

Bombing Yugoslavia—

Should there be standing criteria for committing US forces to conflict resolution abroad in a hostile or potentially hostile situation?

A Short Essay

by

Maj Randy Kee, USAF

Introduction. The current air campaign NATO is conducting against Serb aggression in Yugoslavia is arguably being waged because both NATO and US leadership want to compel Serb behavior to stop waging a war of violence against a portion of its own people. As the leader of the post Cold-War "new world order," the US is trying to use airpower to stop a horrible national internal conflict within Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, based on the historical resolve of Serb peoples, convincing Serbs to acquiesce from a limited airpower application is going to be exceedingly difficult or may even become impossible without either taking airpower to its vengeful extreme, or by introducing massive numbers of ground forces.

As the war over the skies of Yugoslavia wages onward, US military professionals not directly involved in the operation should at least contemplate if the United States had an institutionalized set of criteria to employ prior to initiating military offensives against another nation, what would such criteria be? Would an institutionalized military force criteria for the US, such as argued by Former Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger have reached the same conclusion the Clinton Administration did in deciding to wage war?

The following pages will attempt to articulate the following thesis. There should be a set of certain conditions that frame when and why US military forces should be employed to meet United States' National Command Authority (NCA) objectives. These conditions should be very similar in nature to conditions described by former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in the article of "The Uses of Military Power." The NCA should use established criteria to fashion the US National Security Strategy, (NSS) recognizing actual criteria application may need to be tailored to each crisis situation. Further, the NCA needs to maintain a perspective of determining which tool of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, or economic) would provide the most feasible, acceptable, and suitable solution to accomplish NCA designed situation endstate for each crisis situation.

Supporting points. Establishing conditions for employment of the nations' armed forces should not be viewed by other branches of government (i.e. judicial and/or legislative) as an avenue to usurp executive branch authority as the nation's established foreign policy leader and constitutional authority as armed forces Commander-in Chief. Nor should such establishment be

aimed to foster a return to an isolationist mentality among national leadership. Rather, establishing salient conditions or criteria prior to employing the nation's military serves to reduce potential for ad-hoc reasoning for employment of the military to the NCA and supporting staffs. Additionally, criteria should serve to guide the NCA to strive for appropriate military balance among competing tools of national power. Further, establishment of conditions prior to committing military forces would serve to foster better baseline understanding by establishing a "checklist" national leadership (from all branches) may use to view developing situations with discernment to likely candidates for US military intervention. Lastly, establishment of criteria needs to recognize that use of the nation's military forces should be considered a "last resort" because of two critical reasons: First, it is a rational national desire to conserve American "blood and treasure" of its perishable military strength. Second, among competing instruments of national power, using military forces provides the least flexible or retractable avenue for US foreign policy decision-making.

Discussion. US military forces live and operate in an increasingly unstable and dangerous world. During the time when Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger served in the Reagan Administration, the last stages of the Cold War provided an arguably dangerous, yet stable environment for much of the US military with a clearly defined focus to deter a peer enemy. Because of the looming potential threat of the former USSR, it could be assumed by many American citizens, employment of US forces would be necessary to respond to a USSR sponsored endeavor, which if left unchecked, could threaten the very existence of a critical ally or the United States.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the United States has not been faced with a peer competitor for more than 10 years. With the possible exception of a rogue nation's assault on the US with a weapon of mass destruction, a significant outside attack or invasion from another nation is thankfully remote. However, largely due to the national strategy of engagement in an increasingly multi-polar world, America continues to have a significant stake in global security affairs. Since the defeat of global communism and the threat it posed to the free world, many Americans still feel, as articulated from former President George Washington, the US should return to its national heritage to struggle against "foreign entanglements."

Yet today isolationism is not a viable alternative if the US desires to live in a world, which is progressing towards improved human rights, open and free markets, and democracy as the norm for world governments. In order to shape such a world, US leadership needs to be armed with effective diplomatic, informational, economic and military tools.

Arguably former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger as well as much of the senior leadership of the US military establishment of the 1980s were profoundly influenced by the American participation in the Vietnam conflict. During Vietnam, US President Lyndon Johnson's commitment of US military forces to "send signals, convey intent and American resolve" were inappropriate reasoning to commit the nation's blood and treasure, especially since purpose, objectives, and endstates of military action were never adequately defined, nor publicly defended. Although President Johnson committed forces to Vietnam because of his strategy of containing communism, he failed to recognize the greater issue of committing US military forces in a limited war to another nation which did not have the internal resolve to defeat the enemy. In

the case of Vietnam, President Johnson never displayed the courage of character required to either commit to win, or get out of Vietnam before the US was mired in a hopeless situation. Thus, potentially President Johnson's manifested decision-making debacle of Vietnam provided the impetus to Secretary Weinberger, which led to his doctrine proposal criteria for committing US forces to an overseas conflict.

The standing criteria. Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger articulated six standing tests, which he believed should be virtual criteria to consider prior to employing US forces abroad; these criteria still serve well today in defining situations when, how, and why US military forces would be appropriately used. First, US forces would be used because the issue was vital to American national interests. Second the NCA would not commit US forces to combat, unless resolved to win. Third, the NCA would have clearly defined political and military objectives, and know how US force employment would accomplish those objectives. Fourth, the relationship between US force involvement and objectives would be continually re-assessed and remain relevant. Fifth, before committing US forces abroad the NCA would have reasonable assurances of support from both the American people and Congress. Lastly, committing US forces to combat would be used only as a last resort.¹

This criterion is valuable for the following reasons: First, it serves the NCA as a suitable roadmap or series of issues to consider when responding to a crisis event. This will be addressed further in subsequent paragraphs. Second, criteria provides a "contract" between the NCA, other national leadership, US forces and the American people, the nation's armed forces would not be used unless absolutely warranted by the situation, and all other avenues had been fully vetted. Another integral consideration of the contract, is the US will not commit its armed forces unless committed to win--addressing a critical problem of US involvement in the Vietnam War. Third, criteria serves to constantly remind the NCA, the vital need to solicit the input and support of Congressional leaders, and the American people when contemplating employing US forces abroad. Lastly, criteria serves notice upon the NCA to communicate with Congress, US forces and the American people, the how, what, and why objectives (and supporting reasoning) of US military force employment abroad. The Weinberger criteria correctly recognize effective communication must remain relevant, two-way and on going between the NCA, Congress, US forces, and the American people.

Recognizing the remarkable value of the Weinberger criteria, I would recommend two wording changes and the addition of one criterion: **Wording change #1.** It is necessary to link US military viability to meet both specific objectives as well as desired endstate. To illustrate, US military participation may accomplish specified objectives, which provide the most feasible, acceptable and suitable tool of national power, yet fall short of accomplishing US desired endstate for the situation. For example, although it is speculation at this point, US sponsored North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) aerial bombing of military targets in Yugoslavia is aimed at limiting Serbian military capability to persecute an "ethnic cleansing" campaign against Albanians in Yugoslavia's Kosovo province. Arguably NATO air forces can accomplish the specified objective of degrading Yugoslavia military strength. But if bombings coupled with renewed Serbian pressure force ethnic Albanians to flee Kosovo for neighboring countries, then US sponsored NATO bombing is not appropriate to reach a desired endstate of stopping Serbian "ethnic cleansing" against Albanians in Kosovo (it in fact aids the Serbian effort).

Wording change #2. Committing US forces to actual conventional combat requires a national commitment to fight to win. However, when committing US forces to a combat situation the NCA should consider the full spectrum of desired outcomes (both conventional and unconventional) the NCA should consider in course of action development. The intended focus should be to use US forces to influence adversary behavior to meet US objectives with minimum actual firepower use. Thus, "if we fight, we fight to win, but before we fight, we work to change the enemy, with the goal to get what we want without having to fight."

A fundamental belief I maintain is the inherent value to attempt to change enemy behavior through unconventional methods. For example, US Special Operations Forces possess a unique capability to operate in a combat situation and accomplish US objectives asymmetrically without the need to "win" in a conventional sense. Perhaps the future's Information Warfare specialists may be able to exploit the information medium to US advantage in a similar asymmetric manner.

The reasoning for wording change #2 is because the past decade (and especially this past year) I believe has shown the limits of conventional combat power to change key US adversaries behavior to align such behavior to meet US and allied objectives. Both Iraq and Yugoslavian leadership has repeatedly been able to resist conventional US led military attacks, in part due to limits the US applies to restrain the amount of applied conventional firepower. US participation in Korea, Vietnam, and other crisis events in the post World War II period have similarly displayed the American and allied political restraints applied to US military operations. Clearly, considerable precedence has been established regarding US desires to limit conventional military operations. Thus, in keeping with the desires to conserve US armed force strength, the "fight to win" criteria should be modified to include "work to change the hearts and mind of the enemy, before we have to fight him" as a criteria priority.

Additional criteria. Add the goal of US seeking United Nations, standing treaty alliance or coalition participation prior to unilateral action as the priority for setting US military force participation. This is the same as articulated in President Clinton's 1998 National Security Strategy.

Perspectives of criteria institutionalization. Establishing standing criteria for employing US military requires contemplation from both the theoretical and practical application perspectives. Practically speaking, establishing standing criteria serves as a checklist to guide the NCA in determining appropriateness of employing US forces to accomplish political objectives. Is such as "checklist" necessary to impose upon the NCA to structure the decision making process? In addressing the relevancy of the question three issues need to be adequately resolved: First, what is the intent by establishing and institutionalizing a "pre-employment" criteria listing, compelling NCA consideration prior to employment of US military forces? Second, by establishing standing criteria, would such criteria be binding to the NCA? Third, if such criteria were binding, who would enforce following the criteria to the NCA?

From a theoretical perspective establishing standing criteria have potentially considerable benefits. For example, US Air Force pilots are provided aircraft and mission checklists which are intended to guide pilots to accomplish necessary steps in a sequence which has the intended result to properly configure the aircraft to operate effectively in a particular phase of the flight or

mission. An important note to draw is the "non-binding" nature of the aircrew checklists. A pilot is not required to follow the checklist, any method to configure the aircraft is acceptable, as long as the airplane is configured properly for the particular phase of the flight or mission, and as long as safety is not jeopardized. The provided checklist however illustrates the most logical sequence for configuring the aircraft, as well as providing a rational method for the pilots to avoid overlooking an important step.

The Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) which US Army Command and General Staff College students learn to exhaustive detail during the course, serves as a detailed criteria list of necessary items to consider for military force course of action development. Thus at the tactical level, both aircrew and MDMP "checklists" serve well to ensure successful mission accomplishment.

At the operational level, unified commands and Joint Staff Operations Centers maintain both Quick Reaction Checklists as well as guided criteria lists to ensure necessary actions have been considered and accomplished in response to a crisis.² A primary difference between checklists at the operational and tactical level is the level of detail and interpretation. The operational level "checklists" are much broader in scope, with considerably larger room for interpretation than tactical level checklists. The Weinberger criteria, (plus discussed modifications) as described previously would necessarily be established with latitude for the implementers. Thus, from the theoretical perspective, establishment of a standing criteria for employment of US military forces abroad, serves as an appropriate guide for NCA decision-makers, providing a rational series of issues to consider while developing suitable courses of action.

From the practical perspective, establishing and institutionalizing criteria for employment of the US military abroad, opens the possibility of limitations posed upon NCA decision-makers. Congress could potentially use standing criteria to attempt to manipulate NCA decision-makers from pursuing a particular course of action. Publicly defining criteria could also be used by America's potential adversaries as an asymmetric lever, which could ultimately be exploited, by the adversary to the disadvantage of the US. However, establishing standing criteria, with the understanding situations may require tailoring of criteria, (in order to effectively respond to a particular situation) derails both the potential of NCA-Congressional conflict as well as a determined and crafty adversary.

An additional argument for establishing criteria is to institutionalize the relationship and priorities between tools of national power. Because of the potentially devastating and long-term consequences of using military force, use of such force in a hostile manner should be arguably a last resort in the overwhelming majority of foreseeable situations. In large part, once a nation decides to commit a military campaign against another nation, the other sources of national power are generally "sidelined," until the military situation is exploited and culmination is reached on one side or both. The bottom line is because other tools of national power have a greater chance to "win the hearts and minds" of the enemy, they should be fully exhausted prior to resorting to military force.

Summary. Congress, US forces and many of the American people themselves recognize the underlying reasoning behind employing US forces abroad should be at least linked NSS

fundamental purposes: provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity. Establishing (and committing to routinely publishing in the annual NSS) criteria for employing US forces abroad reaffirms to the nation of NCA resolve to keep appropriate balance and priorities for use of the tools of national power. Additionally, criteria provides an issues roadmap, a contract, and serves as a reminder for effective communications between NCA, Congressional leaders, US forces and the American people when contemplating employing US forces abroad. As discussed in this paper, the benefits of such establishment (and the flexibility to tailor application to meet a particular situation) far out-weigh the drawbacks of such establishment. In conclusion, although every professional officer publicly supports US military policy, in retrospect, I offer the following remark. If the US had established and institutionalized such a criteria as articulated in this essay, I personally believe the NCA would have placed greater emphasis in other channels of national power before resorting to the use of the military in Yugoslavia. Debate time is over for now—may our brothers in the air fly safe and accomplish the mission as best they can!

Endnotes

1. Weinberger, Caspar, W. "The Uses of Military Power", Ft Leavenworth KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Handout for Master Strategist Essay Competition, pages 178-179.
2. United States National Security Strategy, 1998, Page 1.

Disclaimer

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author cultivated in the freedom of expression, academic environment of Air University. They do not reflect the official position of the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force or the Air University.

This article has undergone security and policy content review and has been approved for public release IAW AFI 35-101.