

"Principles of Military Intervention in the Balkans and Beyond: a NATO Practitioner's Perspective."

Jack D. Segal
Andalo, Italy January 23, 2002

The views expressed in this presentation represent those of the author and should not be construed to represent the views of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or its member nations.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, military missions have changed. The simple and clear -- some might say, comfortable -- situation that dominated the NATO-Warsaw Pact stalemate from 1949 to 1999 has been replaced by a far messier range of new demands.

Today's military has to be organized, trained and equipped to perform effectively in a very diverse and demanding range of missions. Here is just a sampling. On the left end of the spectrum we might envision military forces in the United States performing missions to deter and protect against hijackings and terrorism, or UK forces in Sierra Leone using just their presence to persuade warring factions to stop fighting. Toward the middle comes missions such as those the NATO and partner nations are currently performing in the Balkans. To the right such missions as those the British-led force is performing in Afghanistan come into the picture, along with the simultaneous war-fighting role being played by a small coalition of US, UK, French and Dutch special forces.

The requirement that forces be able to operate across this broad mission spectrum is new. It means that the forces themselves must be far more versatile than was previously thought possible.

NATO doctrine since the 1999 Washington Summit has gone through a significant evolution. Today, it emphasizes that political, diplomatic, economic, legal, civil, humanitarian and military efforts all combine to form a political-military strategy for dealing with a crisis. With policy direction from the political leadership, NATO applies its standing and agreed concepts and doctrine to the application of military capabilities.

The application of those capabilities encompasses far more than just bringing combat power to bear on a situation, as I will describe later in my talk.

This political-military interface implies that a consensus has been reached between the military and political leadership on how the military aspects of the effort will be carried out.

But some of the objectives of the two groups -- civilian and military -- can be because for disagreements among decision-makers. For example, politicians normally want to apply military force gradually to allow time and manoeuvre room for diplomatic solutions. But the military wants to apply force decisively to bring the fighting to a successful conclusion as quickly as possible. So my first point is to understand that both groups of decision-makers have to understand the interests of the other, and that requires that they know something about each other's perspective.

It's also important to understand the vulnerability created by the decision-making capabilities of nearly every political-military process used by western nations today. I refer here to the risks created by asymmetric conflicts -- the latest popular term for this is "net war".

The concern is that your adversary will be able to make decisions more quickly than you will. While our hierarchical systems are methodically evaluating information, comparing options and developing strategies, our adversaries may well be organized in an entirely different way.

Look at the examples of the anti-globalisation demonstrations in Genoa and Seattle or the activities of al-Qaida. In each case 21st century technologies - cell phones and the Internet - combined with primitive technologies like drums and whistles enabled networks of like-minded people to outmanoeuvre a seemingly more powerful and better-equipped force. Often there is no leader, or there are several of equal or near-equal statures. There is no hierarchy to exploit or eliminate, no clear center to attack. These networked organizations pose a severe challenge to classical military structures and doctrine that we are only beginning to understand. Is al-Qaida destroyed or merely in hiding?

Despite this challenge, military forces are increasingly being thrust into peacekeeping situations that expose this very vulnerability. The International security force in Afghanistan is just the most recent example.

We send ordinary troops with standard military equipment into violent, dynamic peacekeeping situations with full exposure to public scrutiny through the ubiquitous presence of the media. In this supercharged environment a single mistake can turn public opinion, harden the resolve of the adversary or weaken the will of one's own population.

Not all troops are ordinary, however. In Afghanistan the combat forces you saw represented one end of the spectrum-- the highly trained Special Forces and special operations troops that are able to operate with minimal support and are best suited for extremely dangerous, fast moving situations, normally not peacekeeping.

At the other end of the spectrum are troops like Italy's Carabinieri, Dutch Marechaussee, French Gendarmerie and similar para-military forces that have a significant degree of police training and are as prepared to use conflict resolution methods as they are bullets.

Even these specialized forces however need equipment that is appropriate for each situation they are likely to face. Shields, helmets and rubber bullets are the basic tools for urban conflict situations. But many nations refuse to equip their military forces with these tools on the assumption that this will weaken their war-fighting capabilities, reduce the effort devoted to classic national defence missions and expose the troops themselves to unacceptable risks.

Forces equipped with these new technologies will be able to use far less firepower and place it far more accurately, leading in turn to less collateral damage and fewer unintended casualties. This will tend to make the forces more useable for political ends. That is the second main point - more useable forces might be used more.

Now within this framework of vulnerabilities, concepts and capabilities, I would like to talk a bit about how NATO is building capabilities for the new mission spectrum I referred to earlier.

But NATO is first and foremost a political organization and the decision was made in 1993 to broaden the scope of participation in NATO's activities through the Partnership for Peace -- PfP.

PfP is open to all members of the EAPC which in turn was descendent from the NAC-C. Some people here still know what I'm talking about and they should be worried about that.

The 26 PfP members organize themselves according to what they want from NATO. NATO does not choose who will be eligible for membership -- the nations choose themselves. We would love to see Switzerland bring its sophisticated forces and well-trained troops into NATO, but they're not yet interested. Other countries that are interested are perhaps less attractive to the operational commanders who must actually employ NATO forces in a crisis.

Just a word here on Russia: At the December NATO Ministerial the members decided to engage with Russia on a new approach to Russia's role in NATO. Yes, Russia is very much in NATO and as was properly pointed out here, Russia was disappointed by its role in NATO's decision making, particularly coming to a head over Kosovo. We have been in a holding pattern ever since, but December represented an attempt at a new start. Russia says it does not want a veto over collective defence decisions and it does not want to be a member of NATO. But Russia also does not choose to disengage from NATO and we see that as a very important opportunity.

Certain guidelines are part of the PfP program but obviously, NATO cannot impose its standards or expectations on partners, unless they declare themselves to be aspiring members and join the applicable PfP programs that lead to candidacy.

But if a country does opt for candidacy for membership, here I want to clear up a misconception. NATO can and does impose pretty stringent requirements on aspiring member nations -- not astringents perhaps as the EU which sometimes seems more intent on keeping countries out, but not a free ride either. Such aspirants are required to comply with key norms such as compliance with OSCE principles of human rights, establishment of clear political control of the armed forces, resolution of border disputes and elimination of racial and ethnic discrimination within their forces.

This preparation through PfP is essential to the success of the Balkan missions. Because what NATO today gives -- and what the EU might someday give to its military structure is a common language. First, I mean just that -- the English language.

When the French and Germans first combined forces into a joint unit, the French infantry literally could not speak to the German artillery because neither spoke the other's language...not a situation you want to be in if you're in command. So because Americans speak only English and Europeans are realistic enough to know it is hopeless to expect Americans to learn a European language, NATO units use English.

But the other equally important common language the NATO-led forces in the Balkans share is NATO's unique procedures, doctrine and terminology -- the tools soldiers and sailors need to work within NATO. In addition, equipment has been rationalized. For example, France provides petrol for all units in the Balkans and it comes from standardized pipefittings that all NATO units use and all partner forces must deal with to be part of the NATO force. It is only through such standardization that the mission in Afghanistan could have been put together so quickly. So even though it is not a NATO mission, it has NATO's imprint all over it.

This "interoperability" is perhaps the most obvious operational benefit of the PfP program. But there is also the psychological and political effect that serving with NATO forces has on partner nations.

For relatively less capable forces the experience of serving with NATO tends to raise their performance and tends to cause them to comply to norms of behavior and operational procedures that they probably would not have independently arrived at.

For the more capable PfP partners that are not seeking membership -- countries like Russia, Finland, Switzerland, Austria or Sweden -- exposure to NATO provides a chance to measure their own forces' capabilities against a standard. Their participation also allows NATO forces to do the same against these capable, well-trained, disciplined and well-equipped troops.

In the Balkans, NATO has installed three independent command structures to run the operations and to provide guidance and leadership to non-NATO participants. These command structures are reviewed every six months, as are the levels of troop commitments

Allow me to mention briefly each of the major Balkan deployments.

In Bosnia, now over six years since the initial deployment of SFOR, there remain over 18,400 troops representing all the NATO nations plus 13 partners and four other nations.

The largest contingents are the US (3150), France (2485), the UK (1770), Germany(1753) and Italy (1598).

In our view, these troops are accomplishing their mission of:

- Deterring a resumption of hostilities and promoting a climate conducive to a peace process
- Patrolling the zone of separation and some 766 cantonment sites
- Carrying out inspections and confiscating weapons
- Monitor training and movements of armed forces
- Monitoring and assisting the de-mining efforts
- Removing unauthorized checkpoints
- Repairing bridges, roads and rail lines
- Assisting in opening airports for civilian use
- Controlling the airspace, and
- Ensuring force protection and freedom of movement.

But how does it actually work on the ground? For the answer I have drawn on the experiences of senior officers in NATO who have led the forces in Bosnia and numerous middle grade officers who served there -- admittedly not a scientific sampling but one I would argue is pretty reliable.

One senior officer summed up his work this way. He sought to be "firm, fair, and friendly."

First, he had to be firm by demonstrating his determination to carry out his mission. In fact, each senior officer reported that they were tested rather early on by the warlords, criminal leaders, local officials, and dare I say, even UN,NGO and IO officials who had been there longer than the newcomer. The new man -

no women yet -- had to demonstrate that they were going to enforce those elements of the political agreements and mandates that underpinned the NATO presence - the general framework agreement for peace, the instructions to the parties and the supporting UN actions.

Secondly, they had to make deals with some very unsavory characters. Until such time as the rule of law prevails in Bosnia, control of the streets rests at least partially with un-elected players who tend to exert a great deal of influence and who have assumed a key role in the overall security picture.

For their own purposes, often related to illegal activities in which they were deeply engaged, these non-state players sought to establish a relationship with the force commander. The force commander in effect recognized their role in the society and in so doing acknowledged that NATO cannot be everywhere all the time. A compromise must be reached, "red lines" drawn, and occasionally some undesirable activities tolerated to avoid putting the forces into a situation where their credibility is damaged.

One can criticise this acceptance of a coalition of interests but one would have to be very naive to think the system would work without such co-operation.

With respect to the NGOs and IOs, different tactics are in order. In their case, the commander must try to bring them together in a co-coordinated effort aimed at a useful goal. This is not easy since for the most part they do not want to be directed to do anything by anyone outside their organization and certainly not by the military.

But this is not a zero sum game; rather the card table model of game theory -- which I only vaguely understand -- might be more appropriate. The commander must find the incentives to co-operation that will entice the NGO or IO to conclude that it is in its own best interests to work with that commander. Perhaps military resources will be directed toward those NGOs that are willing to discuss their common goals and not to those that will not. A creative commander can over time move from a process somewhat like trying to get a herd of cats to do tricks to one in which there is acknowledgement that most everyone is seeking the same or mutually reinforcing objectives.

The next thing the commander must do is to be fair. If the forces are perceived to be taking sides, their ability to influence the party that sees itself as excluded is minimal. This is no small task where forces are in daily contact with the population and may well see that one side is not complying with its obligations far more often than another. How to get compliance without appearing to be biased in such a situation is not easy.

Finally, the commander tries to be friendly. That means walking the streets (and, I might add, being vulnerable personally). Every commander I talked to

described the consumption of massive amounts of "Slivovitz" as a prerequisite for success in Bosnia and a major occupational hazard.

In pursuing their mission, a great deal of responsibility rests with the sector commanders - normally Brigadier Generals. They meet with the local officials, deploy their troops to the hot spots, respond to crises and they know who is doing what to whom. They use their contacts to keep track of the security situation and to try to broker compromises over specific issues such as a particular crossroads that has become a flash point. These officers are doing conflict resolution at the retail level everyday. They work extremely hard and if they are successful no one knows their name. They try to enlist the local media to get their messages across to the local populations and to try to draw the population into an acceptance of the peacekeepers as a positive influence on the local security situation.

Another thing the commander does is to draw some firm "red lines." "No harm must come to my troops," was the most common. Force would be met with force. In Bosnia those "red lines" are now well understood and incidents are rare. In Kosovo and FYROM, the situation is less settled.

The assessment of the situation in the Bosnia is mixed. Certainly a more secure environment has been created. But the peace process has two basic aspects -- civil and military and these clearly need to be better integrated. I'll return to that third key point shortly.

The key question on the table right now in Brussels's whether NATO should reduce its military presence in the Balkans?

The pros:

This would break the cycle of dependence and make the population responsible for its own future. It could force the IOs and BiH authorities to speed up the take-over of civil functions, and where necessary, deal with the underlying causes for failure to do this sooner. Force reductions might encourage faster installation of the necessary mechanisms for regional co-operation (which are hampered so long as the international community runs key institutions). Finally, it would be consistent with NATO's members desires to reduce the cost and open' ended nature of the current commitments.

The cons:

It could put at risk the very secure environment that's necessary for all progress. It would take place prior to needed military reforms. It would come before a strong local police and independent judiciary is in place thereby putting at risk the EU's plan to take over the International Police Task Force's function by 1 Jan 03. Finally, it could encourage the already-strong centrifugal forces that are

pulling the three communities apart and away from a multiethnic solution and regional co-operation.

But this begs the question of what is the proper exit strategy for NATO forces?

Should the transition be event-driven or on a timetable, as most NATO allies prefer. There has been little institution building at the BiH level. Yet is it reasonable to expect such institution building to gain support in the current political environment? Many problems have not been addressed: the investment picture remains skewed with most investors going to the Federation and few to the Republik Serpska. Although often cited to show progress, I would contend that minority return statistics are misleading. NATO commanders report that many people are returning solely to sell their property. Finally, less than 10 percent of demining is complete (30 of 400 sq. miles), political oversight of the military remains weak and defense reforms are not progressing.

The next steps in Bosnia from a military perspective are to turn over as quickly as possible the police functions, both to get NATO's forces out of that business and to bring up the level of the local police. But the upcoming Bosnian elections in October are a concern and one should not expect any precipitous change to the mission or the size of the force before then.

In Kosovo itself, about 35,000 troops are distributed in the five sectors as shown here, plus support troops in Albania and FYROM.

Given the clear and present danger of a political stalemate there, the security situation remains tense. The Kosovo mission is stable from a military standpoint, but despite Milosevic's ouster, the underlying causes of the original conflict remain. The linkages to smuggling and illegal activities in Albania and FYROM, the lack of trust between the two communities and the political instability in the province all conspire to suggest that another long-term commitment has been entered into.

The military forces in both Bosnia and Kosovo are nonetheless engaged fully in more than just keeping the sides separated.

In both Bosnia and Kosovo, the IOs and NGOs work in many of the same areas as the Civil-Military Co-operation elements of the forces. CIMIC is of growing importance in NATO military doctrine and in the forces of the NATO member nations. The shift from Cold War high-intensity warfare has allowed this function to gain prominence and resources.

There is a very wide range of activities CIMIC troops engage in today. Increasingly, military assets such as road-building equipment, engineers, water and waste management experts, health care and police are working in concert with their on-NATO agencies. Again, the creativity of the commander is crucial.

If there is good communication with the IOs and NGOs, a great deal can be accomplished. This is another of the non-conventional military missions that can prove useful in resolving a conflict but, as I have outlined in the Balkans, these capabilities do not substitute for progress on the civilian-political side.

So what to do to bring the civil and military efforts more into harmony?

Well, an astute observer of the Balkan mission has been former Finnish President Ahtisaari. Along with Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, he was a key player in the Kosovo negotiations. He has experience from many earlier peacekeeping efforts from Namibia to the Middle East. Recently to a NATO audience he put forward some important proposals for bringing these two functions closer together:

QUOTE:

- We know that force alone cannot create a stable society and functioning institutions. Yet the international community has been slow in developing the capacity to deploy adequate civilian resources. In order to prevent the spread of lawlessness and to protect members of minority groups, trained police officers, judges and civil administrators should be at the disposal of the international community and ready for deployment at much shorter notice than is now possible.
- There is a lot that can be learned from the military by civilian missions in the areas of planning, recruitment, deployment and training of personnel. In particular, the absence of a common institutional and management culture inside operations, shortcomings in communications and co-operation between international organizations and gaps in management skills are still part of the everyday reality in field operations.
- There are also major cultural and operational differences between civil and military organizations that impede co-operation and reduce the effectiveness of each. Mechanisms for sharing experiences, methodologies, ideas (and I would add, intelligence) are needed. One obvious way is joint training for senior civilian administrators together with high ranking military and police officers.

UNQUOTE

Much of this work must be done by the civilian sector. But the military would welcome having a civilian counterpart to its own planning and exercise structure. And why not? Why cannot the ICRC, UNHCR and World Food Program send representatives to participate in NATO Peace Support exercises? Both sides would learn from the other.

No as we discussed previously in this course, military intervention is always the last resort and has not been an option at times simply because there was no ready capability to deploy. Here is where NATO members and partners are about to complicate your life. I refer to something called the Combined Joint Task Force.

Common to the full range of missions I discussed earlier, the Balkan experience demonstrated a deficiency in NATO and more generally among military - and as we have just heard, civilian -- organizations. To deploy for war-fighting was relatively straightforward, but to deploy to a peace support, peacekeeping, or peace enforcement mission has proven far more difficult. The recognition of the need for a more logical approach has led to investment in a new concept called the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF):

Former NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner described CJTF as a means to provide the flexibility for NATO and non-NATO forces to act together in peacekeeping operations by organizing command elements that can be rapidly detached from existing command structures and augmented with additional forces.

This concept is being developed now. It's a capability that will be ready for use within a few years and has already been tested.

CJTFs are based on NATO's three operational headquarters

The concept that we are developing takes serving officers and civilians from the parent HQ, and deploys them to the operational mission with augmenters from a wide range of nations.

Many nations have signed on to this concept and are already participating actively in CJTF exercises. In November I participated in an exercise that involved 2400 troops from all NATO nations, plus 17 non-member nations. I had a deputy from Switzerland, one of our key staff officers was Austrian and the deputy commander was a Finnish general. Experts from the Lester Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in Canada played the role of the UN, the North Atlantic Council and the warring parties in a very realistic test of the CJTF concept. We trained together in Finland for a week, then deployed to Poland with a full communications and life support system as if the area we were entering required a totally autonomous operation.

There are many problems still to resolve, but this CJTF concept, perhaps linked to the EU's stated intent to form a deployable police force of over 5000 officers, and following along the lines suggested by President Ahtisaari, may well be the package solution to future requirements. And therein lies the dilemma on which I will end my presentation. Within three years, the nations of the EAPC will be in a position to project a civil-military package of forces anywhere. The next Rwanda

may not present the excuse that it is too far away to risk intervention. Rather, a decision will have to be based on a moral and political judgment. I wonder if the politicians will thank us.