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Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing

On

Kosovo After-Action Review

November 3, 1999

Mr. Chairman,

Senator Levin,  
Distinguished Senators,

it is my honour and indeed a privilege to testify in the Senate Armed Forces Committee on the lessons learned from Kosovo. I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and your colleagues on your effort to review the operation. I feel this is wise and farsighted since the next crisis will come, for sure, although I am unable to predict when and where.

I will discuss first the lessons learnt during the crisis management phase, then the air campaign until the day on which I left NATO. I.e., May 6, 1999 and end with a few conclusions.

With your indulgence I would like to start with a brief remark on the Military Committee(MC) which seems to be a largely unknown animal in the United States of America.

The MC consists of the Chiefs of Defense( CHOD ) of all NATO countries and an Icelandic Representative of equivalent rank. The Strategic Commanders (SC). i.e. SACEUR and SACLANT, participate in the MC meetings. The meetings are chaired by an elected chairman who has served as CHOD of a NATO country and who is NATO's highest ranking military officer.

The MC meets three times a year and in its permanent session in which the CHODs/Commanders are represented by a permanent representative of three or two star rank once a week as a minimum. SACEUR and SACLANT report to the MC and through it to the Secretary General and the North Atlantic Council(NAC).

The MC is the source of ultimate military advice for the NAC and it has to translate the Counsel's guidance into strategic directives for the two SCs.

The MC played a crucial role during the Kosovo Crisis in keeping the NATO nations together. It was in the MC where the OPLANs were discussed and finalized in such a way that a smooth passage in the NAC was guaranteed and during the war the MC acted as the filter which helped to stay clear of micromanagement of military operations. It is my firm belief that this helped to avoid potentially divisive debates and it allowed SACEUR to concentrate on his superbly executed task to conduct the operation.

The Kosovo War itself deserves careful analysis for a couple of reasons.

It was after all the first coalition war fought in Europe in the information age, fought and won by a coalition of 19 democratic nations who did neither have a clearly defined common interest in Kosovo nor did they perceive the events in Kosovo as a clear and present danger to anyone of them. They fought eventually for a principle that is dear to all of them, the principle that Human Rights ought to be respected. They thus demonstrated that this is more important for them than the principle of territorial integrity which has governed International Law since the Westphalian Peace of 1648. This coalition fought without a clear cut mandate by the UNSC in a situation which was not a case of self defense and it stayed together and on course throughout the 78 days of the air campaign. It was the first war ever which at the first glance was brought to an end by the use of airpower alone. But it would be premature and indeed wrong to conclude from that that future conflicts could be fought and won from the distance by the use of airpower. One could say that only if we had clear evidence that it were the results of the campaign which made Milosevic eventually blink. That, however cannot be said by anyone on our side.

In my view the war proved once again the seasoned experience that we military will do best if we plan and fight joint operations and that it would be a deadly illusion to believe that the Revolution in Military Affairs will allow us to fight a war without any casualties.

What lessons did we learn during the Crisis Management Phase of the conflict?

Allow me start with the rather straightforward statement that we could have done better in crisis management since we simply did not achieve what has to remain the ultimate objective of crisis management, namely to avoid an armed conflict. I do not know whether we ever had a fair chance to achieve it since Milosevic wanted to solve the Kosovo problem once and for all in spring 1999. He saw presumably no alternative but force and violence after the Kosovars took advantage of the Serb withdrawal which General Clark and I had negotiated on October 25, 1998. Nobody knows when he took his decision but I have reasons to believe that it was in November 1998 and it was most probably a decision to not only annihilate the KLA but also to expell the bulk of the Kosovars in order to restore an ethnic superiority of the Serbs. One point has to be made with utmost clarity in order to destroy one of the myths the Serbs are about to create: It was not NATO's air campaign which started the expulsion of the Kosovars. It began well before the first bomb was dropped and it might have been the result of a carefully premeditated plan.

NATO began to be seized with the situation in Kosovo in early 1998. Against the background of the fighting in Kosovo in spring 1998 NATO ministers expressed their concern at their meetings in Luxembourg and Brussels and began to threaten the use of force in an attempt to stop violence and to bring the two sides to the negotiation table.

NATO Defense Ministers decided in June to underpin that threat by a demonstrative air exercise although the NATO military had advised ministers that NATO as such was not ready to act and that any use of military instruments made only sense if there were the preparedness to see it through and to escalate if necessary.

Milosevic who was never unaware of NATO deliberations rightly concluded that the NATO threat was a bluff at this time and finished his summer offensive which led to a clear defeat of the KLA My first lesson learnt for future crisis management is therefore that one should not threaten the use of force if one is not ready to act the next day. To achieve this is difficult in a coalition in which the slowest ship determines the speed of the convoy.

The responsibility for crisis management did not rest with NATO throughout the crisis.

NATO began but then the US took the lead and introduced Ambassador Holbrook to be followed by the OSCE and eventually the Contact Group. When the Contact Group, not surprisingly, failed at Rambouillet and Paris NATO was given back the baton but there was no peaceful solution left. My second lesson learnt is that one should never change horses midstream in crisis management Whenever possible the responsibility should remain in one hand, preferably In the hands of those who have the means to act. As a minimum one has to make sure that those who have the lead in crisis management efforts of a coalition share the objectives the coalition is committed to.

Another time seasoned experience gained during our successful efforts to prevent a war during the days of the Cold War is that one of the keys to success is to preserve uncertainty in our opponent's mind on the consequences he might face in the case of his rejection of peaceful solutions. NATO nations did not pay heed to that experience during the Kosovo Crisis. It became most obvious when NATO began to prepare for military options but some NATO nations began to rule out simultaneously options such as the use of ground forces and did so, without any need, in public. This allowed Milosevic to calculate his risk and to speculate that there might be a chance for him to ride the threat out and to hope that NATO would either be unable to act at all or that

the cohesion of the Alliance would melt away under the public impression of punishing airstrikes.

My third lesson learnt is therefore that we need to preserve uncertainty as one of the most powerful instruments of crisis management which does not mean to agree to an escalation ladder without limits and without rigid political control but which means not to speak in public about these limits.

To keep publicly all options under consideration and to allow the military to go ahead with planning for joint operations would allow for uncertainty without the hands of politicians being tied.

During the air campaign we had to learn some lessons as well.

First we learnt that even a tiny ambiguity in the formulation of political objectives could have adverse effects on military operations.

The OPLANs for Operation Allied Force had been developed in fall 1998. Both ingredients the Limited Air Response and the Phased Air Operation had been designed to meet the objective to bring Milosevic back to the negotiation table. When we began the air strikes, however, we faced an opponent who had accepted war whereas the NATO nations had accepted an operation. Consequently it seems advisable to set a political objective such as 'To impose our will on the opponent and to force him to comply with our political demands'. This would allow, first, to use all the elements of power not just the military means to secure our objectives and, secondly, to move as rapidly as possible to the decisive use of force within the political constraints which drive a coalition war.

Translated into military operations this would not change phases 0 and 1 of Operation Allied Force but it would lead to a phase 2 which focuses more and earlier on those targets which hurt a ruler such as Milosevic and which constitute the pillars on which his power rests, namely the police, the state controlled media and industries whose barons provide the money which allows Milosevic to stay in power.

Secondly, we had to learn how to conduct coalition operations which is of particular interest since most if not all of our future operations will most likely be coalition operations.

Coalition operations mean to accept that the pace and the intensity of military operations will be determined by the lowest

common denominator and that there will be restrictions due to differing national legislation which could affect air operations in particular.

Consequently it will be virtually impossible to use the devastating power of modern military forces in coalition operations to the fullest extent. This is a lasting disadvantage which is on the other hand partly compensated by the much stronger political impact a coalition operation has as compared to the operation of an individual nation.

Looking at Operation Allied Force it is fair to say that the politicians of all NATO nations met most of our military demands and most of them did not embark on micromanagement of military operations.

In this context I have to state that the NAC never imposed a limitation which ruled out to bomb any target in Montenegro. On the contrary, the NAC explicitly accepted that we could strike targets on Montenegrin soil if they posed a risk to our forces.

I also have to say that the gradualism of the air campaign was much more caused by the political objective which soon saw revision against the background of the dynamically unfolding situation than it was influenced by politically motivated interference.

My lesson learnt from that is that coalition operations will by definition see some gradualism and possibly some delays in striking sensitive targets. The likelihood that this could happen will be the more restricted the clearer the political objectives will be formulated.

Coalition operations do, however, not mean that nations can block or veto any operation which is conducted in execution of a NAC approved and authorized Oplan. The only option open to a nation in such a case is to instruct its national contingent not to participate in the respective activity unless the nation would wish to formally withdraw its agreement to the Oplan. It is also noteworthy to state in this context that there are no NATO procedures which could be called a red card rule.

Kosovo taught also and again that NATO's force structure is in contrast to NATO's Intergrated Command Structure no longer flexible and responsive enough to read quickly and decisively to unforeseen events.

That we saw when Milosevic accelerated his expulsion of the Kosovars in an obvious attempt to counter NATO in an asymmetric response and to deprive NATO of its theoretical launching pad for

ground forces operations through a destabilisation of FYROM and Albania. Luckily, we still had the Extraction Force in FYROM and were thus able to react immediately. Without it it would have taken NATO weeks to deploy and assemble an appropriate force.

The lesson learnt is that we have increasingly to be prepared for asymmetric responses, the more so the stronger and hence invincible NATO is. To cope with these threats will be necessary and hence it is critical for NATO's future successes to enhance mobility, flexibility and deployability of its forces which are inadequate at this time. The NATO Summit drew the right conclusion and agreed the DCI and the European allies did the same when they decided in Cologne that the EU has to improve defense.

My next lesson learnt is that there is a totally unacceptable imbalance of military capabilities between the US and its allies, notably the Europeans. With no corrective action taken as a matter of urgency there will be increasing difficulties to ensure interoperability of allied forces and operational security could be compromised. Moreover, it cannot be tolerated that one ally has to carry on an average some 70%, in some areas up to 95% of the burden.

This imbalance needs to be redressed and therefore ESDI which is after all an attempt to improve European efforts within NATO deserves the full support of the US and should be used to encourage those allies who are reluctant to implement to live up to their commitments .

What conclusions can be drawn ?

- 1) The integrated Command Structure worked well. What needs to be improved are procedures to achieve unity of command to be exercised by NATO there where parallel existing national and NATO command arrangements are unavoidable.
- 2) There is a need to think through how crisis management can be improved. Simulation techniques may be a helpful tool to be considered.
- 3) There is an urgent need to close the two gaps which exist today between the US and the European/Canadian allies: The technological gap in the field of C4I and the capability gap caused by the lack of investment in modern equipment.

The DCI is designed to provide some remedy. It should be speedily implemented and the European/Canadian allies should be strongly encouraged to take appropriate action.

4) There is a need to study how NATO can perform better in the field of Information Operations to include better information of the public both in Nato countries and in the adversary=s country.

5) Most importantly, ft can and it should be said that Operation Allied Force was a success since it contributed substantially to achieve the political aims set by the Washington Summit.

It would be desirable that NATO stated simultaneously that the Alliance will act again should the necessity arise.

To do so could help to deter potential opponents and could possibly restrain the one or the other ruler in this world to seek protection against intervention through increased efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

I would be remiss did I not close by commending the commanders from SACEUR down the chain of command, our forces in the theatre and those home who supported them so splendidly. They all performed extremely well and you have every reason to be proud of them and your great nation's contribution.

Allow me to close by saying that I was proud to serve this unique Alliance as the Chairman of the Military Committee in such a crucial time and I felt privileged to serve with a man whose superb contribution was crucial for our common success, Javier Solana.

This brings me to my final point which we should never forget: It was the cohesion of our 19 nations which brought about success.

Thank you, Mr Chairman