



# THE USE OF AIR POWER OF NATO IN KOSOVO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has decided to make a military intervention in Kosovo with the purpose of persuading the Serbian president Milosevic to stop the attack against civilians in said territory and, also, to affect the Serbian military capacity to start a war. NATO thought that a relatively short air bombing campaign would lead Milosevic to sign an agreement. However, it did not properly estimate the risk of the reaction of the Belgrade government and war took a surprising direction.

KEY WORDS: AIR POWER / NATO / UN / JOINT ACTION

By Franco Gabriel Paglione

Translated by Mariana Rios Hudson

## NATO MILITARY INTERVENTION IN KOSOVO

### Political situation in the region and causes of the military intervention

The province of Kosovo is in the south of Serbia within the Balkan Peninsula. Its population is both of Serbian and Kosovar Albanian origin, most of which is Albanian.

The contemporary beginning of the Kosovo crisis has its origin in the reforms made by Marshal Tito during the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). In 1974, these reforms led to a new Constitution that would give Kosovo autonomy and would allow it to create an institutional separation from Belgrade. Although the province was still officially part of the Serbian territory, it had administration, parliament, judicial and educational system.

In 1980, Tito's death led to violence again in Kosovo. Kosovar Albanians wanted to be acknowledged as Republic, while the Serbians fought for Belgrade to control the province.

Slobodan Milosevic became, in 1989, president of the Serbian Republic and this situation changed the status of the region eliminating the autonomy of Kosovo and putting it under the control of Belgrade, capital of Serbia.

An important actor appeared in the Kosovar scenario in 1996 to worsen the crisis: Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). This was formed among the communities of Kosovar emigrants in Europe who decided to gather weapons and prepare for a chase

campaign against the police and Serbian military facilities in Kosovo as they saw they had no Western support to their cause.

By the summer of 1998, the Kosovo Liberation Army took 40% of the province, leading to reprisal from the Serbian government and militiamen who decided to take civilians as target for their attacks. The excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Serbia against the Albanian population in

Kosovo and the ouster of more than 230,000 people from their homes made the international community react against the crisis by means of the passing of Resolution 1199 of the UN Security Council in September 1998. This Resolution stated that Serbian authorities had to accept a ceasefire and a partial withdrawal of the troops from Kosovo<sup>1</sup>.

The ceasefire helped the guerrillas to reorganize themselves, re- design

POLITICAL MAP OF THE WESTERN BALKANS 2008



1. Gómez Puentes, Juliana; "Análisis de la intervención de la OTAN en la crisis de Kosovo, como reflejo de las transformaciones del concepto estratégico de la Alianza de 1999" [Analysis of the NATO intervention in the Kosovo crisis as a reflection of the strategic concept of the 1999 Alliance]; 2009, p. 22.

and prepare a new attack. The Kosovo Liberation Army did not have the intention to negotiate and, in fact, publicly declared the purpose to involve the countries of the European Union and the United States in the crisis for them to favour the autonomy or independence of Kosovo.

Milosevic breached this agreement and continued bringing troops into Kosovo. This led the NATO Secretary General to issue an order on March 24, 1999 without the authorization of the UN Security Council, for the military heads of the Alliance to start the air attacks over the 20 military and police targets of Serbia and Kosovo. This intervention was justified under the expression of humanitarian aid, that is, with the main purpose of ending homicides and expulsion of Kosovar Albanian people by Serbian forces<sup>2</sup>.

This defense organization, which reached its optimal level during the Cold War, was organized to face the threat of a specific enemy: The Soviet Union. With the dissolution of the USSR in December, 1991, the crisis in Communist countries and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO should have been dissolved and replaced in Western Europe with a native defense organization. This conflict gave the United States the ideal argument to adopt the new legitimacy of NATO<sup>3</sup>.

### Events that led to the exclusive use of Air Power

Political leaders of the United States have showed an increasing disagreement with the possibility to have US casualties. This was mainly observed in those circumstances that do not imply a clear and immediate danger for the vital strategic interests of that country. These leaders have

*Slobodan Milosevic became, in 1989, president of the Serbian Republic and this situation changed the status of the region eliminating the autonomy of Kosovo and putting it under the control of Belgrade, capital of Serbia.*

used air power more frequently and this was not due to a joint operation with land forces, but to a replacement of land power.

The Allied Force Operation came after an important event, Desert Storm Operation, which took place in 1991 and during which Iraq challenged the concrete interests of the United States in the Persian Gulf. This operation was designed and conducted giving the highest priority

to the need to minimize casualties. The air campaign of the coalition had an average of 2,500 daily takeoffs using more than 1,800 last generation combat aircrafts. This huge attack which lasted almost 3 weeks and which was prior to the deployment of US land forces caused the defeat of the Iraqi Army in Kuwait. The result of this was: 146 casualties among 500,000 US military men committed<sup>4</sup>.



2. Gómez Puentes, Juliana; op.cit.; page 27.

3. Ramonet, Ignacio; Guerras de Siglo XXI. Nuevos miedos, nuevas amenazas; Editorial Arena Abierta; Paris; 2002; page 111

NATO decided to carry out military operations over Serbia only using the Air Force resources. This decision was implemented with the intention to intimidate Milosevic's administration so that the ethnic cleaning campaign could come to an end in Kosovo and with the idea that a limited bombing would help to achieve the goal of finishing Serbian actions against Kosovar- Albanian population<sup>5</sup>.

Expectations about a rapid defeat of Milosevic's regime was one of the main conditions when starting the air campaign, in particular for the administrations of Clinton and Blair, who believed that they would be able to break the defense and combat will of the Serbian, thus leading to their fall in few days using only air power and smart bombs<sup>6</sup>.

### USE OF AIR POWER IN KOSOVO Development of Air Campaign

The NATO Operational Command received the mission to neutralize and harm the Army and the security structure that president Milosevic uses to defeat and destroy the Albanian majority in Kosovo. The Alliance deployed an important Air Force of 1055 aircrafts of all types in the surroundings of the Theater of Operations, where the main contributor was the United States with 730 aircrafts<sup>7</sup>.

NATO used a series of air bases located in European territory where it deployed the aircrafts mentioned before with the purpose of being able to plan the air power available from said bases.

These favorable relative positions were complemented with the use of an

US aircraft carrier in the waters of the Adriatic Sea.

Air attacks against targets in Serbia and Kosovo were conducted under strict rules of engagement (ROE), part of which included the restriction to fly at an altitude of 4,000 meters over the land level to protect NATO aircrafts from land hostile fire.

4. Record, Jeffrey; "The Allied Force Operation"; Military Review; N° 4; July - August; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; 2000; page 13.
5. Vázquez, Hernán; "Lecciones aprendidas de la Operación Allied Force - May - June, 1999 - Kosovo"; January - March 2001; page 21.
6. Battaleme, Juan; "El balance ofensivo-defensivo y las guerras de Kosovo, Afganistán e Irak"; Revista de Publicaciones Navales; N° 693; 2nd. semester; Buenos Aires; 2006; pages 176-185.
7. Ciaschini, Ricardo et al.; Desde el dogfight hasta losUCAV. Evolución del poder aéreo; Gráfica Independencia Argentina; Buenos Aires; 2002; page145.

DEPLOYMENT AIR BASES USED BY NATO



Source: "Grand Logistics. Distance to target. Operation Allied Force". June 10, 2009

The bad climate conditions in Kosovo at the end of March and beginning of April prevented recognition aircrafts from identifying Serbian Third Army units that kept their military vehicles out of the roads, while hundreds of Albanian refugees left Kosovo. The location, identification and assessment of damage are the three most important and difficult aspects when applying air power. Fixed targets that were easy to locate and identify were politically sensitive and targets that were politically more acceptable to be attacked were difficult to locate and identify<sup>8</sup>.

Air power was never planned to be used decisively and it was used at the end of the campaign in light of the extension of the conflict and the humanitarian catastrophe. While the daily average during the Gulf War was 2,500 daily takeoffs, the initial average of the Allied Force was between 50 and 70 daily takeoffs and rose to 300 firstly and to 600 by the end of the war<sup>9</sup>.

During the 78 days of operation, we can see the variations in the use of air power, which increased as the Air Campaign advanced and the number of aircrafts available and material targets authorized to be attacked increased. In the graphic "Aircrafts used in the Allied Force Operation" we can clearly observe what we have mentioned before, being the United States the highest contributor both in the initial phase and the end of the conflict.

8. Haun, Phil M.; "Air Power versus a Fielded Army. A Construct for Air Operation in the Twenty- First Century"; March, 2003. Published in: Air & Space Power Journal. Available at <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/apjinternational/apj-s/2003/1trimes03.htm>

9. Ciaschini, Ricardo et al.; op. cit. Article 8; page 82.

10. Frechero, Germán; "Campaña aérea de la OTAN en Kosovo 1999. Cinco interrogantes controversiales"; Revista de la Escuela Superior de Guerra Aérea; N° 226; First Edition 2008; Buenos Aires; page 75.

11. Vázquez, Hernán; op. cit; Article 6; page 22.

12. Strikland, Paul C.; "Doctrina del poderío aeroespacial de la USAF- ¿Decisiva o Coercitiva?" Available at <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/apjinternational/apj-s/2000/4trimes00/editorial.htm>

***The characteristics of current and future wars make it necessary to have not only joint operation, but also the balanced participation of the most capable forces for each situation, moment and convenience.***

In the end, it was not possible to stop the killing of Kosovo- Albanian civilians beyond the surrender of Milosevic. Of course, one of the main reasons for this was the huge number of restrictions that affected the use of air power.

#### **Political Restrictions that affected the Use of Air Power**

The Air Campaign had to meet the criteria to reduce to a minimum their own casualties, to reduce collateral damage and to prevent serious damage to the Serbian infrastructure but, at the same time, it had to stop the ongoing violence as soon as it could<sup>10</sup>.

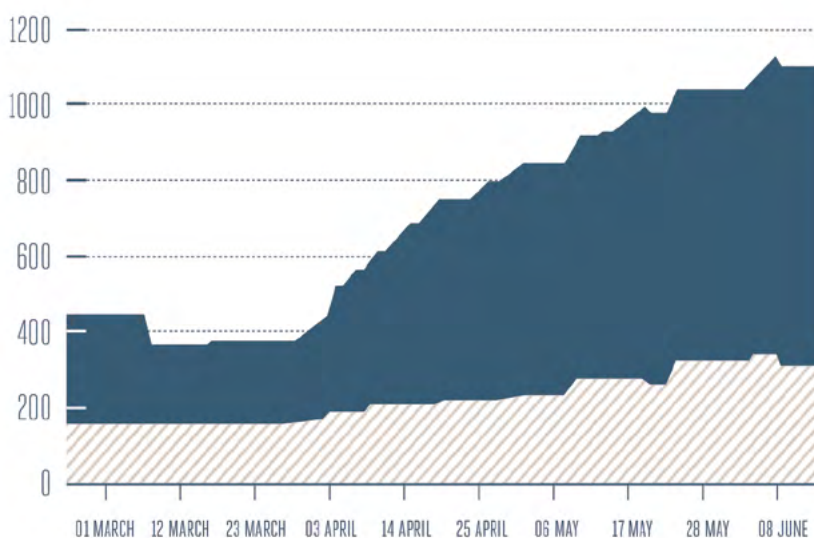
Controversial restrictions and interests of the 19 countries of the Atlantic Alliance prevented forces that were at the disposal of the Organization from taking part to give a rapid

military solution to the conflict in Kosovo. Subsequent analysis of the air intervention confirmed that if some strategy had been applied with the use of the Air Force over Serbia, this could have contributed to reach the goals set by President Clinton in a shorter period of time<sup>11</sup>.

Since the beginning, military men had been politically restricted. But it seems to be clear that politicians, especially those that are in Washington, have never had the intention to reach a total war.

An aspect that limited the effectiveness of air power was the target selection process which was reserved for the maximum political level conduction, both from the United States and NATO taking freedom of action from the commander of the Theater of Operations, General

#### **AIRCRAFTS USED IN THE ALLIED FORCE OPERATION**



Source: "Global Security. Org. Operation Allied Force. Order of Battle Trends"

Wesley Clark. Although the number of targets authorized to be attacked was increased as the Air Campaign advanced, it did not allow to have decisive results as they were mainly directed to the Forces of the Serbian Third Army.

The commander of the Allied Air Forces in Europe, lieutenant general Michael Short, considered that the most efficient tactic for the first night of war was an oppressive attack to the power stations in Belgrade and to the Departments of Government with the purpose of destroying the enemy's fight will. However, political restrictions prevented them from doing so<sup>12</sup>.

**END OF AIR CAMPAIGN**

**Implementation of a NATO Multi- national Force in Kosovo**

The gathering of land forces in Albania and the deployment of the Task Force Hawk, with Apache helicopters threatening with a land invasion by NATO forced Milosevic to accept the conditions proposed to end Serbian violence in Kosovo<sup>13</sup>.



Under the terms of this agreement, the Serbian administration had to:

- › *Immediately start to withdraw all Serbian military forces from Kosovo.*
- › *Allow a security multi-national force conducted by NATO called “Kosovo Force” (KFOR) to enter Kosovo.*
- › *Allow the immediate return of refugees to their homes without disturbing them.*
- › *Authorize the creation of an independent political regime for the Albanian majority that resides in Kosovo<sup>14</sup>.*

On June 12, the Kosovo Force entered Kosovo from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with a group of 20,000 divided into six Brigades directed through France, Germany, Italy, United States and two from the United Kingdom<sup>15</sup>.

The Kosovo Force faced important challenges when they arrived. The

Serbian military forces were present, the armed presence of the Kosovo Liberation Army was also habitual and the fight had not ended. Almost a million people took refuge outside Kosovo and those who stayed in the territory feared for their lives.

The most immediate priority was to prevent the Kosovo Liberation Army or any other armed group to take any empty place that may exist while some forces left the territory and others left. In 11 days, the operation reached the goal: the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo and their replacement with the Kosovo Force as the only legitimate military force pursuant to Resolution No. 1244<sup>16</sup> of the UN Security Council.

Apart from the deployment of this NATO military force (Kosovo Force) that guaranteed security of the province and the execution of agreements, Milosevic accepted

the creation of a UN Provisional Administration Mission (UNMIK) which would be responsible for the administrative reconstruction of the province<sup>17</sup>.

This Resolution is very complete and is detailed in the mandate for the military mission and civil administration. Also, it establishes that the province of Kosovo is part of Serbia but, although it is detailed in most of the text, it is ambiguous as regards its final status and leaves the decision for future negotiations<sup>18</sup>.

### **Lessons learned during the Operation Allied Force**

Once the conflict has ended, we can make a balance between the purposes set before the beginning of air operations and those that were finally reached.

After 78 days, air power could not stop the ethnic cleaning in Kosovo, the bombing did not force Milosevic



***If a nation or Alliance decides to intervene in military terms in a conflict, it is necessary to use the Military Instrument as a whole in a decisive and rapid way so as to destroy the enemy's fight will.***

to sign the agreements previously drafted by NATO. And it did not reduce or defeat the Serbian Army on the field but air attacks caused little damage to the Serbian forces in Kosovo<sup>19</sup>.

This situation may be seen in the ordered withdrawal from the Kosovar territory once the conflict had finished and the condition of the troops and military means was not highly damaged.

The characteristics of current and future wars make it necessary to have not only joint operation, but also the balanced participation of the most capable forces for each situation, moment and convenience. Deciding a priori as to the intervention of a force that may be powerful without analyzing circumstances of each specific situation and requirements imposed by it makes it possible to see mistakes that may be made and that can change the result of the conflict<sup>20</sup>.

At operational level, the commander of the Theater of

Operations, General Wesley Clark, had to deal with a great number of political restrictions from the political level that limited his freedom of action to reach the goals set. These restrictions had an effect on the Aerospace Component conditioning its concept of use and effectiveness and unnecessarily extending the conflict without stopping the killing of Kosovar- Albanian people.

The chain of command was one of the areas with most problems during the whole operation. Although it was agreed by all countries in the North Atlantic Council during the conduction of operations, the US chain of command was a total priority<sup>21</sup>.

This situation was due to the quality and quantity of means deployed by the members of this Alliance, for which the United States provided more resources and had better technology that was exclusively owned by this military power.

The most serious question that the UN Security Council has suffered was a consequence of this war. NATO made an intervention outside the authority of said institution and was applied to a country that was not part of the Alliance.

NATO action ignored the Security Council due to a simple reason: not all of its members agreed to it, especially Russia and China. Apart from the fact that the lives of thousands of Kosovar- Albanian people were at stake, this was not the first civil population threatened by genocidal practices nor western powers have always had the

same concern as to similar situations<sup>22</sup>.

This situation is a very important precedent because, based on humanitarian reasons, a country or Alliance may make a military intervention without the authorization of the United Nations, being one of the countries willing to make an intervention to a member of the permanent group of the Security Council.

The situation in Syria is a clear example as there was an intention to validate a military intervention based on humanitarian reasons (using chemical reasons against the Syrian civil population) as the United States did not get the support of the other permanent members of the Security Council (Russia and China).

## CONCLUSIONS

Air Power is a military instrument of short existence but which has acquired, throughout the years, a decisive importance in war conflicts due to technological advance and the characteristics it has thanks to the environment in which it operates, such as speed, scope, versatility, penetration and flexibility.

In this conflict, in particular, Air Power was used without exploiting its main strengths and is subject to political level interventions that forced it to be used in a limited and gradual way but without reaching the goals that gave place to the military intervention in a short term.

### Franco Gabriel Paglione

Major of the Argentine Air Force. Staff Officer. Bachelor in Aerospace and Air Systems. He graduated from the Joint Forces Staff College in 2013 with a specialization in Operational Strategy and Joint Military Planning. He is currently Head of Training in State Airlines and military aviator in the C-130 Hercules Weapons System.

13. Vázquez, Hernán; op. cit.; Article 6; page 17.

14. Tilford, Earl; "Operation Allied Force and the Role of Air Power"; Military Review; N° 4; July - August; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; 2000; page 21.

15. Jackson, Mike (Kosovo Force Commander); "La KFOR: providing security to build a better future in Kosovo"; NATO Review; N° 3; fall 1999; quarterly; Brussels; page 16.

16. "Kosovo Force". Rescatado de: <http://www.aco.nato.int/kfor/about-us/history/kfor-objectives.aspx>

17. Gómez Puentes, Juliana; op. cit.; page 29.

18. Chort, Pablo Eugenio; "Peace Support Operations"; Revista de la Escuela Superior de Guerra "Tte. Grl. Luis María Campos"; N° 546; July - September 2002; Buenos Aires; page 98.

19. Tilford, Earl; op. cit.; page 30.

20. Strikland, Paul C.; op. cit.; Article 15; page 150

21. López, Ángel; "Lecciones aprendidas en el conflicto de los Balcanes". Available at: <http://arbor.revistas.csic.es/index.php/arbor/article/download/1032/1039>

22. Gaspar, Gabriel; "Las lecciones de Kosovo". Available at <http://www.fasoc.cl/files/articulo/ART41125dad8d821.pdf>





Only a series of air attacks was authorized to be carried out and it was necessary to wait to see if they were enough to make the Serbian leader, Milosevic, change his attitude.

This wrong expectation reduced the list of material targets that could be attacked basically focusing on Kosovo instead of the real gravity center that the Serbian power had in its capital, Belgrade.

Using Air Power in a coercive way, that is, to carry out a military action and waiting for a response have extended the conflict without making a massive use of the Air Force over Serbia.

Only during the end of the Campaign was the list of material targets to be attacked extended and the number of aircrafts available to do that increased, taking the power of fire to the interior of the Serbian territory and involving the Serbian population

***NATO decided to carry out military operations over Serbia only using the Air Force resources.***

in the war. This event had an effect on the political situation of Milosevic as it took the horrors of war to their territory and, knowing about the possibility of a land invasion, he was forced to accept the conditions of the cease fire imposed by the coalition.

We can then understand that the fact that US and European interests were not in danger led to the exclusive use of Air Power. However, it was not possible to stop the killing of Kosovar Albanian civilians just because there were not land forces that could consolidate the achievements of the air weapon created by means of bombing.

The Serbian exercise did not have a significant opposition on the field.

Therefore, from this analysis, we can see the need and importance of joint military action without disregarding any element (land, air, navy) before operations. If a nation or alliance decides to make a military intervention in a conflict, it is necessary to use the Military Instrument as a whole in a decisive and rapid way to destroy the enemy's fight will.

The Commander of a Theater of Operations that is appointed to reach the Desired Final Political Status must be able to conduct the Campaign without excessive interference from the political level. In this way, it will be possible to use available forces exploiting the maximum capacity of the resources assigned.

The chain of command must be simple in order to allow the Commander and his subordinate commanders to plan and conduct operations in a rapid way and to have the possibility to increase success probabilities in light of the achievements made during prior attacks.

In war, our own casualties and collateral damage cannot be avoided in order to reach the Operational End State which, for this conflict, was to stop the forced displacement and killing of Kosovar Albanian civilians by the Serbian army. Therefore, these two factors cannot be decisive to plan and conduct military operations in order to reach a new goal.

The fact that in the Operation Allied Force not even an American aviator or ally died in combat after 78 days has decisively influenced future military actions to be carried out by NATO. This was the case of the Unified Protector operation which took place in Libya during 2011, where, once again, political goals could not be totally reached.

> REFEREED ARTICLE