Theory of War: ""Voices From the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists,"" David MacIsaac

Most sections in this lesson are taken from articles published in Paret, Peter, ed. Makers of Modern Strategy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. Authors and titles of specific articles are given in the headings. Page references within the outline, unless specifically indicated, all come from this work.

1. "Voices From the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists," David MacIsaac

   a. Giulio Douhet (1869-1930)
      i. Believed modern did not distinguish between combatants and noncombatants
      ii. Land offensives no longer possible
      iii. Solution is massive bombing attacks against centers of population, industry and government
      iv. Seriously underestimated capacity of air defense

   b. Billy Mitchell (1879-1936)
      i. Centralized coordination of all air assets under an autonomous air force

   c. J.F.C. Fuller and B.H. Liddell Hart
      i. Theoretical framework for air-land coordination in armored war

   d. US and British strategic practice in World War II
      i. Controversy over ineffectiveness and inhumanity of British night saturation bombing
      ii. Controversy over the delay in effectiveness of US precision bombing
      iii. Tendency of US effort saturation bombing (fire-bombing of Japan and the use of the A-bomb)
      iv. Controversy over whether resources would have better been employed elsewhere since victory through air power alone is not possible

   e. Nuclear-armed air warfare
      i. Theory revived in 1954
      ii. Essentially an economic, not strategic decision: "more bang for the buck."
      iii. Kennedy/MacNamara decisions in 1961 to build up non-nuclear air power ("flexible response") and missile launched warheads (ICBMs and SLBMs)
         (1) Vietnam: flexible response
         (2) Cuban Missile Crisis: missile launched atomic weapons
f. Post World War II non-nuclear war
   i. Lessons of World War II were not learned
   ii. "for air interdiction to be effective, the surface forces had to be in control of the tactical initiative." (643)
      (1) as in Egypt, 1967, but not in Vietnam

g. Vietnam
   i. Five separate air wars:
      (1) South Vietnam
      (2) North Vietnam
      (3) Laos (clandestine)
      (4) Cambodia (clandestine)
      (5) Ho Chi Minh Trail
   ii. Goals
      (1) To pressure North Vietnam to withdraw support
      (2) To interrupt the supply flow
      (3) To strengthen the morale of South Vietnam
   iii. Air war rigidly controlled from Washington
      (1) No precedent for the commitment of air power to achieve limited, essentially psychological goals

h. NATO air forces
   i. Essentially a deterrent force, with nuclear and non-nuclear capability
   ii. Changing technology seems to be dominating the field of air power theory today