

Editorial

The bulk of this number is given over to a detailed report by Amnesty International on the effects of Nato's war against Yugoslavia. This report is important, because it cuts through the haze of wordy rhetoric about the justification for the war, and tells us precisely what the war entailed for those who suffered it.

Since hostilities ceased, there has been a great deal of recriminatory polemic. Some liberals¹ in the United States have sought to blame the administration, and especially Madeleine Albright, for what has gone wrong.

For sure, on the political plane, very many things have gone wrong, and very many more will go wrong in the coming months and years. Nobody knows what to do about the victorious detachment of Kosovo from Serbian control. Will the Kosovars obtain self-determination? If so, how will the pressure for Greater Albania be restrained? How many more wars will domino out across the Balkans? If not, who will confront the rage of the Kosovo Liberation Army? The Nato statesmen have assumed that if they can encompass the ruin of President Milosevic, all will be well. But his ghost will walk with them for many years following his downfall, if that comes about.

The curious thing is that, while the political consequences of the war remain a complete mess, the military balance sheet is really quite different. The air forces have been blamed for legendary mistakes. The press has reported the war as a chapter of military miscalculation. We have been told repeatedly about the microwave ovens which simulated vital hardware, and lured a whole succession of expensive Nato missiles to an unnecessary end. Over and again we have heard of the cardboard tanks which were, at ruinous cost, taken out by ultra-modern rocketry. The Serbian experience in guerrilla warfare, and long years of training to meet possible Russian intervention, are blamed for a whole succession of Nato mistakes.

These mistakes will be extremely useful to the Generals when they come to argue for even more expensive hardware, which can tell the difference between cardboard and metal, and can pass over the threat of mischievous microwave oven deployment. How many billions will be required to build any such discriminatory powers into the next generation of rockets we shall not know for some considerable time. But doubtless more necessary social expenditure will be aborted, in order to develop the necessary technology to outwit future adversaries.

In spite of all this, the real military balance sheet for the Americans remains, for them, quite positive. The actual outcome of the Yugoslav war seems to have very precisely followed the models laid down by the American war planners.

Colonel John A. Warden III of the US Air Force, summed up much of this thinking in his paper 'The Enemy as a System'.² This represents a thorough-going revision of the thinking of Clausewitz and Napoleon, and begins with a severely rational examination of how to achieve the objectives of the United States.

'At the strategic level', says Colonel Warden, 'we attain our objectives by causing such changes to one or more parts of the enemy's physical system that the enemy decides to adopt our objectives, or we make it physically impossible for him to oppose us. The latter we call strategic paralysis. Which parts of the enemy system we attack . . . will depend on what our objectives are, how much the enemy wants to resist us, how capable he is, and how much effort we are physically, morally, and politically capable of exercising.'

But what is the enemy 'system'? Warden offers a simplified model of five rings. At the centre is the leadership or brain. In the next circle are the organic essentials, food, energy, and so on. Thirdly, there is the infrastructure, of vital connections and skeletal essentials: roads, air fields, factories, transmission lines. The fourth ring is the population which is sustained by these essentials, and is necessary to sustain them. Lastly, and in fact least important for many purposes, is the circle of the fighting mechanism.

The purpose of modern war is not to confront arms, or kill soldiers. If this process can be avoided altogether, that would be fine by the controllers of modern war, provided only that they could exercise their will over enough of the other rings to bend the enemy leadership to their own purposes.

Colonel Warden explains these categories with a series of intricate diagrams. But such diagrams are not necessary for us to realise that within this model, American Generals do not give a fig whether the tanks destroyed by their rockets are made of metal or plywood. What they care about is the destruction of the system, if not by the liquidation of its leadership, then by cumulative damage to the essentials which sustain it.

'We must not start our thinking on war with the tools of war – with the air planes, tanks, ships and those who crew them. These tools are important and have their place, but they cannot be our starting point, nor can we allow ourselves to see them as the essentials of war. Fighting is not the essence of war, nor even a desirable part of it. The real essence is doing what is necessary to make the enemy accept our objectives as his objectives.'

Modern, this surely is: but it is by no means necessarily humane. The allies in the Gulf War did not wish to fight the Iraqi forces on a level battlefield, but they were not averse to destroying them *en masse*, and bulldozing them into mass desert graves, whether they were dead or alive. Here we had a 'modern' view of ethics, no doubt.

Since we are likely to meet the Warden doctrine again, it would be as well to study it, and to study its results, as they are made plain, for instance, in the Amnesty Report.

Ken Coates

Footnotes

1. See Michael Mandelbaum, 'A Perfect Failure: Nato's War against Yugoslavia', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1999.
2. We are grateful to Jurgen Rose for drawing our attention to this important paper which can be located on the Internet at: <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/warden.html>