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A New Century of Power Projection Begins

by

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(For information about U.S. military power projection prior to 1999, see Dr. Schrader's "A Century of Power Projection, 1898-1998" [Landpower Essay No. 98-4, July 1998].)

On 24 March 1999, the United States began a second century of power projection much as it had ended the last—with a major deployment of military forces to the Balkans. Operation Joint Guardian, the U.S. deployment associated with NATO Operation Allied Force, the 78-day air campaign against the forces of the former Yugoslavia, and the humanitarian relief operations to succor the more than 850,000 ethnic Albanians expelled from the Kosovo region by Slobodan Milosevic's military and police forces, was only the latest in a series of responses to rapidly developing crises which have required the rapid deployment of U.S. military personnel and equipment to distant scenes of conflict. The challenges of Operation Joint Guardian were met—as such challenges have been met in the past—enthusiastically and successfully but with a noticeably greater degree of efficiency than ever before. Moreover, this most recent projection of American military power reflected the positive impact of efforts over the past decade to improve our airlift and sealift capacity as well as to make our forces more mobile while retaining their high combat power.

In response to the oppression and expulsion of ethnic Albanians from the Kosovo region of the former Yugoslavia, on 22 March 1999 the North Atlantic Council authorized the Secretary General of NATO to begin a phased air operation designed to end the Milosevic regime's ongoing ethnic cleansing campaign in Kosovo. Operation Allied Force, which began on 24 March, turned out to be a 78-day around-the-clock operation involving 19 NATO nations and more than 38,000 combat sorties. Terminated on 20 June 1999, Operation Allied Force was the largest combat operation in NATO history. For the United States, participation in Operation Allied Force involved the deployment, primarily from the United States and Germany, of more than 31,600 personnel with their equipment, 650 aircraft, and a dozen major combatant vessels.

Air mobility operations in support of Operation Allied Force did not significantly stress our strategic airlift system, even though 67 percent of all dry cargo for the operation was moved by air

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(compared to 9.4 percent in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm). In all, between 24 March and 3 July 1999, U.S. Air Force Air Mobility Command (AMC) and U.S. Air Force Europe (USAFE) flew a combined total of 11,480 airlift sorties, moving 50,453 passengers and 92,833 short tons of cargo in support of Operation Allied Force, as shown in the following table. Of the total, some 500 sorties were devoted to the delivery of humanitarian supplies to support Operation Shining Hope, the relief of the ethnic Albanians who fled Kosovo for camps in Albania and Macedonia.

Operation Allied Force—Combined AMC/USAFE Airlift Summary

	Sorties	Passengers	Short Tons
Deployment	6,197	28,698	63,095
Redeployment	3,518	15,940	16,768
Sustainment	1,765	5,815	12,970
TOTAL	11,480	50,453	92,833

Although flying only 20 percent of the total strategic airlift missions, C-5 aircraft were critical for the long leg from the continental United States (CONUS) to Europe and the movement of precision munitions by air. Most of the airlift sorties were flown by the newer C-17 aircraft, which proved its mettle as well. KC-135 and KC-10 tanker aircraft also played an important role. Operation Allied Force and the associated deployment and humanitarian support operations were “tanker intensive” and strained Air Mobility Command tanker capabilities. Between 24 March and 3 July 1999, some 160 tanker aircraft—manned by 300 aircrews operating from 11 bases in Europe—flew 6,959 missions in support of combat aircraft and transports carrying deploying units, off-loading some 311,700,000 pounds of fuel.

Ships belonging to or chartered by the Navy’s Military Sealift Command moved everything from Abrams tanks to humanitarian supplies. Operation Allied Force was supported by 34 strategic sealift ships which transported some 7,594,674 barrels of fuel, 245,280 square feet of ammunition, and 1,225,849 square feet of vehicles and equipment as well as 1,533 20-foot container equivalents—in all the equivalent of 20 million minivans and enough cargo to fill 13 Super Walmart stores. Prepositioning program ships provided direct support involving one tanker for JP-5 aviation fuel and two ammunition ships for air munitions. The strategic sealift operations in support of Operation Joint Guardian also involved the first operational voyage of the Navy’s new large medium-speed roll-on/roll-off (LMSR) vessel, the USNS *Bob Hope*, one of a planned 14 new-construction LMSR ships to be built by 2001. The *Bob Hope*, assisted by the USNS *Soderman* (a Shugart-class LMSR built in Denmark and modified by the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company of San Diego, California), was used to deploy some 7,000 United States Army, Europe (USAREUR) personnel and their heavy combat equipment, including Abrams tanks, Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, armored combat engineer vehicles, heavy equipment transporters and various other items from Bremerhaven, Germany, to Thessaloniki, Greece, for onward movement to the Kosovo area of operations.

Port operations were conducted primarily from two ports in the United States: Military Ocean Terminal-Sunny Point, North Carolina (for ammunition), and Beaumont, Texas (for unit equipment). In Europe, matériel flowed from Port Thames in the United Kingdom, Bremerhaven in Germany, Augusta Bay in Italy, and Bandırma in Turkey to three main ports in the Adriatic and Aegean seas: Brindisi in Italy, Dürres in Albania, and Thessaloniki in Greece. Thessaloniki, operated by 170 soldiers, civilians and contractor personnel, was an excellent port but required overland movement of equipment and supplies to the staging areas in Macedonia and Albania. The Albanian port of Dürres, although closer to the area of operations, was shallow and limited in its infrastructure.

Support for Operation Allied Force also involved the movement of U.S. troops, equipment and supplies from Germany as well as from the continental United States. The planning time was short and involved major readjustments as well as a few glitches, but overall the deployment of Task Force (TF) Hawk was carried out in good order in an acceptable time frame. The warning order for the deployment of U.S. forces from Germany—mainly Apache attack helicopters and multiple-launch rocket systems—was issued on 27 March 1999. When the Macedonian government refused to allow the deployment of the task force through its territory, the plan was changed on 1 April for deployment of TF Hawk to Albania. The plan called for the self-deployment of the Apache helicopters from Wiesbaden Air Base and the deployment of other forces through the Deployment Processing Center (DPC) at Rhine Ordnance Barracks in Kaiserslautern for movement by air from Ramstein Air Base to Tirana, Albania. The deployment was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 4 April, and on 7 April the Albanian government approved the basing of U.S. forces at Rinas airfield near Tirana. The first C-17 departed Ramstein AB on 8 April en route to Tirana, and the first Apache helicopters began self-deployment on 14 April, arriving at Rinas on 21 April. The deployment was completed by 7 May, and on 9 June the TF Hawk mission was terminated and some 1,700 TF Hawk soldiers were reassigned to TF Falcon.

The deployment of TF Hawk was not without its problems. The limited runway and infrastructure at Rinas airfield in Albania, heavy rains and poor flying weather, and the massive ongoing humanitarian relief operations in Albania and Macedonia, compounded by the lack of engineer assets early on, resulted in unexpected delays. The Deployment Processing Center concept proved its value, but some age-old problems surfaced once again. Unit movement officers lacked sufficient training and understanding of the process, and units failed to comply with established standards, appearing at the DPC with “uninventoried containers”—recalling the unlabeled boxcars lined up at Tampa (en route to Cuba) in 1898. Some confusion was also caused by differences in Army and Air Force standards and procedures, but overall the 6,000-man force and their equipment were fully deployed and ready for operations by 7 May, only one month after their deployment was approved.

Overall, Department of Defense systems for planning and controlling the strategic movement of forces were strained by the rapidly evolving requirements of Operation Allied Force. In particular, the changing requirements affected the ability of planners to quickly develop plans for force deployment which utilized lift assets efficiently. Poor port facilities in Dürres, near the area of operations, slowed the movement of equipment and cargo through the port area, and poor airport conditions in Tirana slowed aircraft turnaround times, limited throughput and slowed the onward movement of forces and humanitarian support.

As usual, Operation Joint Guardian and Operation Allied Force were Total Force operations for U.S. military forces inasmuch as some 61 percent of our CONUS surface transportation capacity, 57 percent of our airlift capability and 93 percent of our aeromedical evacuation capability resides in the reserve components. The personnel demands associated with the deployment of forces to Macedonia, Albania and ultimately into Kosovo itself were a reminder that the most critical factor in power projection remains capable, trained personnel. Although airlift and sealift personnel as well as combat troops were readily available, tanker aircrews and capable staff planners were at a premium during Operation Allied Force, suggesting areas for improvement in the future.

Major changes in military doctrine, organization and equipment usually require a significant catalyst to dissolve the old ways of thinking and allow new concepts and designs to emerge. The deployment of U.S. armed forces to Kosovo as part of Operation Allied Force and the related humanitarian relief operations may have been the catalyst needed for the United States Army to make the first major changes in Army organization and equipment since the 1960s.

In October 1999, Army leaders announced plans for the development of two new medium-weight brigades, which may turn out to be models for future mobile Army strategic forces. As reported by

Steven Lee Myers in the 13 October 1999 edition of the *New York Times*, the plans call for the formation of two new 3,000-man brigades, capable of being deployed anywhere in the world in less than 96 hours. Two existing brigades at Fort Lewis, Washington (the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, and 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division) will be converted to form the new brigades, the organization of which may foreshadow the most significant restructuring of U.S. ground forces since the Vietnam War as efforts to reduce the large support "tail" of deploying combat units and to introduce new, "lighter" weapon systems accelerate. As Army Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki noted recently, "Everything is on the table." Ultimately, such major changes in Army force structure, rejected as recently as a year ago, may mark the beginning of an effort in which the current distinction between "heavy" armored forces and "light" infantry forces is blurred as the Army strives to achieve its strategic mobility goal of being able to deploy a 15,000-man division in five days and five divisions in thirty days.

In early November 1999, *Washington Post* reporter Bradley Graham described how the Army's move toward lighter, more deployable forces of substantial lethality has been reinforced by the decision to support a new approach in armored vehicle design. Over the years, Army tanks have become ever heavier as their capabilities increased. The M-48 tank weighed 50 tons; the M1A2 Abrams weighs close to 70 tons, can be airlifted only one at a time even in our largest aircraft, guzzles fuel, and requires extensive maintenance support. The goal of Army leaders is to develop a tank nearly equal in capability to the Abrams but weighing less than 20 tons and thus better able to deploy rapidly to remote places to fight or keep the peace with minimal supporting structures.

The new concept in armored vehicle design, recently approved by the Defense Science Board and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), involves what is known as a "distributive approach" in which the various tank components (armament, targeting systems, radios, etc.) are deployed on the battlefield as separate elements and linked by electronics. Past attempts to develop a "light" but fully capable tank (for example, the unlamented M-551 Sheridan of the 1960s) have failed, and the technology needed to facilitate such an innovative system is only just now coming into existence. Moreover, the resistance to change among older "heavy force" advocates is strong, and fiscal constraints are always a factor. Nevertheless, the continued development of the new approach, as part of a larger effort to field more agile, more deployable fighting systems for the Army, has been endorsed by General Shinseki and Army Vice Chief of Staff General John Keane, who have also decided to move up the deadline for fielding new light ground combat systems from 2025 to 2012, with the necessary procurement decisions being made by 2003. The search for a new light armored vehicle will probably be a joint effort with the U.S. Marine Corps, which has traditionally relied on lighter armored vehicles. Marine Corps Commandant General Jim Jones has expressed interest in working with the Army on development of such a new armored vehicle.

There is little doubt that both the decision to develop the new "medium-weight" brigade and the search for a lighter, more strategically mobile armored vehicle have been given greater urgency by the demands of recent events such as Operation Allied Force and the September 1999 crisis in East Timor. The deployment of U.S. forces to the Balkans in support of Operation Allied Force was by no means without challenges and important shortcomings, but it revealed how far we have come in improving our power-projection capabilities as well as how far we have left to go. Most importantly, the recent deployment of forces to Kosovo appears to have finally convinced American military and political leaders that increased strategic mobility of our forces is the *sine qua non* for a future environment in which we are required to respond to crises on short notice around the world. Many challenges remain to be overcome, human as well as fiscal and technological, but as the United States Army enters its second century of force projection, it appears to be moving forward at an accelerated pace to make the changes necessary to ensure that those challenges are faced and overcome.

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