

Letters: Another Shot at “Nine Myths”

We appreciate Dr. [Rebecca] Grant's efforts to highlight lessons learned from Operation Allied Force, but we found the description of each “myth” to be more convincing than the rebuttals. [See “Nine Myths About Kosovo,” *June*, p. 50.] The article's two main points are that airpower was effective against Serb forces in Kosovo and that land power did not contribute to Allied Force. The first argument misses the point completely and the second argument is simply wrong.

The discussion of “myths” one through four, concerning airpower's effectiveness against Yugoslav forces in Kosovo, essentially degenerated into quibbling over numbers. Regardless of recent reports that the numbers cited in the article are significantly inflated, body counts are no more valid measures of effectiveness today than they were during the Vietnam War.

The obsession with numbers obscures the larger question of whether airpower alone can be sufficient to do anything more than degrade enemy ground forces. This argument glosses over airpower's inability to halt Yugoslavia's operations in Kosovo, especially ethnic cleansing. Defending the Air Force's halt-phase concept by arguing that the conditions in Kosovo were uniquely unfavorable challenges the concept's utility in the real world.

Kosovo cannot be seen as an ex-

ception because it was characterized by “a morass of close combat without a traditional front line.” We cannot assume, against all evidence, that our future wars will all be like the Gulf War. It is unrealistic to expect future conflicts to be free of political constraints, noncombatants, refugee flows, paramilitary forces, bad weather, and restrictive terrain. These are the defining characteristics of the 21st century battlefield.

“Myths” five through seven discount the role of land forces in Milosevic's eventual capitulation. [Retired] Gen. [Wesley] Clark has stated that allied ground forces deserve “an awful lot of the credit for the successful outcome of the operation in Kosovo last year.” That we were “never close to preparing for a ground invasion” is simply incorrect. In fact, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Strobe Talbott and two American generals briefed Russian envoy Victor Chernomyrdin on US invasion plans, which a shaken Chernomyrdin then related to Milosevic. National Security Advisor Sandy Berger had already drafted a memo to the President, recommending a ground invasion in case Chernomyrdin was unable to persuade Milosevic to back down.

The argument that ground forces played no role is further discredited by the actual presence of allied ground units in Kosovo and in theater. The arrival of

Task Force Hawk and other NATO forces in Albania as well as the reinforcement of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in Macedonia lent credibility to the threat of an allied invasion.

These “myths,” then, contain more truth than myth. As Dr. Grant states in the article, “If these myths were to be credited, one would have to conclude that aerospace power is nothing more than a flashy, unreliable tool of military force.” This conclusion is too harsh; we have the best Air Force in the world, and airpower will always play a vital role in joint and combined operations. Any student of military history knows that combined warfare is always more effective than the use of a single element of power.

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From Rebecca Grant

Two guys from AUSA liked the myths better than the facts? Hardly surprising. Myths thrive in spite of facts and that is why they have to be rebutted before they morph into joint doctrine.

Despite the gossip about invasion threats, this fact remains: Ground forces were not used in combat during Operation Allied Force. The major lessons, good and bad, that come out of Allied Force centered on the

planning and employment of coalition aerospace power.

That's why it puzzles me to be accused of obsessing over numbers—especially numbers that were first briefed by an Army general, Wesley Clark. The damage assessments for fixed and mobile targets contain intriguing lessons for future joint operations. Would it really be better to ignore the numbers?

As for the inability to halt ethnic cleansing, this was an issue way beyond operational doctrine. NATO backed itself into a corner that gave Milosevic a big tactical advantage and allowed him to push out the Kosovars. Remember that many European allies had put troops on the ground to defend safe areas in Bosnia and had hundreds at a time taken hostage. All accounts tell us that NATO could barely agree to start airstrikes, much less to contemplate seizing Kosovo with ground forces. Whatever NATO did would have to be with aerospace power. My point was, let's not confuse the issue. This was a long way from the Pentagon's rapid-halt strategy of having the go-ahead to attack forces massed on a border and did not tell us much about whether that strategy would succeed.

As it happens, I agree with Messrs. Kreul and Lathrop that the larger question is about what aerospace power

can do to an enemy ground force. How much more proof is needed?

Aerospace forces are designed to reach and strike much deeper, much quicker. They have gotten to be pretty effective at targeting enemy ground forces. But for some reason, advocates of land power still like to criticize airmen for doing their job.

It's an old problem.

As Billy Mitchell observed in 1917: "The ground troops did not yet realize that they were perfectly incapable by themselves of dealing a blow at the heart of the enemy country or its vital centers." Of course, we know what the Army did to him.

■ *Kreul and Lathrop suggest that we are picking an unprovoked argument in an otherwise jointly serene setting. Recent statements by their senior colleagues at the Association of the US Army call that into question. "The Army has paid a high price for the unfulfilled promises of airpower since World War II—between wars in budget battles and during wars in facing enemy capabilities with which we were unprepared to cope," wrote Gen. Frederick J. Kroesen, USA (Ret.), in the January 1999 issue of AUSA's Army Magazine. Kroesen is a senior fellow of AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare. He also said that "in the Persian Gulf, more than one month's expenditure of the most proficient air*

campaign in history failed to achieve a single objective established for that war. ... Even with the wondrous capabilities of today's technology, airpower is still a part-time participant."

In the August 1999 issue of Army Magazine, retired Lt. Gen. Theodore G. Stroup Jr., AUSA's vice president for education, said this about Operation Allied Force in the Balkans: "Milosevic's will was not broken by weeks of strategic bombing. Milosevic lost his nerve when ground power, in the form of the Kosovar offensive and the capabilities of [the US Army's] Task Force Hawk, ... first unlocked the full capability of airpower. ... That is what brought about the negotiated settlement, not the bombing of water supplies, power grids, and Yugo factories."

The reason that we and Dr. Grant debunk myths is that there are myths that need debunking.—THE EDITORS