
The Plight of Joint Doctrine after Kosovo

By PETER F. HERRLY

When the war over Kosovo started, America and its allies faced terminological difficulties that had both strategic and operational import. Briefings at NATO headquarters, the Pentagon, and the White House made reference to an *air campaign* that was underway and a *ground campaign* that was not contemplated. Moreover, nothing was uttered about the maritime component in this effort. This came as something of a shock to military officers and defense specialists who were nurtured in the brave new world of joint doctrine. It was not the way the Armed Forces had agreed to talk about warfighting in the wake of the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

In fact, Operation Allied Force was inconsistent with joint doctrine in both word and spirit. As early as 1991, Joint Publication 1, *Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces*, and subsequently Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, applied the term *joint campaign* to every campaign, whether fought on land, at sea, or in the air. This vocabulary was predicated on common operational practice—capitalizing on firm footing in each dimension of warfare, striking an enemy asymmetrically, and exploiting synergism between maneuver and interdiction. Neither of these seminal doctrinal pubs mentions separate ground, maritime, or air campaigns.

The reaction to such a critique, particularly after the fact, might be so what? Joint doctrine, after all, like other types of military doctrine, serves as an authoritative guide for commanders, not a strait jacket. If it becomes necessary for a commander to fight in another way—and incidentally, to prevail over an enemy—one should not dwell on subtleties like nomenclature.

But the debate runs deeper than terminology and reveals shortcomings in military culture. It demands an inquiry into the development of joint doctrine over the last decade and a look at why it failed so pitifully to describe—if not guide—the largest conflict since the Persian Gulf War.

Background

Congress assigned the authority for developing joint doctrine to the Chairman in what was a mighty grant of influence over the American way of war. The framers of the Goldwater-Nichols Act knew that concepts matter over the long haul and that service paradigms had often diminished military effectiveness in the past.

Efforts prior to 1986 aimed at formulating joint doctrine were faltering, being largely dedicated to constructing a rudimentary hierarchy and highly collegial process that relied on individual services to act as lead agents in drafting new publications. The major problem was that there were very few people in the doctrine business with an appreciation of the unique capabilities of each service and the skill to think through how such capabilities could best be combined.

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Victory in the Persian Gulf jump-started that process according to the Chairman of the day, General Colin Powell, who commissioned Joint Pub 1. Within weeks of the end of Desert Storm, Powell told the Joint Staff that he wanted air-land-sea doctrine which went beyond AirLand Battle (outer space would be added as a dimension)—and he wanted it fast.

Powell's purpose for Joint Pub 1 was twofold and was reflected in its structure. First, he believed that instilling a genuine joint perspective in the future leaders of the Armed Forces (while preserving the expertise of each service in its respective operational medium) would require at least ten to fifteen years to develop.

Basic changes in service cultures were needed. Second, he thought that overwhelming force as exhibited in the Persian Gulf War concealed some exceptionally diverse doctrinal views among the services, especially on the so-called deep battle area, which could not be resolved quickly. Nevertheless he wanted Joint Pub 1 to provide a hook on which to hang future resolution of these issues.

gradual process of acculturation, especially among mid-level officers. "I want to get to the guys in the engine room," Powell indicated. His target was majors and lieutenant commanders who had developed solid service expertise and were ready to take on wider challenges.

As for the other part of its purpose, providing a hook to resolve joint issues, Joint Pub 1 attempted in its last two chapters to settle some of the conceptual issues dividing the Armed Forces. It came down firmly on the side of friction and fog of war as opposed to the notion that technology can yield *perfect* intelligence. The volume also tried to update the time-honored principles of war by providing fundamentals of warfare in the joint, multinational, and interagency context.

One chapter was quite ambitious. Three of its provisions are particularly interesting today in light of the Kosovo experience. First, it placed the airpower doctrine of strategic attack firmly in the context of a joint campaign, avoiding the term *strategic attack* in favor of the phrase *direct attack of enemy strategic centers of gravity* and closely associating such attacks with a joint campaign, either with air, missile, special operations, and other deep-ranging capabilities or as part of a joint theater campaign. Next, Joint Pub 1 used the concept of joint campaign as a *unifying focus*, a paradigm for the American way of war in which land, sea, air, undersea, and space operations are integrated and harmonized. Finally, it laid the basis for the effort in Joint Pub 3-0 to resolve the issue of deep battle by introducing ideas such as leverage among forces, supporting and supported relationships within a theater, and symmetries and asymmetries in joint warfare. Despite strong attempts by all the services during the intensive six-month drafting and publication process, the terms *ground*, *maritime*, and *air campaigns* appear nowhere in the text.

Deep Battle and Airpower

Immediately after Joint Pub 1 was published in November 1991, the Joint Staff moved to address deep battle, an issue which its own close-hold, in-theater assessment of Desert Storm had identified as a major problem. The deep-rooted nature of the problem was revealed by the fact that the services did not even think of the area of battlespace at some distance forward of the front line of ground troops in the same way, nor did they use the same terminology. What was deep battle to the Army, for example, was not deep to the Air Force. At the same time, drafts of Joint Pub 3-0 were so mired in parochialism that a high-level, intensive effort led by the Joint Staff



31st Communications Squadron (Della A. Castillo)

Checking F-15 at Aviano air base.

To meet the first goal, Joint Pub 1 included two chapters on the purpose of military service and values in joint warfare. It also contained examples of the most successful joint campaigns of the past to illustrate that fighting as a joint team was not alien to the American way of war but had characterized its most notable applications. (The corollary should also be noted, that an absence of jointness often marked some of the Nation's least effective operations). The objective was to start a

Helicopters arriving
in Albania.



1st Combat Camera Squadron (Cesar Rodriguez)

AH-64 supporting
Task Force Hawk.



1st Combat Camera Squadron (Michelle Leonard)

began to seek common ground on key issues. At stake was the three quarters of a century-old doctrinal dispute between airmen and the rest of the military over airpower. The debate rose to fever pitch with new precision strike technologies, the appearance of *The Air Campaign* by John Warden, and the role of airpower in the Persian Gulf War.

The solution to the issue in Joint Pub 3-0 (albeit somewhat awkward because of continued service infighting up to the final stages of its development) acknowledged that airpower was equal to land and naval power, that air can be the lead force, and that the air commander can be and often will be supported, not supporting. These formulations were not popular with the Army, Navy, or Marine Corps.

The heart of the approach found in Joint Pub 3-0 was laid out in “Synchronizing Maneuver

and Interdiction,” which highlighted the dilemma such synchronization poses to an enemy:

If the enemy attempts to counter the maneuver, enemy forces can be exposed to unacceptable losses from interdiction. If the enemy employs measures to reduce such interdiction losses, enemy forces may not be able to counter the maneuver.

This pub left it to the joint force commander to “carefully balance doctrinal imperatives (between interdiction and maneuver forces) that may be in tension” and pointed out that the commander may employ interdiction as a principal means of achieving intended objectives, with other components supporting the component leading the interdiction.

But Joint Pub 3-0 also specified that the part of interdiction with a “near-term effect on land and naval maneuver” normally supports that maneuver within an area designated by the joint force commander as a land or naval force area of operation. A nuance of command relationships is that supporting commanders in this context get to prescribe their own tactics, procedures, and so forth. Although the Air Force had held the concept of supporting force to be anathema since 1942, this compromise was adopted.

Finally, Joint Pub 3-0, like Joint Pub 1, did not invoke the term *strategic attack*. Instead, in aid of achieving decisive advantage early on, this volume pointed out that joint force operations may be directed against enemy strategic centers of gravity. This compromise was far from perfect. While joint doctrine firmly embraced the notion of *one campaign*, it did not entirely eliminate the air only option.

Strategic Attack and Kosovo

The fact that Allied Force succeeded without a firm foundation in joint doctrine should not be surprising. It was not a miracle that the major military powers in the world could collectively defeat a small and economically and morally bankrupt state led by a dictator. As Clausewitz noted, “If the political aims are small . . . a prudent general may look for any way to avoid major crises and decisive actions, exploit any weaknesses in the opponent’s military and political strategy, and finally reach a peaceful settlement. If his assumptions are sound and promise success we are not entitled to criticize him.” The termination of the conflict, however, was surely

technology lessens the chance that strategic attack will work

puzzling. Why did Milosevic decide to withdraw his forces? Was it the first-ever triumph of an air campaign? Was it the Russian card? Or had the Alliance mounted a joint campaign, with Kosovar guerrillas serving as a land surrogate, supported by sensors and C⁴I assets of Task Force Hawk in Albania and allied land deployments in Macedonia, coupled with the increasing threats of intervention on the ground? The answer may never be known. In fact, the way the war was fought practically guarantees that we will never know since the Alliance did not use a strategy of compulsion but one of punishment. And Milosevic may never tell (or tell the truth) about why he accepted an agreement.

Kosovo has made it clear why joint doctrine of the early 1990s—although it acknowledged airpower as an equal player in modern warfare—did not adopt the notions of strategic attack and air campaign. There has always been a problem with

strategic attack. Douhet's original idea of 1921 has not changed much. Striking directly at enemy political leadership and popular morale (and/or key industrial or economic targets) will crack the enemy will to resist. But in direct contradiction to the underpinning of strategic attack doctrine, modern industrial and post-industrial societies are not fragile but redundant, and popular will is amazingly hard to crack. This has become complicated by an incremental application of force to first *signal* an enemy that one is serious and then *punish* it. As General Powell has recently stated, the problem with this type of operation is that it permits an enemy the initiative—the enemy decides when it has been punished enough.

Advanced technology lessens the chance that strategic attack will work. Precision weapons coupled with a reluctance to inflict collateral damage result in less shock and certainly less terror. The Serbian people were no doubt getting concerned as hostilities progressed, but it was also clear that NATO airpower was not targeting them except by mistake.

A sense of *déjà vu* arose many times during the Kosovo war, but one of the major ironies was the way in which airmen lamented that their efforts were hampered by political constraints. Inherent in those complaints is a deeper concern over collateral damage, which is understandable if one advocates strategic attack theory: collateral damage runs contrary to that theory, which seeks to shock and frighten an enemy into submission. This point highlights another problem with this doctrine—its contradiction with the laws of warfare, which are based upon deep-seated moral and ethical constraints on the type of targeting most favored by the strategic attack theorists.

That said, why was Kosovo billed as an air campaign? Certainly senior military leaders in the United States and at NATO headquarters know all of the above. For example, the commander of Allied Air Forces Southern Europe expressed the joint doctrine perspective with insight:

We lacked a ground element to fix the enemy, to make him predictable, and to give us information on where the enemy might be. The fact that [the enemy] were in the field and having some success made the Yugoslav

A-10 at Gioia del Colle air base, Italy.



52^d Communications Squadron (Blake R. Boeste)



F-15 crew members, Allied Force.

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Jeffrey Allen)



KC-10 on ramp at Rhein Main.

DOD (Aaron D. Allmon II)

army come out and fight and try to blunt their offensive. They could not stay under cover. And once they moved, or fired their artillery, our strikers learned where they were and could go in for the kill.

The most interesting question for practitioners of the joint operational art is why political leaders picked and even flaunted an air-only option in the first place. Why was the campaign so obviously launched with the hope that sending a signal for a few short days and a few hundred sorties would suffice when joint doctrine clearly indicates both that force must be applied decisively and that hope is not a method? Why were Alliance ground troops expressly taken off the table? Why did NATO launch a campaign where a readily foreseeable enemy reaction—turning the people of Kosovo into a million-person psychological and logistical refugee weapon against the Alliance—was clearly not initially accounted for? And what are the implications of this campaign for the future of joint operations?

The Blind Spot

These questions are linked to the Western preoccupation with casualties. The emphasis on minimal casualties has increased since World War I but has gained momentum since the Cold War. That trend has progressed under the current administration. Neither the drafters nor the approvers of joint doctrine ever anticipated that this concern would grow so strongly and quickly. Certainly allowing 10,000 innocent

Kosovars to perish without risking a single soldier, or bombing a series of rusting hulks because pilots were not permitted to fly lower than 5,000 meters, would not have been deemed credible in 1991.

The reasons for this concern over casualties deserve to be enumerated. First, the media have escalated the obsession with casualties. When gut-wrenching reactions of wives, parents, relatives, and friends of every American casualty or POW is piped live into our living rooms, the calculations of policymakers change. Second, demographics count. As family sizes in the developed nations have decreased, the impact of individual casualties has increased. Third, the distaste for war in the Western world as a policy option also plays a role—virtually forcing national leaders to emphasize humanitarian grounds for conflict. Finally, specific political sensitivities and instincts concerning the use of force by the President and his advisors should not be neglected as causal factors (similar reactions can be found in major European capitals including France, Germany, and Italy).

The Armed Forces have exacerbated this problem. Policymakers have increasingly come to conclude that there is an orderly, discrete, and bloodless military option: the air campaign. Despite the decisions reached about joint doctrine in 1991 and 1992, it is abundantly clear that the concept of an air campaign did not vanish. Ideas count, but so do words. Warden deserves enormous credit, for his book, which expounded an



B-1B taking off from RAF Fairford.

DOD (Jeff Fitch)

air campaign, has had an inordinate influence on policymakers. Such a campaign presents a deceptively cheap way out in a world in which few public officials are willing to risk casualties—or at least unwilling or unable to explain why humanitarian operations are worth the life of a servicemember. So airpower alone has become the policy tool of choice for active combat operations since 1992—and has several times become further distorted to mean only salvos of cruise missiles.

So What's Wrong?

Kosovo lays bare a fundamental problem evaded by joint doctrine during the early 1990s. As French General Philippe Morillon remarked: "What good are members of an armed force who are permitted to kill but not to die?" An obsessive fear of casualties not only robs warfare of useful tools (such as infantry, tanks, and manned aircraft), but on a deeper level strips away its redeeming qualities. Conflict has always presented a terrible dual reality for soldiers: the necessity to kill and the willingness to sacrifice oneself for a greater cause. In Kosovo the cause was just. But what message was sent? That the lives of 10,000 Kosovars are not worth the life of a single American or allied soldier?

The fact that extensive combat operations could last for two and a half months without the loss of one servicemember to hostile fire is an astonishing tribute to the leadership and skill of the participants. It testifies to the hard work over many years to make NATO an efficient military

team on the technical, tactical, and procedural levels. It is also a tribute to joint tactics, techniques, and procedures, and to joint exercises and training. In that sense, the effect of the Goldwater-Nichols Act on joint interoperability has been an unqualified success. But given the horrors inflicted on the Kosovars, we must ask if the right type of campaign was conducted and if the standard of zero casualties can be justified.

Two aspects of jointness—the joint campaign and decisive force, both of which require the display of courage—appear to be jeopardized. Joint Pub 1 must be revised. This is the moment to rethink the reasons for service to the Nation—not in terms of the price we are willing to pay, but the price that we may be allowed to pay. The effects of this reexamination, like every doctrinal pursuit, will have far-reaching implications for the Armed Forces. **JFQ**