

# Keeper File

## Air War—the Short Version

*Lt. Gen. Michael C. Short was NATO's air boss for the 1999 air war over Serbia. Short loathed the way pusillanimous politicians ran the war. "I'd have gone for the head of the snake on the first night," he said. "I'd have turned the lights out the first night." Early in 2000, in a speech at an AFA event, Short gave a thoughtful take on problems with coalition war. The Vietnam combat veteran was, however, typically blunt, noting that as he was soon to retire, "this will be my last opportunity [to speak], and I don't intend to blow it."*

I want to talk for just a few minutes today about coalition air ops. ... I believe that for every instance where we face an adversary, we will look for a coalition opportunity. We will try to cobble together a coalition, because we want to fight that way, because we want to share the burden, and because we want the cloak of legitimacy that operating in a coalition gives us. That is what I want to talk about for just a few minutes this morning: coalition air operations. ...

You and I must be given political objectives. We need to know what our coalition is trying to accomplish on the political scene, and we need to have those translated to us, as professional soldiers, into military objectives. Ladies and gentlemen, we began bombing the first night with our objective being to show NATO resolve. That is tough to tell the airmen at Aviano [Air Base, Italy]—to go out and put it on the line to "demonstrate resolve." We need to know what our military objectives are, and we need to understand what we are trying to accomplish with airpower and ground power and sea power.

I knew—we all knew—what we were trying to do in Kosovo. We wanted [Slobodan] Milosevic to cease ethnic cleansing. We wanted the VJ [Yugoslav Army] out of Kosovo. We wanted a force on the ground, an international force under NATO leadership. We wanted the Kosovar Albanians to have the ability to return to their homes and pick up their lives. We wanted the ICTY [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia] process to work. We accomplished all five of those things to some degree by happenstance, rather than by design.

You and I need the clearest possible definition of an end state. General [John] Jumper has been very articulate in his observing that we don't know yet if we won in Kosovo. ... What was the end state? We knew what as soldiers we were going to try to accomplish: those five points I spoke to. But what is the end state in Kosovo? Is it a free Kosovo? Is it greater Albania? Is it return of the Kosovo province to Serb rule? We don't know yet. I have never seen it clearly articulated. We know in a general fashion what the international community wanted to accomplish, but we are not there yet, and we won't be there for a long time. [We need] political objectives, military objectives, and a clear end state.

We need to prepare our politicians as best we can for what is going to happen. If we are going to initiate an air campaign—not an air effort, but an air campaign—airmen need to be given the chance to explain what is going to happen, to our political leadership. Airmen, who have practiced their craft and their trade for 30 or 35 years, need to be given the opportunity to make that explanation. I read in General [Charles] Horner's superb book [about Desert Storm] how he went to Camp Da-

### "Coalition Air War"

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Address to AFA Air Warfare Symposium  
Orlando, Fla.  
Feb. 25, 2000

Find the full text on the  
**Air Force Magazine's website**  
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vid and briefed the President of the United States on how he intended to conduct an air campaign to prepare the battlefield in Kuwait and Iraq. I am not campaigning for a trip to Camp David, but there was a case to be made for an air campaign, and airmen should have made that case.

Our politicians need to understand that this isn't going to be clean. There is going to be collateral damage. There will be unintended civilian casualties. We will do our level best to prevent both, but they've got to grit their teeth and stay with us. We can't cut and run the first time we hit the wrong end of a bridge. We can't cut and run the first time we kill innocent people [who] clearly we did not intend to kill. Just as we did not target the Chinese Embassy as the Chinese Embassy, we never targeted civilians, and you know that, but there are people out there who believe that we did. Unfortunately, the reaction to every incident placed our airmen at greater risk and made it more difficult to do our job.

What we are left with now is a generation of politicians throughout the alliance who have an unrealistic picture of airpower and air war. It is a video game on CNN. All your nation has to do is send four airplanes and 60 people a thousand miles, turn them over to an American commander, and go about your business. ...

Our politicians need to understand that we will do our best to make airpower clean and painless as they want us to, but it is not going to work out that way. People die in airpower conflicts. There is collateral damage. There is unintended loss of life. When they choose to employ us, to take us to war, when they choose to use military force to solve a problem that politicians could not, then they need to grit their teeth and stay with us. ■