

AFTER KOSOVO: INSIGHTS INTO FUTURE OPERATIONS

CORRELATION OF FORCES

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BACKGROUND

Every conflict spawns a cottage industry of lessons learned and Kosovo is no exception. The first wave of “lessons learned” came from the journalist community and of necessity drew the most obvious conclusions from the rush of information that flooded the airwaves this summer. The next lessons learned reports came from the governments of the participating nations. Such reports tend to be turned out hurriedly since behind the desire to draw appropriate lessons is a political imperative to weigh in to the debate with the right story. Senior DoD and military officials will follow with a quick-look lessons learned if for no other reason than to make sure that the story told gives appropriate credit where credit is due, not the least motive being to ensure the desired effect on the future budget requests.

For Kosovo, the US and its allies are beyond this initial phase and the time has arrived for serious, objective, in-depth analysis. This is a strength of the Western alliance. While the initial instinct is one of self-congratulation (or damage limiting by spinning the events), over time, defense analysts are allowed the freedom to do systematic analysis and reveal findings that find

their way into decisions about the future of our defense policy and the configuration of our armed forces.

REASONS FOR ANALYZING OPERATION ALLIED FORCE

In the spirit of the “third wave” of lessons learned analysis, this paper will review Operation Allied Force in Kosovo. The aim is *not* to chronicle events but to determine what insights Kosovo provides into future military operations with a focus on coalition operations.

In what ways was Operation Allied force representative of future military operations?

With each conflict and each lessons learned exercise there are prudent analysts who point out, correctly, that the next war will inevitably be different than the last. Military plans crafted on the basis of experience of the last conflict are assured of being off the mark when events present us with a different adversary or, if it is the same adversary, he learns some lessons himself and changes tactics against us.

That said, there are elements of Operation Allied Force that are highly likely to be typical of future operations. These are well worth paying attention to and integrating into the framework in which defense policy is crafted and force planning is done.

1. National survival of the US or of its coalition allies is not likely to be at stake.

There is no country or coalition of countries that can field enough conventional military power to challenge that of the Western allies. National survival against classical military invasion is no longer the primary challenge for defense planners that it was in the cold war where defense

planning in NATO was very much focused on the national survival of Germany and other member states in the Center Region. The conflicts the US and its allies are engaging in on the periphery of NATO territory have a great deal to do with maintaining a civilized political and social order in Europe with democratic institutions at its base. Ensuring that member nations of NATO will not be invaded and occupied by a hostile country will continue to be a bedrock of official NATO policy, but it is not where the action is.

This trend is likely to hold even as the US looks beyond the periphery of Europe. In other key regions, more attention is being paid to the damage that hostile states using weapons of mass destruction could inflict while overt invasion and occupation seems less likely than as recently as a decade ago.

2. Campaign objectives will be limited.

Since national survival will not be at stake, the campaign objectives will be limited. The United States and its Western European allies felt an imperative to intervene in Bosnia and more recently in Kosovo, but in both cases the political authorities felt a countervailing imperative to limit their involvement. This was due both to concerns to put bounds on the effort to be expended and to a realization that over the long term, the communities affected had to establish their own modus operandi for governing themselves and providing for internal security.

Even in the case of Desert Storm where a critical interest of the West (access to a secure and steady flow of oil) was at stake, the objectives were limited to a restoration of the pre-war

borders. The coalition halted well short of destroying the Iraqi Republican Guard, which it could have done, let alone move on to Baghdad.

3. National Command Authorities will take interest in the details of the military operation.

In every conflict there is a measure of complaint from the military commanders about constraints put on the execution of the operation. The experience in Kosovo was no exception. As far as the military commanders were concerned, they had to labor under political authorities who

- were slow to commit forces to the operation;
- insisted that casualties be minimized;
- insisted that collateral damage be minimized; and
- pressed for the operation to be brought a quick close.

There were important political reasons behind each of these, and every reason to believe that they will typify coalition operations on the periphery of Europe (and even beyond).

The reluctance to commit forces lay in a hope to resolve the situation with a minimum of effort and a minimum of violence. In fairness to the political leadership, the air strikes in Operation Deliberate Force (in Bosnia) had succeeded in bringing President Milosevic to the negotiating table with only one-tenth of the force (as measured in combat sorties flown) as finally proved necessary in Operation Allied Force. What appears to have been underestimated was the degree to which Serbia was facing pressure at the same time from Croatian ground forces to the north.

The imperative to minimize casualties derives from the condition that immediate vital interests of the allies, let alone national survival, was not at stake. Large portions of the body politic in allied capitals felt the operation was of minimal significance to their own interests and from this follows a reluctance on the part of the national command authorities to have to defend a high price in lives. This held not only for allied forces and refugees but also for Serbian civilians. Too much bloodshed and support for the operation could have been undermined.

A related consideration is the careful avoidance of collateral damage. This was the chief motivation for the close review of the tight constraints on the targets chosen for attack. There was direct intervention by senior political leadership to place classes of targets, and in some cases even specific targets “out of bounds”. Again, the appropriate desire to manage the operation with a minimum of damage *coupled with* a strong reluctance to inflict damage disproportionate to the objectives of the campaign.

Ironically, when the limited early commitment of forces failed to bring Serbia to halt operations, pressure grew from the political leadership to bring the operation to a close rapidly. The consensus the allies had forged was delicate and it was uncertain how long it could be maintained. Political support in some key capitals (Paris and Berlin to name two) had been marshaled by underscoring the humanitarian nature of the operation. As the conflict dragged on, it began to look more like a military operation with a cloudier end-game than had been presented at the outset. Naturally, it is impossible to say how long the coalition would have stayed intact if

Milosevic had not called back his forces when he did. That said, in any operation short of one that directly threatens a critical national interest, support can be expected to wane as it drags on.

4. Future military operations will be done in coalition.

Military planning for and execution of coalition operations are inefficient. The need to accommodate forces that are not fully interoperable in equipment or in doctrine with and that may not be up to the same standard of US forces, makes the whole less than the sum of its parts. Since the end of the cold war, there has been an unresolved debate over the extent to which and how US force planning and operational planning should account for contributions from allies. US military planners can make the argument that, with the exception of very limited circumstances (most notably, the breakout of a “second major theater war (MTW)” while the US is engaged in a MTW and elsewhere an SSC elsewhere), the need for a military contribution from allies is marginal.

Moreover, this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

- The US defense budget is larger than that of the next seven largest defense budgets combined. Five of these are allies with whom we have formal defense treaties.
- The US spends more on personnel and training than the next five countries, four of which are allies, which helps to ensure that US forces will continue to be well-trained and ready to fight.
- The US is programmed to spend more on procurement over the next five years than the next ten countries combined, seven of which are allies. This makes it a good bet that among the “the next militaries” the US will be dominant.

- The US has programmed more for military research and development than all the militaries of the world combined, thus giving the US the chance to expand the technology and capabilities gap in “the militaries after next”.

Granted these investment figures are “input measures”. Resources translate into battlefield capability only when managed and invested wisely. That said, investing to attract, train, and retain quality soldiers; steadily modernizing the capital stock of military equipment; and investing in developing the next generation of equipment pays off over time.

But military capability is only half the story. Political support for an operation is needed both at home and in allied capitals. Indeed, in any operation far from our shores, the political imperatives for operating in a coalition are going to outweigh considerations of military efficiency. In future operations on the periphery of Europe and beyond, we will be in the field with allies and partners. The challenge for the US is to work with them to make the most of their military contributions.

IT IS DANGEROUS TO EXTRAPOLATE INTO THE FUTURE EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED IN OPERATION ALLIED FORCE.

While the characteristics of Operation Allied Force described above can be expected to characterize future operations as well, the injunction to be careful about planning the next war based on the last one should be given equal time. The most prominent anomaly in Operation Allied Force may well turn out to be the marginal involvement of ground forces. While the desire to minimize casualties, especially among US and allied forces, steered the political authorities

away from the commitment of ground forces, eschewing their employment in advance was probably a tactical mistake and may have prolonged Milosevic's resistance.

In future operations, especially against paramilitary forces and classical forces operating in small, dispersed units as Serb forces did, the only way to bring a conflict to closure may be to defeat them on the ground with a strong contribution from the air. A question for the "lessons learned" exercises to address is what it would have taken to prevail on the ground had the Serbian paramilitary forces not been firmly under Milosevic's control (i.e.- if they had to be driven out by military force). This is a key area for future planning: how to cope with paramilitaries or with dispersed, dug in conventional forces operating on territory familiar to them.

THE ALLIED CONTRIBUTION

Within the context of what experiences the US ought to pay attention to in Kosovo, the section that follows reviews the salient features of Operation Allied Force and looks at the contributions the allies made. It goes further and cites key areas where allied forces were either inadequate or malconfigured for the operation. It further identifies high leverage investments the allies can make to upgrade their capabilities for future operations.

1. Aircraft committed

Beginning with the aircraft committed to Operation Allied Force, two items are worth noting:

- by the end of the operation, the allies had committed almost as many aircraft to the operation as has the US.

- the US, on the other hand, supplied the overwhelming majority of support aircraft (tanker, lift, jamming, defense suppression, and reconnaissance).

Naturally, the number of aircraft committed is not a good measure of the military contribution made to the conflict. Not all aircraft are equal in capability and some air forces provide the support and training needed to maintain a higher sortie rate than others. Moreover, the quality of pilot training and of munitions delivery make a considerable difference in combat effectiveness. That said, by supplying about 45% of the total combat aircraft for tasking by the SACEUR and his component air commander COMMAIRSOUTH General Short, the allies showed their willingness to put significant forces into combat. The allied record is less impressive in the category of support aircraft, notably transport, tanker, jamming, defense suppression and battlefield management aircraft. In this category, the allies provided less than 25% of the total leaving the lions share to the US.

The aircraft build-up was slower than the NATO commanders had wanted. It was not until a month and a half into the war that the forces committed to the SACEUR reached the 900+ that he had requested at the outset. This was due to a number of reasons, most prominently the expectation on the part of the political authorities that Milosevic could be frightened to the negotiating table by a relatively modest effort. But there were two operational reasons for the slow build up as well. First, air base capacity in the region was limited. Second, in the air forces of some of our Continental European allies, the ground attack squadrons are kept in a lower state of readiness than air to air combat squadrons. This made sense in the cold war when expectations

were that a conflict would open with massive air attacks on NATO's rear installations by Soviet bomber and attack aircraft. Air to air combat squadrons would be needed first. When air superiority was established, the alliance could then turn its attention to attacking targets on the ground and ground attack squadrons would begin operations. This makes less sense in a conflict like Operation Allied Force. Serbia launched only a handful of aircraft and if anything NATO had more than enough air to air assets.

2. Sorties flown

Sorties flown is a better, though not perfect measure of the contribution the allies made. The allies flew roughly the same number of ground attack sorties as did the United States. While this sounds like an impressive contribution, and it is, there are two reasons to be careful with the interpretation of these data.

- First, Operation Allied Force was much different than the air campaign in Desert Storm. In Desert Storm, the ground attack sorties made up almost half of the total. In Operation Allied force, ground attack sorties made up only about one-third of the total sorties flown.
- When it came to support sorties, the US flew almost 80% of the total. This was critical since for every ground attack sortie, the US and its allies flew over two support sorties.

The reason for the high proportion of support sorties was three-fold.

First, the imperative to minimize the loss of coalition aircraft resulted in a heavy allocation of sorties to attack Serbian air defenses where possible and to jam those that were not destroyed.

Second, most of the air bases the allies had to use were remote from Yugoslavia. During the 40 years of the cold war, NATO developed an infrastructure of air bases well located to strike targets in the center region of Europe. This constellation of bases is not well situated to strike targets in the Balkan region. Many aircraft had to be refueled to provide the range to reach targets from bases remote from the target area.

Third, the imperative to minimize collateral damage (and civilian deaths) drove NATO commanders to commit heavy resources to surveillance of the battlefield to ensure the best possible battlespace awareness.

To the extent that these factors are typical of future operations on the periphery of Europe and beyond, to make a balanced contribution, the allies will have to strengthen their fleet of support aircraft. In the US air force, over 40% of the total aircraft are support aircraft while among our principal NATO allies; the proportion is typically about 30%. This harks back to two factors. First, the United States Air Force has always been something of an expeditionary force. A large part of it was always focused on deploying and operating overseas. Second, serious planning to prepare for operations in the Persian Gulf in the late 70s and throughout the 80s made Air Force planners think about how to cope with operations in a theater with a relatively austere host nation infrastructure relative to the Center Region of Europe. The tanker and cargo fleets were beefed up accordingly. Europe is only gradually realizing that its future military operations are

most likely to be fought a good distance from their home airfields and will require a greater focus on support functions.

Finally, not all sorties are the same. The B-2 could, and did, carry up to 16 precision guided (all weather) munitions. This allowed it to strike up to 16 different aimpoints while most other aircraft were able to strike one or at best two aimpoints per sortie.

3. Munitions

Mention has already been made of the imperative to minimize collateral damage and this put a high premium on striking targets with precision. Thus, much more so than in Operation Desert Storm, precision guided air to ground munitions were the weapon of choice. In Desert Storm, less than 10% of all munitions dropped were precision guided. In Operation Allied Force, the proportion exceeded 30%. This too will be typical of conflict on the periphery of Europe (and beyond) in the future.

This will require the allies to rethink the makeup of their munitions stockpile. While key allies have made progress since Desert Storm, stockpiles are still inadequate. For example, France ran out of laser-guided bombs near the end of the campaign and the US drew down its stockpile of cruise missiles more rapidly than had been programmed.

There was a secondary theme as well. The pressure from the political authorities to conclude the operation promptly led the NATO commanders to try to keep the pressure on the Serbs night

and day, good weather and bad. The commanders did not want to pause operations to wait for the sun to come up or to wait for the clouds to clear. This, coupled with the need to minimize collateral damage, led to a heavy use of all weather precision guided munitions. Virtually all these sorties were flown by US aircraft who could deliver GPS guided munitions, mostly Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM).

WHAT FORCE IMPROVEMENTS SHOULD WE BE ENCOURAGING OUR ALLIES TO MAKE?

At the Washington Summit of April 1999, NATO adopted a Defense Capabilities Initiative designed to improve the NATO forces' ability to project military power outside its borders. The initiative contains considerable detail that is classified, but the broad themes are not and are well focused on precisely the deficiencies that showed up in our allies' forces during Operation Allied Force. Among others they include:

Effective engagement. NATO forces are going to have to acquire more and better precision guided munitions to include those that can be employed at night and in bad weather.

Survivability. A greater part of our allies' force has to include active defense suppression, electronic jamming of air defenses, and stand-off weaponry to keep aircraft out of range of surface to air missiles.

Deployability. Operations such as that in Kosovo can be fast-breaking and the allies need to be able to get to a theater and begin operations promptly. Better lift, more prepositioning of low cost, high weight materiel at forward locations could have shortened the deployment times in Operation Allied Force.

C3. As we move from analogue to digital means of passing information (including cockpit-cockpit and ground-cockpit voice communication), powerful encryption techniques become available to provide secure communications. The technology exists today, and it is only a matter of careful planning to take advantage of it.

Finally, many of our key NATO allies have accepted the need to invest in their power projection capabilities rather than maintain forces guarding borders no one is threatening. The US would do well to encourage this development and push the our allies at the least to maintain their current levels of defense spending shift more into procuring the means to make it a reality. The alliance would be stronger for it and the US would be better off for it.