Says Sharp, "Once the decision is made to use military power to settle a political issue, that power should be used to its fullest to get the war over with as quickly as possible." (8:128-129) Few would argue with Admiral Sharp's comments. However, the military man must again remember that the use of force is merely a tool and that the reason for using that tool, and the degree to which it is used, is ultimately controlled, not by the military strategy, but by the political objectives. Again, Clausewitz emphasized that while "[p]olitical considerations do not determine the posting of guards or the employment of patrols, . . ." the civil leadership ". . . is wholly and exclusively entitled to decide which events and trends are best for the objectives of the war. . . at the highest level the art of war turns into policy--but a policy conducted by fighting battles rather than by sending diplomatic notes." (13:606-607)

While Admiral Sharp intended these comments as criticisms of the actual application of air power, they allude to another potentially dangerous concept, that the military must have the freedom of choosing the level of military actions it deems most appropriate to accomplish the object of the war. Admiral Sharp does somewhat soften this theme saying, "The aims and objectives of an international political strategy may quite reasonably and legitimately be limited, as were ours in Vietnam . . . ;" however, the basic theme resurfaces as he finishes this comment: ". . . but the actual application of military force required to achieve those aims cannot and *must not* be tactically limited." (8:270) A discussion of the actual application of force will follow later in this paper; however, it is important to address what appears to be Admiral Sharp's lack of understanding of the depth and breadth of the political-military connection. By virtue of its position of authority, civil leadership retains the privilege of orchestrating

all aspects of the war. Clausewitz further emphasizes the preeminence of the political over the military in a clear summary: "Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political." (13:607)

The real concern presented in Admiral Sharp's statement is not, as some may cynically retort, that the military commander will select a wholly inappropriate level or type of force to achieve a military victory. The danger is more subtle. If the military instrument acts independent of the political objectives, it may also act contrary to those objectives. The result may be loss of political control. An earlier reference to Clausewitz applies here as well. If the link between the political and military establishments is severed, ". . . we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense."

SUMMARY

"Without such a theory it is generally impossible for criticism to reach that point at which it becomes truly instructive. . . ." (13:157) To that end, the time honored thinking of both Clausewitz and Sun Tzu have been very valuable tools to help evaluate the utility of Admiral Sharp's book.

The works of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu have vindicated many of Admiral Sharp's strong criticisms. Highly controlled application of military forces can unnecessarily escalate and prolong a conflict. They have also underscored Admiral Sharp's assertion concerning the necessity of military advice at the highest levels of policy to ensure that the military arm is capable of supporting the political objective. Clausewitz and Sun Tzu also clearly supported Admiral Sharp's assertion that the political objective must be clearly articulated; it must allow for a clearly defined military objective, and that lacking such clarity, the national/political will of a nation may not support military operations at the scale required to achieve the political objectives.

While his criticisms are generally supported by Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, Admiral Sharp fails to recognize the inextricable tie between the military arm and the political establishment. Clausewitz continues to remind the military man that without a guiding political objective, war makes little sense; war is not a self-sufficient entity. The art of warfare is truly responsible to, and is in fact, a part of the political dimension.

The next chapter will expand on these conclusions by looking at Admiral Sharp's assertions about the effectiveness of air power against the actual results of air power actions during World War II and Korea, as well as Vietnam. Even at this point, the thoughts of Clausewitz are useful. He calls for us to understand what theory has to teach, but also for us to realize ". . . the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities." (13:593)

Chapter Four

ADMIRAL SHARP AND HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

"My purpose is primarily to tell those who will listen how air power could have done the job if only it had been used properly, and also to justify, thereby, its future utility." (8:xvii)
Adm U.S.G Sharp

One of the most popular assertions concerning the employment of military forces in Vietnam, especially in military circles, is that the U.S. military could have "won the war" if it hadn't been constrained by the political establishment. The answer to this assertion, if indeed there is one, is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, the purpose of this chapter is to examine Admiral Sharp's assertion that "air power could have done the job if only it had been used properly . . . ."

Recalling that the purpose of the overall analysis is to determine the merit of Admiral Sharp's book as a guide to the future employment of air power in a limited war, this chapter will begin with a look at air power as a military tool within the context of a war with limited objectives, or "limited war." As noted in the previous chapter, limited political objectives can greatly restrain the use of military forces and will naturally result in less than ideal use of that force--something that thoroughly frustrated Admiral Sharp. This chapter will then address Admiral Sharp's assertion that "air power could have done the job" by looking at the decisiveness of air power. History provides a somewhat mixed answer to that question. The answer also points to the difference between a military victory and a political victory Clausewitz recognized that the military mind often draws a distinction between military and political objectives, especially in wars with limited aims. Just as often, however, the military man assumes that military victory is the same as political victory--an assumption that Admiral Sharp seems to make in his book.

AIR POWER AND LIMITED WAR

"Measure it with a micrometer, mark it with a grease pencil, and cut it with an axe." This familiar adage, and the many similar versions, all point to a situation where the instrument used to accomplish the task was unable to deliver the product that was intended. This principle is also applicable to the use of air power Admiral Sharp recommends in his book. While he apparently understood that the objectives of a war could ". . . quite reasonably and legitimately be limited. . . ," he does not seem to believe that the instrument used to achieve those objectives should be limited in any manner: ". . . but the actual application of force . . . cannot and must not be *tactically* limited." (8:270) As we learned from Clausewitz in the previous chapter, the objectives in war are the complete and rightful controlling

authority over the scope of the military force used. Political objectives may very well dictate the degree of application of military force. Such is the essence of limited war.

The Enemy

Colonel Donaldson Frizzell and Mr W. Scott Thompson, in their book The Lessons of Vietnam, stated that the U.S. failure in Vietnam ". . . resulted [partially] because of misconceptions about our friends, our enemies, and ourselves." (12:iv) One key point of this observation is the imperative of knowing the enemy. Limited war makes this principle crucial. When the use of force is restrained, the blows must be aimed where they are certain to be the most effective.

Nowhere in his book does Admiral Sharp come to grips with how the nature of the enemy can impact the utility of military force. He tended, rather, to view the North Vietnamese as more of a textbook enemy, calling for air power to ". . . systematically flatten North Vietnam's military and industrial base." (8:125) Nowhere in his book does Admiral Sharp consider whether such efforts would be truly effective. James Clay Thompson, in his book Rolling Thunder: Understanding Policy and Program Failure, describes the nature of the Vietnamese industrial base:

> . . . Vietnam could hardly be considered an industrial area. North Vietnam was an agricultural country with a primitive transportation system and almost no industry. Furthermore, the North Vietnamese army did not follow conventional Western organizational forms, using large amounts of supplies. That army did not need to be supported with a huge logistics tail involving massive supply convoys and large supply bases. The supplies required for its operations were minimal and could be transported by a limited number of trucks, sampans, or coolies. Ironically, the primitive transportation system became an asset for resisting strategic and interdiction bombing. Paved roads for motor-driven vehicles were generally not required. Dirt roads used to support oxcarts could be repaired with a few shovelsful of dirt. (11:72-73)

Certainly a poor country with little industry to support its war making effort will not be brought to its knees if that industry is disrupted. That fact that North Vietnam was not a highly industrialized country points to the important fact that they received a great deal of their supplies from China and the Soviet Union. Dr Guenter Lewy in his book, America in Vietnam, noted ". . . the main reason why the bombing campaign did not destroy North Vietnam's war-making ability was, of course, Soviet and Chinese aid, which more than made up for losses and damage." With the obvious restrictions prohibiting attacks on Chinese soil, it seems clear that the very nature of the enemy made North Vietnam ". . . an extremely poor target for a sustained air campaign." (5:391-392)

Admiral Sharp strongly criticizes the U.S. administration for being ". . . disproportionately concerned with the possibility of Communist Chinese and Soviet intervention" and therefore unwilling to step up the tempo of the air campaign. (8:4) Such restraints, though, *are the nature of limited war.* Since no one can know for certain what the Soviet or Chinese reactions may have been to a stepped up U.S. air effort, it seems somewhat presumptuous to assume that we should automatically be willing to take the risk in the future and use air power without limitations. Moreover, it is not at all clear that a more intense campaign would have altered the North Vietnamese response. In the end, it seems most evident that the first consideration when employing air power is to understand the susceptibility of the enemy to air power. Perhaps the situation will require an entirely new method of application. Finally, like it or not, the level of force used must remain consistent with the overall political objectives. Perhaps Sun

Tzu best emphasized the importance of this point saying, "If ignorant of your enemy and yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril." (10:84)

The Objectives

While it is evident that the U.S. did not fully understand the nature of its enemy, it is equally apparent that we did not understand ourselves. To properly know ourselves we must understand the actual limits on our capabilities. The military, the civilian leaders, and "[t]hus the public expected . . . that the bombing operations in Vietnam would bring the war to an early conclusion." (12:129) The objectives set for air power were too ambitious for the task at hand. "We must understand the limitations and capabilities of air power . . . and learn to balance our selection of objectives with full appreciation of the capabilities of the men and the systems that we intend to use. And we must be aware of the human, material, and psychological costs." (12:141)

As to the selection of objectives for the aerial campaigns, no single source appears to provide an all inclusive, officially accepted listing. Col Frizzell, writing as an Air Force Research Associate, however, provided one such listing based on a U.S. Senate directed study that included such objectives as "[t]o reduce the infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam . . . to make North Vietnam pay a high cost for supporting the war in the South . . . and to break the will of North Vietnam." (12:132) This listing shows very clearly how poorly focused the U.S. air power objectives were in Vietnam. How could the U.S. ever determine the necessary air power to accomplish these objectives? Are these objectives really realistic given the limited nature of the war? How air power was to accomplish these goals was never completely clear. Admiral Sharp himself noted that ". . . definitive programs and actions adequate to secure those objectives were not generated." (8:33)

The attempts to use air power to completely stop the infiltration of men and supplies into the South proved to be ineffective. While North Vietnamese losses were high, at no time did the bombing ". . . put a ceiling on the volume of supplies the enemy was able to move southward." (5:391) As mentioned earlier, the nature of the enemy made him much less vulnerable to air attack than envisioned. Maj Gen George Keegan, a former Chief of Air Force Intelligence noted, "I know of no responsible airman who has ever judged publicly that the Air Force could do more than impede maybe 10 to 15 percent of the flow of the enemy's logistics. Our weapons were totally inadequate to the task." (12:141) Admiral Sharp apparently recognized the limits on air interdiction of supply lines, stating: "The primary objective of using air power should not be to try to stop infiltration, but rather to destroy the sources of the material being infiltrated. That is the way to use air power properly, and it has been so used in other wars, very effectively." (8:134) How effective such campaigns have been will be dealt with later in this chapter. Certainly, Admiral Sharp makes an important point about attacking the source of supplies, but just as certainly the limited nature of the war precluded that approach. As Dr Lewy pointed out, ". . . Soviet and Chinese aid . . . more than made up for the losses and damage." (5:392) Just as in Korea, the "sources of the material being infiltrated" was beyond the reach of U.S. air power--not because of inherent weaknesses in air power, but because limited war restricted our ability to target the sources. There was clearly no way the U.S. could maintain any domestic or international support for attacks on Chinese soil. Once again, such is the nature of limited warfare.

As far as using air power to increase the cost of the war for North Vietnam and ultimately break their will, the objectives of air power were still beyond its abilities to perform in the context of a limited war. From its earliest days, air power doctrine has assumed that by destroying an enemy's ability to wage war--its industrial base and population--it will lose the will to continue the fight.

(2:15-23) Once again, had the U.S. understood the nature of the North Vietnamese enemy, this objective would have been recognized as unattainable. The fact that the North Vietnamese had so little to lose by destruction of their meager industrial base is evidence to that fact. As to the results of the U.S. effort:

> Reports from the diplomatic community and observations of travelers in the North indicated shortages of food and consumer goods and widespread economic disruption generally, but there was no evidence that these hardships had reduced North Vietnam's ability or willingness to continue the conflict or had demoralized the population to any appreciable degree. On the contrary, the bombing appeared to have engendered a psychological climate of common danger which aided the government in winning support for its demands of stern sacrifices and facilitated other measures of control. The bombing had also helped the regime to cast the U.S. in the role of a cruel aggressor. (5:391-392)

Conclusion

Throughout his book, Admiral Sharp asserts that air power could have "done the job" in Vietnam. He fails, however, to consider the nature of the North Vietnamese enemy which prevented air power from attaining its classical objectives. In doing so, he creates an unrealistic assessment of the utility of air power. "We employed our air power in a limited way, but held on to our rather unlimited expectations of what it might accomplish. If military advisers made a mistake in this war, it was in failing to recognized that air power cannot have the desired results if it is applied in an environment that is inappropriate for its use. Further, it cannot succeed if it is employed in a manner that strongly mitigates against its ultimate success." (12:130)

Clearly, the utility of air power is dependent on the circumstances and the decisiveness of air power is not a given.

IS AIR POWER DECISIVE?

When Admiral Sharp said "air power could have done the job," the obvious question is: "What job?" The answer to that question is crucial to understanding how to apply air power and to determine the success of that application. Few would disagree with a conclusion that air power could have played a significant role in successful military operations. If, however, Admiral Sharp meant that air power could have been the decisive blow leading to a satisfactory conclusion to the war, the evidence in Vietnam, as well as history, is lacking. The overall tone of his essay implies the latter. "What a difference [in results] had we been allowed to utilize fully our military-technical power." (8:96) Moreover, the nature of the objectives previously discussed indicates that Admiral Sharp was not the only one who held such a view. Over and over again, Admiral Sharp pushed for the use of air power to strike the key industries and services in Vietnam. "Every known POL facility and distribution activity should be destroyed and attacked until the war is concluded. Denial of electric power facilities should begin at an early date and continue until all plants are out of action." (8:110) These strikes were to be conducted for the same basic reason as they were during World War II, to eliminate the enemy's ability to support the war. Admiral Sharp looked at air power like most in the military in the 1960s. "They assumed that air power would be as decisive a factor in Southeast Asia as it was against Germany and Japan in 1944 and 1945." (12:129)

World War II - Europe

The use of air power in Germany provides an interesting insight into the actual effectiveness of air power since it was used for much the same purpose as it was in Vietnam. According to The U.S Strategic Bombing Surveys, "In the RAF and the United States Army Air Forces there were some who believed that air power could deliver the knockout blow against Germany, and force capitulation." (1:9) Destroying Germany's war supporting industries was the key.

The results of the bombing campaigns in Europe were impressive and generally served to vindicate this philosophy. The Bombing Surveys concluded, "The German experience suggests that even a first class military power--rugged and resilient as Germany was--cannot live long under full-scale and free exploitation of air weapons over the heart of its territory." (1:37-38) Of the German people, the Surveys stated: "Their morale, their belief in the ultimate victory or satisfactory compromise, and their confidence in their leaders declined...." (1:39)

Nevertheless, despite the success of the U.S. air campaigns, the decisiveness of air power was not completely conclusive. The bombing survey prefaced its findings saying: "No one should assume that because certain things were effective or not effective, the same would be true under other circumstances and other conditions." (1:5) In light of this statement, it is important to realize Germany was a modern, industrialized, economic power. Without a large economic framework, the only remaining target for air power is the will of the population. The Surveys indicate that despite the serious impact to the German population, "... they continued to work efficiently as long as the physical means of production remained." (1:39) Dr Lewy expressed very succinctly, the ability of air power to defeat the enemy's will to support the war effort:

> In short, the ... bombing of Germany in World War II demonstrated that bombing focused on the will to resist is unable to accomplish its goal. The far more concentrated and intense bombing of Japan, culminating in the use of two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, supports this conclusion. 'In Japan there was no more tendency than there was in Germany for the low morale to find expression in any organized popular movement to revolt, or in manifest pressure upon the government to surrender.' (5:395)

Korea

While in World War II the U.S. was able to achieve the goal of unconditional surrender, in Korea, an armistice was all that would be forthcoming. In many ways Korea was like Vietnam. The scope of allowable military actions were severely limited when compared to operations just five years earlier against Germany and Japan. For the first time the U.S. was faced with a relatively primitive, lightly armed enemy, supplied primarily from beyond its borders. Borders that politically limited the ability of U.S. air power to strike at the source of the enemy's support.

> Because the enemy obtained logistical support largely from the Soviet Union and Communist China, his supplies could not be interdicted at their source, which is the most effective method of destroying war supplies. Instead, the supplies had to be cut off along the lines into Korea ... but results became marginal as the enemy was able to repair bridges, railways, and marshaling yards; construct bypass bridges; and reload supplies to be carried by animals or humans. It might be said that air interdiction was on the average 90 percent effective, but the enemy was able to keep going with the other 10 percent of his supplies. (3:63)

Apparently when Admiral Sharp asserted that using air power to strike the source of supplies had been accomplished successfully in other wars, he did not include the Korean experience.

Linebacker I and II

Despite mixed opinions as to the results of the air efforts up to 1972, the "Linebacker" campaigns illustrate the inherent value of air power. Admiral Sharp called this campaign ". . . a skillfully coordinated effort, exemplifying the way air power should be used." (8:252) To be sure, the results of the campaign were impressive. "The railroad system had been brought to a virtual halt as bridges, marshaling yards, rolling stock, locomotives, and storage warehouses were destroyed or damaged. Electric-power facilities were heavily damaged; warehousing and supply depots had been extensively damaged. Airfields, SAM sites, military complexes, naval bases, ports, shipyards, and communication centers were all subjected to heavy damage or destruction." (12:168-169) Following this campaign, Dr Lewy notes that former JCS Chairman Admiral Thomas Moorer believed, "Air power, given its day in court after almost a decade of frustration, confirmed its effectiveness as an instrument of national power. . . ." (5:414)

Clearly the Linebacker campaign showed the tremendous force available through air power, but the political objectives that prompted this campaign differed from those that brought air power to Vietnam. The U.S. subtly moved from a goal of defeating the North Vietnamese war effort to simply attaining a negotiated settlement. Former President Nixon, in his book No More Vietnams, explained that "We had to convince the North Vietnamese by our actions, not just our words, that they were better off concluding an agreement on our terms than continuing the fighting." (6:157) The Linebacker bombing campaign clearly accomplished this purpose. Mr Nixon notes that within 48 hours after re-initiating talks, the essence of a cease-fire was agreed upon. (6:158)

The important question is not whether air power brought the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table, but whether the results of the negotiations were satisfactory to the U.S. Even though a cease-fire agreement was signed soon thereafter, Dr Lewy explains, ". . . in order to consider this result as conclusive proof of the decisiveness of air power, one would have to be convinced North Vietnam, in signing the Paris agreement, put itself at a serious disadvantage, and the evidence for this assumption is lacking." (5:415) The Paris cease-fire agreement actually provided North Vietnam time to re-group its forces overrunning South Vietnam in just over two years after the U.S. withdrawal. While Linebacker accomplished the goal of forcing a negotiated settlement,

> . . . it failed to achieve a settlement that could be considered a victory for either South Vietnam or the U.S. By December 1972 there were few military targets left in North Vietnam and, short of the complete obliteration of the country, it is likely that no continuation of the bombing would have induced North Vietnam to withdraw its forces from the South or make other important concessions. In this sense, then, the argument for the decisive effectiveness of . . . air power in the Vietnam conflict . . . remains unproven. (5:415)

Even though Linebacker was a *military* success, it did not lead to a *political* victory. The distinction between a military and a political victory is important for both military and civilian to understand, and one that Admiral Sharp fails to make. Military success does not always result in, nor is it equivalent to, political victory. As Clausewitz noted, "The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at a later date." (13:80)

SUMMARY

"We could have brought the Vietnam War to a successful conclusion in short order, early in the game, once the decision had been made by the civilian leadership to engage with U.S. forces. All we needed to do was assemble the necessary force and then use it the way it was designed to be used." (8:2-3) With these words, Admiral Sharp echoes the opinions of many in the military today. To subscribe fully to this statement, however, fails to recognize the many crucial realities inherent in a war with limited objectives. The U.S. experience in Vietnam showed that the World War II-type expectations for air power were unrealistic.

Admiral Sharp asserts that air power could have been decisive if it had been used properly, yet he fails to recognize the limited political nature of the war and the susceptibility of the enemy to air power. The nature of the North Vietnamese society and its military were such that classic air power targets such as war-supporting industry and large supply lines were too rudimentary to be decisively struck with air power. There is little evidence to support Admiral Sharp's conclusion that a bigger, harder blow could have done enough additional damage to significantly increase the overall impact to the North Vietnamese war effort. Ironically, even World War II, where air power played a significant role, showed that air power did not break the will of the people to continue the effort. In fact, it showed that massive aerial bombing was most effective against highly industrialized, highly supply dependent nations rather than small nations lacking such resources. The objectives set out for air power, to crush the enemy's ability and will to continue the war effort, were doomed to mediocrity from the beginning.

Once again, the fact that Saigon is now Ho Chi Minh City prophetically shows that air power may achieve significant tactical victories, however, it does not win wars. The political institutions must pick up where warfare stops. To win a war, said Clausewitz, ". . . peace must follow." (13:92)

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

"In thinking about conclusions . . . I fear we are already on the way to our distressing, if quite human, national tendency to bury yesterday's mistakes under today's obsessions, not stopping even to mark the grave in our rush to do so." (8:267)

Adm U.S.G. Sharp

No matter how the reader receives his book, Admiral Sharp makes a very important point about the need to study past military actions in order to learn from the mistakes. As Sun Tzu observed, "War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied." (10:63) Admiral Sharp's book is an attempt to learn from what he believes were mistakes in the employment of U.S. air power in Vietnam, and from this analysis to extrapolate its future utility. The result is an interesting book that provides good insight to much of the military thinking of the day concerning air power. It is not, however, the complete story of air power employment in Vietnam and it does not lay a sound foundation for future air power employment.

Why Limited War?

As noted earlier, Admiral Sharp said his book was an attempt to prove the future utility of air power by examining its failures in Vietnam. It is interesting that while Admiral Sharp recognizes that the Vietnam War was a "limited war," he makes no reference to that fact when he draws his conclusions about the utility of air power. Vietnam, as in Korea, was a war limited in scope and by political boundaries; and those very limitations had a significant impact on how and where the U.S. was able to use its air power. Clearly, limits on military force are inherent in limited political objectives.

The conclusions drawn from Admiral Sharp's book must be weighed carefully and in the context of the political, military, and social realities of the Vietnam War. Applying these principles to future wars requires the same careful analysis of the circumstances surrounding *those particular* conflicts.

Lessons from Theory

Approaching Admiral Sharp's book armed with the works of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, his essay makes some significant points concerning both the direction and application of military forces. While for obvious reason neither Clausewitz or Sun Tzu speak directly to the use of air power, the general principles they highlight are certainly appropriate to that instrument.

Admiral Sharp rightly concludes that the planning and execution of warfare must include input from knowledgeable, military leadership. It must also be applied forcefully and expediently, and tasked to

accomplish clearly defined objectives. The inability to operate with such clear guidelines can erode the effectiveness of air power as well as public support for the use of the military instrument.

Admiral Sharp fails, however, to acknowledge the crucial relationship between the political leadership and the military instrument of national policy. Without a proper understanding of this relationship, the military community, and its leadership, will be continually frustrated as it tries to build and employ a "decisive" military force. Much of today's dogmatic doctrine derives from such thinking. The military man does not build a war in isolation from policy. The objectives of war and its conduct must remain under the control of the political leadership--an important principle to remember when engaged in limited warfare. If the results of the Vietnam War were poor, it is because of the policies, not the political influence.

Lessons From History

While Clausewitz and Sun Tzu have nothing to say about air power in particular, history has much to tell. As noted earlier, it is essential that the lessons from history be understood in context, especially when drawing conclusions about its effectiveness.

In every war where air power played a role, but especially limited war, history indicates that the effectiveness of air power depends upon the nature and susceptibility of the enemy and upon prudent, realistic objectives. The use of air power to interdict supply lines and subsequently break the will of an enemy is highly dependent upon the industrial, economic, and social nature of the enemy.

In addition, Admiral Sharp and many others assumed air power could deliver the "knockout blow;" that air power in itself was a decisive force in war. World War II, Korea; and Vietnam viewed in their proper context, all clearly prove that while air power is a powerful and effective tool, it is only so when it is tailored based upon a clear understanding of the susceptibility of the enemy and a reasoned analysis of what it can realistically accomplish. Air power cannot win a war by itself.

The Book As A Whole

The real utility of Admiral Sharp's book cannot be determined by merely weighing the good points and the bad points. While examining the book against the thinking of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu uncovered some important truths applicable to air power, Admiral Sharp's approach of examining "failures" to "justify future utility" does not offer the same benefits. Close study shows that many of the "failures" of air power resulted from misunderstanding the enemy and generally unrealistic objectives. Moreover, Admiral Sharp never comes to grips with the restrictive nature of limited warfare. The "theoretical" truths in Admiral Sharp's essay are buried within unsupported assertions. Without a careful examination such as this paper provides, the reader would likely miss these truths and draw the conclusion that employing air power as Admiral Sharp explains should be the blueprint for future wars. While this book provides some interesting insights into the military thinking of the era, it is not a useful guide to the future employment of air power in a limited war.

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