

Verbatim Special: The Balkan War

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"It was less than three weeks ago that the realization first dawned on me: Airpower might actually be winning the Balkan War. I turned the thought round for a while and looked at it from several directions, rather as a Creationist Christian might have done on being shown his first dinosaur bone. I didn't want to change my beliefs, but there was too much evidence accumulating to stick to the article of faith. That article of faith, held by all military analysts outside a few beleaguered departments of airpower studies in the service academies, was that air forces could not, alone, win wars. ... It now does look as if airpower has prevailed in the Balkans and that the time to redefine how victory in war may be won has come. ... After this war, ... there will be no grounds for debate or dispute. Aircraft and pilotless weapons have been the only weapons employed. The outcome is therefore a victory for airpower and airpower alone."—**Military historian and commentator John Keegan, London Daily Telegraph (LDT), June 4.**

"What did the trick was the accuracy of the precision weapons, the avoidance of losses, and the increasing destruction of the Serb forces."—**Army Gen. Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, New York Times (NYT), June 5.**

"It's a strange situation. Just because it comes out reasonably well, at least in the eye of the Administration, doesn't mean it was conducted properly. The application of airpower was flawed."—**Retired Gen. Ronald Fogleman, former USAF Chief of Staff, NYT, June 5.**

"What you've got is a mess. We may have gotten Milosevic to cry uncle, but it was the absolute worst way to fight a war."—**Retired Adm. Leighton Smith, former commander of NATO's southern region and the Balkans, Associated Press, June 5.**

"There are certain dates in the history of warfare that mark real turning

points. Nov. 20, 1917, is one, when at Cambrai the tank showed that the traditional dominance of infantry, cavalry, and artillery on the battlefield had been overthrown. Nov. 11, 1940, is another, when the sinking of the Italian fleet at Taranto demonstrated that the aircraft carrier and its aircraft had abolished the age-old supremacy of the battleship. Now there is a new turning point to fix on the calendar: June 3, 1999, when the capitulation of President Milosevic proved that a war can be won by airpower alone."—**Keegan, LDT, June 6.**

"Already some of the critics of the war are indulging in ungracious revisionism, suggesting that we have not witnessed a strategic revolution and that Milosevic was humbled by the threat to deploy ground troops or by the processes of traditional diplomacy, in this case exercised—we should be grateful for their skills—by the Russians and the Finns. All to be said to that is that diplomacy had not worked before March 24, when the bombing started, while the deployment of a large ground force, though clearly a growing threat, would still have taken weeks to accomplish at the moment Milosevic caved in. The revisionists are wrong. This was a victory through airpower."—**Keegan, LDT, June 6.**

"Not only were we fighting Hitler; we were fighting fascism. Not only were we fighting Stalin; we were fighting communism; Now, we're not only fighting Milosevic, but we're fighting genocide and ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity."—**Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Washington Post (WP), June 6.**

"There can be circumstances short of an existential threat to the United States where the use of force is appropriate."—**White House National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, WP, June 6.**

"The lesson for NATO should be: If you're serious about applying power, don't screw around. Get at it. Turn

out the lights, take the phone system down—not this incremental 'maybe we'll hit it, maybe we won't.' That's no way to fight a war."—**A "high-ranking military officer," WP, June 6.**

"I don't think anyone should walk out of this thinking we ought to only have airpower."—**Gen. Henry Shelton, Chairman of the JCS, WP, June 6.**

"The lesson for the Army is, it's not going to be in the game unless it develops some sort of medium-weight force that it can deploy rapidly."—**Retired US Army officer John Hillen, defense analyst with the Council on Foreign Relations, WP, June 6.**

"We own the Balkans. NATO is now in the position of a real estate investor who keeps buying properties where the taxes exceed the rent."—**Michael Mandelbaum, professor at Johns Hopkins University, WP, June 6.**

"I can't give you a timetable [for the NATO occupation of Kosovo], and I'm not going to say, 'Is it six months? Is it a year? How long is it going to take?' We will do our best to facilitate the transformation of Kosovo into a self-governing province under the aegis of NATO and the UN."—**Defense Secretary William Cohen, NYT, June 6.**

"This war was worth fighting."—**Sen. John McCain, Presidential aspirant, Los Angeles Times (LAT), June 6.**

"We just overwhelmed them with destruction. It was technically excellent but strategically bankrupt."—**Retired Air Force Maj. Earl H. "Butch" Telford Jr., former editor of Air University Review, now director of research at the US Army College's Strategic Studies Institute, NYT, June 6.**

"We never said that we're going to disarm the KLA. [The term "demilitarization" means] no longer having organized units, getting rid of the uniforms, the heavy weapons, things

of this type. To our knowledge today, they [the KLA] still intend to comply with that.”—**Shelton, NYT, June 7.**

“This war didn’t do anything to vindicate airpower. It didn’t stop the ethnic cleansing, and it didn’t remove Milosevic.”—**Retired Army Lt. Gen. William Odom, former director of the National Security Agency, Time magazine, released June 7.**

“Once you get the air defenses suppressed, you can just fly over and puke out JDAMs.”—**Retired Gen. Merrill McPeak, a former USAF Chief of Staff, Time, released June 7.**

“We achieved our goals with the most precise application of airpower in history. ... Of more than 23,000 bombs and missiles used, we have confirmed just 20 incidents of weapons going astray from their targets to cause collateral damage.”—**Cohen, DoD news conference, June 10.**

“We will continue to use ground forces wherever they are required in the best possible military campaign that can be devised under the most optimum of circumstances. We are not afraid to use ... a ground component to a military campaign.”—**Cohen, DoD news conference, June 10.**

“In Kosovo, NATO’s American-led bombers, some originating their missions from inside the US, destroyed discrete targets measurable by addresses on a doorway.”—**Wall Street Journal (WSJ) editorial, June 11.**

“Airpower, in this particular case, has been effective and has been successful. It should not be seen as the only course of military combat in the future.”—**Cohen, WP, June 11.**

“Proponents of airpower will also see this as a victory. Ever since the early days of military aircraft, ‘victory through airpower’ has been the Air Force’s goal in war. It failed in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Storm, and critics predicted it would fail in the Balkans. It didn’t. Two factors led to success. Precision guided bombs performed as advertised, despite periodic but embarrassing and costly exceptions, such as mistakenly bombing civilians. And high-tech weaponry permitted pilots to fly high out of harm’s way while visiting destruction below. An estimated 5,000 to 10,000 Serbs were killed in the bombing at no cost to the airmen. This has troubling moral and political implications. Despite the accuracy of the air attacks, too many civilians

were killed while Allied combatants avoided risk. This turns a principle of a just war on its head—specifically, the obligation to protect the innocent at the expense of the warrior. Another troubling and similar aspect of the so-called ‘immaculate’ air campaign is the ability to drive an enemy to his knees without shedding a drop of the bomber’s blood. Normally, the litmus test of going to war was the willingness to suffer casualties in pursuit of its objective.”—**Retired Marine Lt. Gen. Bernard Trainor, Boston Globe, June 11.**

“Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the B-2 is every bit the technological marvel it was meant to be.”—**President Clinton, remarks June 11 at Whiteman AFB, Mo.**

“This really wasn’t a war. It was diplomacy backed by force.”—**Clark, NYT, June 12.**

“The final standard is: Did it work? Did it provide crucial leverage to diplomacy? I think yes, it did.”—**Clark, NYT, June 12.**

“I don’t use the word ‘victory.’ I very carefully say they have advanced substantially the five goals of NATO that we have steadfastly adhered to. Any assessment of who won and who lost should await the ground campaign and how well we survive the risks and the return to their homes of the refugees. Then is the time to make that assessment.”—**Sen. John Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington Times (WT), June 13.**

“As long as Russia possesses nuclear warheads, it is allowed to pretend it is a superpower. Russia’s tough and uncompromising stance on the Kosovo conflict is nothing but a face-saving measure designed to help Russia avoid complete humiliation.”—**Genady Oreshkin, retired colonel of the Russian Interior Ministry, LAT, June 15.**

“Certainly airpower played a very pivotal role, as it has in so many times since the invention of the airplane. ... A lot of defense pundits have egg on their face[s] at this point, and they will find reasons for explaining away this decisive use of airpower. But there’s no doubt that, if facts have any power to convince, this was a victory for airpower.”—**McPeak, PBS “Newshour,” June 16.**

“We’ve got to think about what transpired during the time that we

started on the 24th of March until we closed this down last week. There’s a lot of ethnic cleansing that took place. The results are coming in daily, and it doesn’t look very good or very pretty. We’ve created a refugee population of a million-plus people, and we’ve destroyed all of the infrastructure out there in the province. So we [won] sort of a Pyrrhic victory in some sense. We destroyed Kosovo in order to win it.”—**Retired Marine Corps Gen. Richard Neal, former assistant commandant (1996–98), PBS “Newshour,” June 16.**

“So many people have predicted that airpower would be ineffective if it’s used alone that, now, they have to describe what’s happened in this case as some sort of a defeat. Now, victory comes in many flavors, and this one will obviously not be to the taste of everyone, but the fact of the matter is, airpower carried the day here.”—**McPeak, PBS “Newshour,” June 16.**

“It’s sad, actually. The Army’s got the best strategy of all the services for avoiding casualties, and that is the Army avoids combat. It can’t get there. It’s too heavy. It’s obese.”—**Retired Army Lt. Col. Ralph Peters, PBS “Newshour,” June 16.**

“There is very little stomach for young infantrymen and other soldiers coming home in body bags, and it’s very difficult to fight any sort of ground conflict without having casualties. There are some people who will continue to believe that airstrikes are surgical, that casualties do not occur, and that you can bring down an enemy without inflicting civilian casualties or suffering losses yourself. We all know that not to be correct, but some people will draw the wrong lessons.”—**Lt. Gen. Michael Short, head of NATO air operations in Kosovo, NYT, June 18.**

“I hope those [NATO] nations that could not participate in the way they would have liked will take the necessary action and make the necessary investments to catch up. Otherwise, we run the risk of creating second or third teams within the Alliance.”—**Short, WP, June 20.**

“I thought that there was maybe a 50 percent chance it [the war] would be over in a week. I knew if he [Milosevic] decided to take the punishment of the air campaign, it could go a long, quite a long, time.”—**Clinton, interview on CNN’s Late Edition, NYT, June 21.**

"The whole policy of gradual escalation is back. Something very different happened in this war, and to simply pass it off as being an aberration is dangerous. I think we need to think through it."—**USAF Col. Philip Meilinger, US Naval War College professor, WP, June 22.**

"As a result of Kosovo, I'd expect there'd be more careful scrutiny of some heavy systems that hardly ever seem to be taken to war these days and hopefully a little more respect and appreciation for those Air Force capabilities that get there quickly, are easily integrated in coalition operations, and provide only fleeting or invisible targets for enemy guns."—**Retired USAF Maj. Gen. Charles Link, WP, June 22.**

"The war in Kosovo wasn't really the work of one man. Saying that Serbia needs to unseat Mr. Milosevic is shorthand for saying that Serbs need at least to begin to come to terms with the terrible things their armed forces and their paramilitaries have done in this decade, to the approval or silence of most of them."—**WP editorial, June 22.**

"The B-2 really did the job. One thing the Air Force and all of us will want to be reviewing is the bomber force and whether we ought to be investing more in it."—**Sen. Joseph Lieberman, Senate Armed Services Committee, remarks to Defense Writers Group, June 23.**

"At this point in our march through history, our heavy forces are too heavy and our light forces lack staying power."—**Gen. Eric Shinseki, Army chief of staff, WP, June 24.**

"With the seeming victory of airpower in Kosovo, we are again in danger of thinking there is some easy way to win wars."—**Retired Army Col. Harry Summers Jr., military commentator, WT op-ed, June 24.**

"Albanians and Serbs will not be able to live together in peace in Kosovo until they've had a period of time with international security forces to keep them from tearing each other to pieces."—**Richard Holbrooke, former Balkan negotiator, NYT, June 25.**

"I was surprised about some of the things. ... I was surprised, on the one hand, that we lost no pilots. I was surprised by that. I was surprised that

we'd lost only two planes and no pilots. I know that from your point of view, there were a lot of civilian casualties, but that's because you got to cover them, as opposed to covering the civilian casualties of the Gulf War. If you talked to any military person that was involved in both conflicts, they will tell you that there were far, far more civilian casualties in Iraq. I mean, many more. ... Several times as many. I was a little surprised that we had no more problems than we did in maintaining our allied unity, given the enormous pressures that were on some of our Allies. And I think that gives you some indication about the depth of conviction people had that this was right. I was surprised and heartbroken that the Chinese Embassy was hit because of the mapping accidents. That did surprise me. I had no earthly idea that our system would permit that kind of mistake. That was the biggest surprise of all."—**Clinton, White House press conference, June 25.**

"We have not put a price on Mr. Milosevic's head for someone to kill him. ... We don't try to do that to heads of state."—**Clinton, White House press conference, June 25.**

"What the Serbian people decide to do, of course, is their own affair. But they're going to have to come to grips with what Mr. Milosevic ordered in Kosovo. ... And then they're going to have to decide whether they support his leadership or not; whether they think it's OK that all those tens of thousands of people were killed, and all those hundreds of thousands of people were run out of their homes, and all those little girls were raped, and all those little boys were murdered. They're going to have to decide if they think that is OK. And if they think it's OK, they can make that decision. But I wouldn't give them one red cent for reconstruction if they think it's OK, because I don't think it's OK. ... I do not believe we should give them any money for reconstruction if they believe that is the person who should lead them into the new century. I do not, and I will not support it."—**Clinton, White House press conference, June 25.**

"Everyone agrees on the lessons to be learned from the Kosovo experience, but few people here [NATO headquarters] are confident that we will apply them. It would take the Europeans two decades to catch up with the Americans [in military power], even if they had the money and the

will to spend it."—**A "senior NATO intelligence official," WP, June 28.**

"In the end, Short and Clark say, it was NATO's ability to hit 'strategic, fixed targets'—causing an estimated \$30 billion damage and widespread hardship among civilians—that ultimately compelled Milosevic to accept the Alliance's demands."—**Correspondent William Drozdiak, WP, June 28.**

"The Russians have expressed concern that they will be used as target practice by the Kosovo Liberation Army. The Russians want protection. They are edgy."—**A "senior officer attached to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's KFOR peacekeeping force," WSJ, June 28.**

"JDAM was the hero of this war, and the B-2 was the hero of the early days of Kosovo."—**Maj. Gen. Dennis Haines, ACC director of combat weapon systems, Defense Week, June 28.**

"We are both aware, as God knows, how much evil has been done [in Kosovo] in the course of the last year and especially in the last three months. The great part of the guilt lies with Milosevic."—**Bishop Artemije, senior representative of Serbian Orthodox Church, speaking for himself and Patriarch Pavle, head of the church, NYT, June 29.**

"The apology phase is long since over. That [delivery of a US apology to China for the bombing of its embassy] was done immediately. I think it was done genuinely. It was done personally. It was done repeatedly, both publicly and privately, and I don't think there's any more, really, that could be said on this score. It was a tragic accident, and we have, you know, expressed our regrets as personally as we could. ... You know, China really must recognize that this is the only explanation that it's going to get."—**Stanley Roth, assistant secretary of state for Asian Pacific affairs, WT, June 30.**

"The bottom line is that there is no way to protect them [the Serbs in Kosovo], and we will indeed have a new refugee exodus, which is very sad when what we wanted is a multi-ethnic society. A lot of them would like to stay, but they are dead scared."—**Soren Jessen-Petersen, assistant UN high commissioner for refugees, remarks at a UN news conference, July 1.** ■