

A SOFTWARE VIEW OF THE KOSOVO CONFLICT¹

Chuck de Caro

Aerobureau Corporation, Mc Lean, Virginia, USA

ABSTRACT

The contemporaneous viewing of Global TV (GTV) during the recent conflict in Kosovo demonstrated that the Milosevic government used 'SoftWar' tactics to attempt to counter-balance US/NATO in the global mil-pol regime. The resultant effects upon the bodies politic of the NATO nations may well have helped to prolong the conflict. In this paper some Soft War aspects of the KOSOVO conflict are examined. The paper starts with an overview of 'who we are' and the philosophy and way of operations of Aerobureau Corporation. As the resident out-of-the-box-IW-guy I am very happy that to see that the pursuit of IW is having some effect on the way the US conducts itself on the international scene. But in all cases I think that the portrayals do not go far enough in that they are limited to activities that take place in an arena of nation-states (or in the case of Kosovo, proto-nation-states)

ORGANIZING FOR THE FUTURE OF IW

The reality is that the Information Age has already created war forms that go beyond conflict bounded by such Industrial Age geopolitical norms.

While my colleagues pay some attention to the Information Age in their references to IO/IW now and in the future, they miss the idea that the *nature of war itself has changed* due to the new dimension of the Infosphere. The examples of Somalia and Rwanda demonstrate *precisely* this point. Worse, instead of *adapting* to a world in full view of the glare of Global TV their recommend largely reflect a kind of Luddite view of trying to evade or hide rather than act fluidly on the "terrain" of the ether.

The Clausewitzian definition of war is the extension of politics that uses the controlled application of violence to constrain the enemy to accomplish our will. That definition, however, has been eroded by the advent of instantaneous global telecommunication, especially of global television, in that it is now possible to affect multiple bodies politic without the direct application of force. Why else did the US cut and run from Somalia, when the great US tactical victory was completely upended by the effects of video of a handful US casualties upon the American body politic?

As another example, consider that the United States has been engaged for the better part of a decade in a new kind of war whose main proponent is the stateless ex-Saudi terrorist Usama Ben Laden. That UBL has been successful can be very succinctly put: One individual, primarily self-supported, has managed to engage a superpower with various large scale acts of violence, and that after several years, that man and his cause are still alive...and thriving!

The long standing US countermeasures have thus been ineffective and arguably counterproductive, in that retaliatory cruise missile attacks, such as the one in Sudan, tend to outrage the local population and impel others to join UBL's cause.

This inability to stop UBL stems from US insistence on using Cold War legacy systems and even more archaic thinking in dealing with an asymmetric enemy who has totally adapted himself and his operations to the Infosphere; he is in effect a *virtual guerrilla* whose area of operations is global and four dimensional. His adaptation to the terrain of the Infosphere (of which cyberspace is a subset) gives him and his organization the advantage of amorphousness to appear and disappear at will.

Thus this stateless millionaire, whose operatives constitute a small *virtual nation*, has been able to conduct a new kind of guerrilla war on a global scale with attacks against American interests from the Middle East to Africa to the Philippines and even to the once sacrosanct shores of the United States itself.

Ben Laden has demonstrated distributed and dispersed intelligence and command functions. He has used global television to greatly magnify the size and scope of his attacks and create a kind of cult following based on the amplification of his alleged charisma. He has used cyberspace to conduct operational simultaneity in his attacks as demonstrated at the embassies in Africa, and has demonstrated a desire for global power by his seemingly one-man onslaught against the United States.

The US has worsened the situation by treating Usama's attacks the way an inept mechanic deals with an engine warning light: It makes the symptom go away by cutting the wires to the light! The same mentality applies to simply killing, or capturing and trying a terrorist. *The problem is in the engine!* And the *engine* here is the body politic and virtual body politic that support Ben Laden through contributions of personnel, intelligence and operational support.

To end the problem the US must affect those bodies politic and support mechanisms, which allow Ben Laden to carry on his operations. *Thus, the US must adapt to the Infosphere and attempt to out-guerrilla the guerrilla.*

And to do that the first thing that needs to be fixed is intelligence, especially adapting "steam gauge" data gathering to useful knowledge that is readily applicable. Again let me illustrate this by using UBL as an example:

EXAMPLES

The recent one-hour, highly produced television program developed by Usama Ben Laden and then transmitted via satellite from facilities in Qatar presents an opportunity to use non-verbal, televise cues to garner information that is simply not obtainable through industrial age intelligence gathering methods, because interpretation of video is simply not taught.

It is my experience with this specific matter that the only conventional method of ascertaining the intent of the TV program has been to have the script reconstituted by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service and then screen the words for meaning. While this worked fine for radio, it misses the whole point of television: TV is a cool medium where perception of images and sound is more important than the words that are carried along.

Moreover, like the “fist” of a Morse code operator, the stylistic nuances of a producer, director and writer are recognizable when compared against a body of work. Given that a satisfied end user will tend to go back to the same production company, and that the roster of quality TV producers in the middle east is a limited one, a television-oriented review of the existing video tape of the UBL program may bring forth information that may reveal the names and locations of the persons involved in its production and thus back to the paymasters and possibly even to UBL himself.

What may be even more intriguing is the possibility of “turning” the producers in place in a Information Age variation of the “Funkenspiel” of WWII. It may be possible to inject scenes, add subliminal effects or in other ways distort or make counterproductive any future programming against specific target audiences.

However, none of this is being done or even being contemplated at this juncture.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

What all this means is that a band-aide fixes applied with superglue, do not make a novelistic war fighting capability fit for the Information Age future in a milieu of new entities beyond the nation-state. What will be needed is a new kind of warrior, who from the day he is recruited or possibly even drafted is optimized for this new kind of combat. This means smaller numbers of extremely well educated soldiers, fluent in media as well as languages and capable of four-dimensional combat against a worthy enemy.

Moreover, why would we organize such future soldiers in a rank structure copied from Industrial Age models? (Does UBL have 9 grades of enlisted, 10 grades of officer and 5 grades of warrants? does Bill Gates?) Or organize in a hierarchical structure (Does UBL have fixed Squads, Companies and Battalions? Does Bill Gates?)

Futurist Alvin Toffler in his book “War and Anti War” made a very important discovery: “Nations make war the way they make money.” The way we make war is the way our grandfathers made war.

This new model military and intelligence system then must be organized in a kind of fluid matrix made possible by the communications potential of the Infobahn and which changes precisely, in real-time, to deal with the problem or problems at hand.

The first step on this quest must be to break down the formidable barriers to change inculcated by useless tradition in our national security organizations; for as Shakespeare once wrote: “*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in the stars, but in ourselves.*”

THE KOSOVO CONFLICT

Political Throw Weight I: Stealth Crash

In the background of the still burning F-117 were a couple of buses, some official cars and

lots of reporters, which indicates that the Serbs expected such a crash. (Was this an ambush using military operations to create a mil-pol event? Perhaps using radar signatures of one missile system then using a barrage of a second missile system with a different minimum range and optical/sound cueing? Or did the Stealth fighter operators get overconfident and fly down the same routes more than once?) Obviously, the logistics were preplanned and practiced, thus seducing GTV with great B-roll and thus opening an information channel to erode support in the US body politic.

This means that someone in the Yugoslav government was in charge of a mil-pol operation to maximize the "political throw weight" on GTV. Why was there no effort to backtrack that operation to delay or deny access? .

Political Throw Weight II: POWs

The capture of the US soldiers is a variation of the "Balkans Jacks" tactics used against Canadian Peacekeepers in 1994. Serb SW efforts were dominating the airwaves and continued to do so in a "Pit and Pendulum" manner leading to the Jesse Jackson "Let's Make a Deal" finale.

What was the impression upon the Serb audience of a hand-wringing, friend-of-the-president minister/would-be politician begging for the release of the US soldiers?

What was needed was a strong televised visual (not talking head) messages beamed directly to the Serb Body Politic so that the consequences of POW mistreatment would have been universally understood.

Body Politic Unification Measures:

Serb TV stayed on the air through most of the conflict and was used as an instrument for political solidarity. Thus the rock concerts and human shield tactics served both to demonstrate defiance and project a sense of safety in numbers, which again helped prolong the conflict.

It wasn't until late in the conflict that NATO realized this, and took action by wrong-headedly bombing the TV production facility and thus playing into the Serb propaganda organizations hands (see below.)

The Industrial Age myopia of simply destroying targets to preclude the Serb government's use of its TV transmitters missed the possibility to project a nationwide dis-unification TV campaign. The COMMANDO SOLO still does not have 24-hour counter-programming capability to beat a ground-based national TV system because TV shows remain the responsibility of the 4th POG which is grossly under equipped, under manned and especially under funded to deal with this situation.² What are needed are a UAV-based dissemination system and a Soft War 24-hour, Real Time/Near Real Time campaign.

State Department Efforts Using DBS Transmissions

While the idea of using European satellites to beam TV to the Serbs was at least a start, it was amateurish and randomly distributed. Apparently someone at the State Department figured out that there were in excess of 100,000 DBS receivers in Serbia. Fine, except that they did not take account of the idea of Ratings (number of TV sets turned on at any given time) or Share (the number of those sets tuned to a specific program at a specific time). Thus depending on power outages from the bombing perhaps half or less were turned on. Of those, the menu of Euro TV is in excess of 100 channels. Meaning that perhaps less than 500 sets were tuned to the State Departments broadcasts.

And what did the State Department's broadcasts consist of? Why the Secretary of State's talking head speaking in American accented Serbo-Croatian of course. The end result was printed on the front Page of the Washington Post. When asked about the SECSTATE's effect a Belgrader was quoted as saying: "*...all she was missing was her [witch's] broom.*"

The idea of trying to affect that tiny fraction of the Serb body politic that receives DBS vice the huge demographic that gets local broadcast TV is simply an exercise in futility. Worse, without a demographic analysis system of some sort in place, the message cannot be tweaked for maximum results.

And while the Secretary of State speaking in Serbo-Croatian was perceived as an IW 'coup-de-main' over in Foggy Bottom, those macho Serb boys were not "mirror-imaging" and were not in the least bit daunted by what they perceived to be a sawed-off, over-aged, finger-wagging schoolmarm with a Rambo fantasy.

What was needed was visceral, B-roll-heavy campaign aimed at dividing the factions that exist in Serbia using the UAV system mentioned above.

Negative Telegenics Of SACEUR

In his public statements, SACEUR's body language, preference for the sitting position and inability to make eye contact with the camera (and thus the audiences he was trying to convince) worked against him. Moreover, his choice of uniform and lighting made him look ashen and perplexed. What was needed was very serious and meticulous coaching, better lighting, and a standing posture.

GTV Deception/Spoofing Operations:

The use of GTV by the Serbs to sow confusion amongst the bodies politic of NATO was commonplace. Note for example, the large number of English speaking Serb officials who stayed steadfastly "on-message" ("*NATO bombing is driving Albanians out*"; and "*Serb units are only attacking guerrillas*") on GTV. For every NATO speaker there was a near equality of Serbs, some of whom had pretty good telegenics.

Serbs also demonstrated "Orson Welles" attacks by using old video of negotiations with an Albanian faction leader and repackaged as current, so as to confuse and delay NATO political response.

Using SOF For Mil-Pol Effect

The lack of real-time or near-real-time video of Serb ethnic cleansing operations while-in-progress eroded the credibility of NATO actions. What was needed is the immediate up-linking of on-going SOF special reconnaissance operations, because the video itself is far more valuable as a mil-pol weapon than the mere tactical identification and laser illumination of Serb units. Air recce stills, no matter how high their resolution, simply do not have the visceral impact of live video, especially the up close and personal stuff that SOF can deliver. This mission should have had unfettered number one priority, especially in the early parts of the conflict.

Kinetic Attacks On Serbian Television:

The attack on the Serb TV production studio in downtown Belgrade was grossly wrong-headed, unjustified and hugely counterproductive. The attack only temporarily put the institution off the air, an obvious conclusion because video footage showed wreckage of the microwave transmitter tower, not the broadcast antenna itself. Far worse, the ill-conceived attack provided the Milosevic regime with a massive propaganda lever, with gory B-Roll of dead civilian journalists alarming editorial institutions around the world. A subsequent attack against a generator building was needed to cut power to the remote transmitter, which should have been the sole target in the first place. Generators are easy to replace; it is the **klystron tube** in the transmitter that is the heart of the system. As long as the KT could be replaced, Serb TV continued to go back on the air. These tubes are serial numbered items and are in limited supply around the world. As a follow up, the US could have bought up all the tubes that fit the Serb transmitters and thus insure that after the Serb's finite of ready spares was exhausted, there were no alternative means for returning to the airways.

SoftWar Attacks On Serb TV

It was simply not enough to take out the transmitters and leave the receivers to lay fallow. By transmitting programming into the intact receivers using UAVs, the US could have affected the glue that holds the **Serb belief system** together. This should have been integral to the kinetic scheme of maneuver. Leaving out this methodology, cost the US a huge lever that could have greatly assisted in forcing the Milosevic regime into acceding to NATO's wishes much sooner.

Again developing TV programming for use through the trans-attack and then in the post attack/peacekeeping phase requires lead time and thus should have been in the works early on. The experience of trying to assemble the OHR (NATO) Open Broadcast Network (OBN) in Bosnia and make it into an effective system should have been a sobering thought and the lessons learned should have been applied right away.

Cyberattack (US POWs)

Given that the capture of US soldiers was an IW act to generate political throw weight, it might have been possible to have used another form of IW to get them back. A cyber attack against the personal bank accounts of the Milosevic family especially Mrs. Milosevic, (probably in Cypriot banks) could have given the US the leverage to secure the POWs release. The money caches, generated from skimming the black markets in the last decade, would likely not be widely known to the body politic of the former Yugoslavia, and given the current state of the economy, Milosevic, et al, would have been loathe to complain. Thus the money could have been returned quietly as each soldier was repatriated.

Political Throw Weight (US Train Attack)

Despite the degradation of facilities in Yugoslavia, their information campaign continued unabated and seemed to have improved despite the NATO attacks. For example, within 24 hours of the accidental attack upon a passenger train and the subsequent apology to the Serbs by SACEUR, the Serbs had computer generated animation demonstrating that the attack was not an accident but was intentional. Given the then continuing on-air capacity of Serbian television, it gave Milosevic still another unifying tool to keep his body politic in line. Moreover, the use of such unauthenticated but convincing and “news-balancing” video causes a slow erosion of the national wills within the NATO community and especially within the United States. This kind of counterpunch must be parried, visually, right away before it “sticks” in the minds of the bodies politics.

Near-Future Softwar Ops

With US forces now deployed in Kosovo it would be wise to have a modern IW plan in place to deal with both the AOR/AOI to keep possible problems in check. Keeping the displaced Albanian Kosovars informed will keep other problems from cropping up, and there is the legitimate group of Serbian Kosovars who are going to remain in the country and whom NATO must now protect.

Takeover of existing TV transmitters or rebuilding them is important but as important is generating the PROGRAMMING is critical because of lead times needed. In addition, getting radio and print facilities operational is critical to support and promote TV programming.

Because the infrastructure will be down, it would be advisable to purchasing tens of thousands of battery powered TV receivers to hand out to the displaced people so they can receive the TV message.

The ultimate goal here is to attempt to change the inbred belief system, so that while US forces are in place and after they leave, the locals won't pull out their weapons and start again.

NOTES

- ¹ Copyright 1999 Chuck de Caro
- ² COMMANDO SOLO is useless as a TV platform for anything other than coastal targets.