

## **A dissenting view of the war-winning capabilities of stand-alone air-power: The Kosovo Air-War of 1999 and its prescription for Libya in 2011?**

As an old fashioned military historian, I am compelled to bring some more exacting light on a rather popularly held fantasy concerning NATO air-power in the so-called Kosovo War as it has been trundled out for public consumption as a wonderful example of what the joys of stand-alone airpower can do for you, especially when one is confronted with a certain recalcitrant Libyan Colonel who wants to hang on to power. To be perfectly blunt and in keeping with a firm grasp on reality, I think the so-called 'Kosovo War' is better-termed as the 'Balkans Bravado' of a rather desperate President Bill Clinton, who wanted no more untidy ground-war messes, such as experienced in Somalia, and, of course, I would be remiss not to include the other serious proponent of this political/military charade by neglecting to mention one Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. Other influential characters in this farce-cum-tragedy were none other the perennially arrogant and markedly purblind (late) Richard Holbrooke and, of course, the never to be forgotten for nearly causing the Third World War, General Wesley Clark!

Some background on sources is required here: i.e., as a professor of military history I had Canadian Armed Forces students writing to me back in the early 1990s from Sarajevo and, to a man, they constantly dinned in my ear how the Serbs, while not innocent, were not nearly as cunning as the Bosnian Muslims. One small sample, came from a Canadian soldier who was set out on a roof top ostensibly to monitor Serb cease-fire violations in the form of hostile fire coming in from the surrounding hills whereas, in reality, he told me that all he got to observe was the Muslims, in a soccer pitch not far from his position, lobbing heavy mortars at the Serbs about five to ten minutes before the American Press arrived at their duly appointed time (i.e., CNN) so that the Serbs would retaliate just in time for the gullible Yanks to catch those 'evil Serbs' being bloodthirsty again against the poor, innocent Muslims. In various forms, this was the story I got from Canadian troops ad nauseum (author Scott Taylor's own experiences there and his many publications on the Bosnian Wars thoroughly supports this discernment as well) and, in addition to this, I also was treated to some of the Bosnian Muslims attempts to kill Canadian troops which ended in their own early dispatch to Allah; also, one needs to be aware that the Croats, similar to the Bosnian Muslims, were far from being the victims of Serbs as they were caught red-handed, on a number of occasions, practicing their own very robust versions of Srebrenica on Serb civilians - especially in the Krajina. During the last Balkans Bravado, i.e., the air-war on Serbia by NATO - I had a well-ensconced and highly-reputable source in Belgrade during the entire NATO air-strike period and, of course, the BBC until their man, Simpson, got his plug pulled for contradicting the contradictions of Mr. Jamie Shea over at NATO HQ! I have kept all the many hundreds of primary source documents that came my way from that horrible time.

Before touching on that NATO air-war I need to bring your attention to the single most foolish thing the Serbs did and that was, simply, to hire a third-rate PR firm in the United States while the Bosnian Muslims, supported by their own ill-gotten drug

gains and Arab oil-money, hired New York's finest PR firm which had enormous pull over at the DoS (aka 'Foggy Bottom' [and, really, 'foggy-brained']). These facts are readily available to any researcher should you want to check them out. The point in all of this is to say, coupled with an essentially atheistic Clinton White House Admin. in DC and the need to placate the Saudis along with the old allies of the Bosnian Croats and Muslims, i.e., the Germans, it was easy to see that America and Britain's mature and trusted friends from WWII (i.e., who saved far more US and British airmen than any Croat or Muslim has ever dreamed of [or would want to - remembering the Croats were pro-German and the Muslims had their own SS unit]), the Eastern-Orthodox Christian Serbs, were going to be cast to the dogs - and how they were! Moreover, with the Monica scandal breaking around his ears, amongst other things, President Clinton found a most convenient scapegoat in those wretched Serbs - as anyone with half an eye open had already figured out. As such, a confluence of immoral conveniences, some being obvious and others not for public consumption, had come across President Clinton's desk and he was not the man to resist such temptation.

The real preparatory attack of the Kosovo War was contained within that insidious document, the Rambouillet Treaty which, in a couple of its sub-section paragraphs, made it impossible for the Serb Government to sign as, likewise, it would have been impossible for any sovereign nation to sign. For the Serbs were required, in detail to submit their internal security, even down to billeting NATO troops at their own expense in their own country - amongst many other stupidly provocative dictates. The Serbs knew that Clinton's government already wanted a war as they had monitored aircraft beacon and radar watch sites being setup around the perimeter of Yugoslavia. Anyway, to keep this as concise as possible, suffice it is to say that I have read the Rambouillet and I can tell you it was an outrage; moreover the NATO leadership and the Clinton Administration knew that it was over-the-top in its outrage and they counted upon that fact: i.e., they wanted a war for some of the reasons already mentioned, and others (i.e., to further humiliate Russia while it was prostrate [along with its drunken premier, Boris Yeltsin] and totally dependent on US sponsored IMF loans - remember this point because this is what brought the war to a close).

So, pretty much on schedule the NATO air attacks went in while there was great flux in Kosovo but no, repeat - no, stampede of Kosovar Albanians had begun yet, however, with the unfolding of the air-assault two things happened near simultaneously: 1.) Kosovar Albanians began to flee the wide area of air-assaults and I have pictures of many who were killed by NATO air strikes in their panic to get out of the kill-zone and 2.) the Serbs then set about in earnest driving the Kosovar Albanians away from the same area as they wanted no KLA partisans in their flanks during an all out war (remembering that they were positioning assets around expecting a full NATO ground attack as well and they did not want those defensive positions betrayed to their NATO enemies - an understandable move in any military discernment.

This is where things went wrong for NATO air-power, and contrary to the rather novel propaganda NATO espoused later, never went right again: i.e., they could not

strike any Serbian armored assets as they could not find any. Sure, they hit what they thought were tanks but those turned out to be mock-ups and decoys as the real Serbian armored assets, which were considerable, were already sitting quiet with their main engines switched-off (so as to give no heat-signature to NATO smart-weaponry) in bunker positions that had been carefully prepared from decades earlier - some of them stretching back to Tito's time - which gave them commanding fields of fire over all ground approaches into Kosovo and southern Serbia. A quick military fact here for you: the Serbs, during the Yugoslav heyday, had built defensive positions throughout their mountainous country and all the approaching passes/valleys/access routes - every bit as formidable as those that Switzerland had become famous for. NATO planners already knew a ground war, against Serbia's JA emplacements would be a nightmare as no-one knew where they were and casualties would have been extremely high. Anyway, to continue with the NATO air-war that was going astray - the Serbs had also gotten a hold of various Cruise Missile models that the US and NATO were deploying and, not being exactly a stupid people when it came to military tech, they rapidly deduced how these so-called smart weapons did their last few hundred yards of approach to a target once the computer mapping and satellite guidance systems got them close and, lo and behold, heat signature played a prominent role and thus NATO/Jamie Shea's fairy-tale that they had knocked out all these bridges that would stop Serb forces from advancing or retreating turned out to be utterly false. For those unaccommodating Serbs had painted many of the bridges multi-colours so as to give off a confusing heat signature while large bonfires were lit not far away; well, you can imagine what happened - smart weapons began to make NATO look might foolish (as their own ground forces later testified to finding many bridges intact with a really weird paint job still on them)! So, Serb ground and air assets (air assets, safely tucked into mountainside bunkers and bases that used highways as runways, etc.) remained virtually untouched in the war zone and, regardless of Jamie Shea's wonderfully over-optimistic reports of "attritted Serb military assets," NATO & President Clinton had a real problem on their hand: i.e., they could not bring effective military pressure on the Serbian military and the air-campaign was running on way too long - people were asking hard questions that they couldn't answer - in the US Congress, in European Parliaments and in Canada. Therefore, they switched targets: i.e. they decided to go after civilian targets, this re-direction was against the very Geneva Conventions they had so over-enthusiastically screamed at the Serbs of violating; these targets included the Serbian electric grid, in some cases hospitals, water supplies and even the Chinese Embassy for good measure (i.e., in retaliation for Chinese leaking a lot of smart-weapon targeting info to the Serbs). But the real heroes of the Serbian War turned out to be the Serbian electrical engineers who were able to restore power within a couple of minutes of NATO air-strikes knocking out power stations with carbon/graphite bombs. I know of this personally - through my online Belgrade contacts - as e-mail was interrupted but briefly then servers were back up in an instant! In further desperation, NATO then went after the most ridiculous target of all - the Yugo Car Factory - claiming that it was a military asset - pure BS!

With failure piling up all around them, NATO had only two cards left to play - short of a ground war (which, for the reasons of political casualty avoidance already

pointed out, was not a card they would dare play): 1.) they had to apply serious pressure to Serbia's ally - Boris Yeltsin and Russia (the Russians had already quietly sent 17,000 men into Serbia in support of the Serbs and they were helping with air-defenses, etc. [one Serbian told me she was more afraid of the drunken Cossacks than anything NATO had done [LoL]) and 2.) they had to quietly back-down on the offensive, war-causing paragraphs in the Rambouillet Treaty!

For PR purposes, the pressure on the Russians, which was considerable, paid off the biggest dividends and here is, in basic terms, how it worked: Serbia was receiving all its fuel and oil products, necessary for war and civilian purposes, via heavy barges coming down the Danube from the Black Sea and Russia/Ukraine beyond. The President Clinton's administration, at the highest conceivable levels, bluntly threatened Yeltsin with the turning-off of the desperately needed IMF loans-tap if he did not bring the Serbs to book and right quickly! It was at this point the Yeltsin threatened to launch missiles on Europe (do you remember these blusters in the news-media and how NATO and the US played them down as just Boris muttering in his vodka?) - well - he was feeling the pinch and he did not like it one bit because Russian public opinion was solidly behind Serbia and thoroughly outraged, almost to a war-footing, with NATO (especially the Germans) for picking on their South-Slav brethren. Nevertheless, Milosevic was duly informed that the supplies of life-blood oil coming down the Danube (or up the Danube - depending on your perspective) were going to be cut-off he did not accept some of NATO's new-improved Rambouillet terms. The rest was history, Milosevic indicated that he could live, begrudgingly, with the Treaty now that much of what had caused the war had been scrapped from the Rambouillet and he signed it knowing that Serbia would lose any control of Kosovo in the interim but, on the other hand, none of Yugoslav Serbia would be subject to the NATO boot as originally envisioned. NATO breathed a collective sigh of relief and, idiotically and falsely tried to claim victory by air when it had really been a partial political victory by cheque-book and a near 100% military failure! Don't believe me still? Here are the figures and you can check them out yourselves: pretty much 98% of all Serb armored assets that entered Kosovo at the beginning of the air-war returned home to Serbia after the cease-fire (NATO and Canadian troops on the ground in Kosovo were simply astounded at the endless convoys of armored vehicles heading home after the cease-fire). More tangible proof came in the form of a very cheeky MiG-29 'Fly-by' at Pristina airfield: i.e., you will recall that Russian troops actually seized that field as peace-keeping troops were permitted in at the end of the war (and that 'chairborne' 'wunder-General,' Wes Clark, ordered the British ground troops to attack the Russians to which the British commander told him "I am not going to start the Third World War for you just so that you can rescue your tarnished reputation!"). Anyway, with the Russians in possession of the airfield and NATO/British troops all in the same area - suddenly, from an underground bunker and hidden apron - six Yugoslav MiG 29's roared off the ground into the air, circled the airfield while waving their wings at the Russians and Brits alike, with the Russians laughing and cheering and with the British jaws on the ground (as the Serbs could have killed the lot of them had they chosen); they then flew back home to Serbia!

Israeli military analysts and any Western analyst who prefers the truth to propaganda nonsense - all knew that air-power had singularly failed in the Kosovo war and that the Serbs, by any way you care to define it, had won a defensive victory while NATO won the PR war!

America's military had been warned about this problem of unrealistic expectations concerning air-power over and over again since Gulf War I - i.e., that it looks a lot more spectacular than it really is and that it is no good at winning wars because it can't hold ground! One of America's highest decorated soldiers, the late and pretty great Col. David Hackworth, warned the Pentagon at the end of the Gulf War: "the lesson from this war is that there is no lesson here!" In other words, don't be misled by the air-power advocates who want you to believe we are in a new era - we are not! The Balkans Bravado proved that - but they chose to ignore it and believe their own propaganda, the war in Af/Pak has proved this from day one (i.e., with ground troops it can work at times and without, regardless of the PR you have heard about those wretched drones, it cannot) and the smoldering after-fires in Iraq prove - well, I don't know what other than Iran came out on top.

So, to the current queries about air-power versus our old friend Muammar Khadafy? Well, unless his military turns on him as a result of decimation by NATO air (i.e., when they are caught in the open) - and unless you want a stalemated smoldering mess - much like Iraq only worse - then ground forces will have to be deployed and that is a whole other problem (militarily and fiscally)!

To sum up, do not be deceived - air power can work destructive wonders when it has viable military targets to hit, such as armoured columns in the open and less advanced aircraft, etc., but even these destructive successes cannot win a war without considerable ground forces in place to seize and hold terrain that has been cleared of enemy bunkers and vehicles. In the case of the NATO air-war unilaterally declared on Serbia, no Serbian military assets were destroyed as the Serbs simply refused to offer them up as targets. In turn, this created a terrible conundrum for the stand-alone air-power advocates within the Pentagon and NATO which, as irony would have it, could only be solved by the political-economic screws turned on then-vulnerable Russia, Serbia's sponsor. In the current situation in Libya it is very difficult to see how air-power, alone, can topple the good Colonel despot in charge there. Certainly, the US and NATO air-strikes saved the rebels in Benghazi so that they could fight another day and that may be well and good. Little is known of these rebel groupings however and, furthermore, some have even been associated with Al Qaeda which, in turn, poses many other difficult questions to Western would-be supporters.

While not being an Obama or Democrat supporter, this writer believes that one has to give credit where it is due and the careful thought given to the limited air-support the President has issued in support of the rebels, or at least to prevent massacres in Benghazi, is worthy of at least a modicum of praise. The place is in flux and a virtual rabid tiger's den, anyone who rushed in there in full support of one side or the other, which would eventually mean the commitment of ground forces, would need their head examined. Air-power, as just discussed, has serious

limitations and that the current US President has recognized this reality is not a bad thing at all.