

Discussion

Brian O'Donnell:

General, did you ever feel constrained in the bombing campaign not to strike a target because you did not have a precision-guided munition?

Michael Short:

We started this fight out as a totally precision-munitions fight. A lot has been made in the press about the fifteen thousand foot floor that I placed on my people. You need to understand that when we started this fight, we were only going to attack fixed targets. We were not going to attack tanks. We were not going to attack troops in the field. We were going to attack buildings and airfields and aircraft shelters and bridges and those sorts of things, which are easily identifiable from fifteen thousand feet. Restrictions were placed on me that I could not lose any aircraft and any aircrews. So I had enormous concern for force protection. You cannot fly high enough to avoid the radar of a surface-to-air missile. But you can fly high enough to avoid small arms and light triple-A (anti-aircraft artillery) and the IR (infra-red) missile. Fifteen thousand feet was that floor, so that's where we started out.

Every bomb that was dropped for the first X number of days in Serbia and Kosovo was a guided munition. There were a number of NATO nations that did not carry precision-guided munitions, and they were not allowed to drop bombs. Then as we moved into the next phase, which was attacking the Third Army in Kosovo, we continued to use nothing but precision munitions. Then we found that if we controlled it properly and used the correct force that we could drop a certain number of unguided munitions—what you and I call dumb bombs. We did indeed drop a number of dumb bombs, particularly from B-1s and B-52s. I understand there was a discussion earlier today about so-called carpet bombing B-52s. No carpet bombing occurred. Outside of Kosovo, again with the exception of the B-52 and the B-1, we dropped nothing that wasn't precision guided. Everything that hit Serbia proper was

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precision-guided munitions in an attempt to control collateral damage and in attempt to control loss of civilian life.

Leslie Green:

Do you not think that it is time we took the line that we want the military representative with perhaps their legal advisers from the members of the coalition to get together and say, putting it brutally, to hell with our constitutional political advisers—we are going to decide, not somebody sitting three-and-a-half thousand miles away who has not the vaguest idea of what is going on anyway?

Michael Short:

No, sir, I can never imagine giving up civilian control of the military.

Leslie Green:

It is the constitutional control that worries me, not the civilian control.

Michael Short:

No, as strongly as I feel about men and women in my profession being allowed to do their jobs, and as strongly as I would advise against micromanagement by political appointed or elected leaders, if that is the role they choose to play, then I have to accept that role. I advise against it. I hope that what my own country and I saw during the last eight years was an aberration driven by a particular administration that I will not see again. But you need to understand, I hoped the same thing in 1967 when Lyndon Johnson was on his hands and knees in the Oval Office reviewing targets with Robert McNamara. Remember that my generation swore that would never happen again. In the Gulf War, in fact, it did not. George Bush the elder gave us mission-type orders. That was not the case in 1999. But I cannot imagine a military professional saying to hell with the constitution and to hell with our elected and appointed leaders, we'll do this as we see fit. That is not how we do business.

Leslie Green:

What if the constitution of one country interferes with the military operations of the coalition?

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Michael Short:

I believe, sir, you've got to set those rules beforehand with that particular country. In the case of the Canadians, there were targets I knew the Canadian F-18s were not allowed to attack. Their pilots were dying to do it, but Ottawa was not going to allow them. So it was my job to assign those targets to a nation with less restrictive guidance. I could still use the Canadians in many roles. It is my job to fold all those capabilities together and produce a coherent war-making effort. Now I agree with you that before the fact is when we have to agree on what the rules are. I would take the position that before the fact we say "nation X, if you don't wish to attack any of these targets, that's fine, but you cannot prohibit the rest of us from attacking those targets." But as far as I can tell, that conversation never took place, and once the fight started, we lost that leverage.

Ruth Wedgwood:

You said that the center of gravity to really win the campaign was the ruling elite in Belgrade.

Michael Short:

Milosevic and the men and women around him who depend upon him and who he, in turn, depends upon.

Ruth Wedgwood:

We had a big debate this afternoon about whether civilian morale as such is ever an allowable target. From an operational point of view, fill me in on what you make of that.

Michael Short:

Let me give you my perspective, and Colonel Sorenson who was my lawyer will leap to his feet if I get out of bounds here even though I am retired now. You cannot target civilians—pure and simple. Now, as a professional soldier, I will target the power grid, which I believe will significantly impact command and control of all Serb forces throughout the entire country. We will prohibit their ability to move on trains, and we will make it very, very difficult for them to do their military business. Now when I sit with my planners, I am not going to think that you are so naive that I do not say to myself and to my planners that this will also make the Serb population unhappy with their senior leadership because they allowed this to happen. But that is a spin-off—a peripheral result—of me targeting a valid military target.

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If I had gone to my bosses with Colonel Sorenson and said I want to target something because it will impact the Serb civilian population, from my perspective, that would be totally out of bounds. That would be unacceptable. But any thinking military professional knows that there are certain target sets that if targeted are going to have an effect on the population which in turn will pressure the senior leadership. There were factories that we were never able to get to for a number of different reasons that were dual-use factories. They produced Yugos from midnight until noon and tank turrets from noon to midnight. That is a valid military target. Now if I blow that up, two thousand Serbs probably just lost their jobs, and they will demonstrate outside Milosevic's palace because they would be unhappy. I know that, but that is not why I targeted that facility. I will stand in any court in the land and swear to that because that is how we hit our targets. But certainly we understand the peripheral in that.

Christopher Greenwood:

My question is this General: Britain would have been in the dock along with the United States, so can you see any circumstances in which it would have been responsible for a British government not to have insisted on reviewing targets? Can you think of any circumstances in which the United States would allow British aircraft to fly from a US air base to attack a target without the United States checking to see whether it would be attacking a lawful target?

Michael Short:

No, I understand your position. There were strange aircraft taking off from Germany every day and the Germans did not exercise their prerogative to approve the targets of those aircraft. The vast majority of US strike aircraft were stationed at Aviano, Italy and Mr D'Alema, who was struggling with extraordinary skills to hold together a coalition government, never approached us and asked to review the targets of our aircraft taking off from Aviano. So while I certainly understand the position taken by the British government, when the rest of my allies did not take that position, then the British position stands out to me as a problem. Okay? I was able to work around this as long as I got a notification time or as long as I was able to understand the sensitivity of what Britain thought was good, bad, or indifferent. But on more than one occasion when the system wasn't working, I had dozens of strike aircraft on the tanker within ten minutes of pushing into Serbian airspace when the word came through from Ten Downing Street that the target was not acceptable to the British.