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Operation Provide Promise: The JFACC's Role in Humanitarian Assistance in
A Non-Permissive Environment
A Case Study

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: James J. Brooks

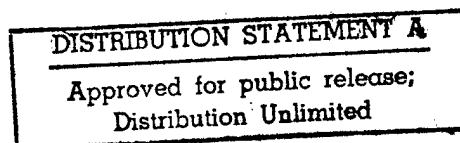
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ABSTRACT

Operation Provide Promise was a United States-led allied effort to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The airdrop portion was envisioned as a noncombat operation. While no casualties were incurred, the airdrops were, in fact, combat operations. The potential risks to the aircraft and crews from the warring factions throughout Bosnia were too great to be ignored by the operational commanders. The joint force air component commander had to integrate allied airlift forces along with defensive, offensive and surveillance forces into a synergistic team to provide aid in a non-permissive environment. Additionally, targeting the aid uniquely tested the JFACC's ability to ensure his assigned forces were employed in a coherent manner. The JFACC conducted the airdrops with restraint, unity of effort, legitimacy and perseverance. However, the lack of a clear and defined political objective and end state hampered the JFACC's measurement of success and his ability to balance the political demands to provide more aid with his scarce resources against the risks of the non-permissive environment of Bosnia.

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“United States will conduct humanitarian airdrops over Bosnia...Their purpose is to supplement the land convoys. This is a temporary measure designed to address the immediate needs of isolated areas that cannot be reached at this time by ground.”¹

With those words President William J. Clinton initiated the longest airdrop operation the US Air Force has ever conducted.² Operation Provide Promise was the allied military operation to provide humanitarian assistance to the Bosnian people isolated by the fighting among the Croats, Muslims and Serbs within the geographical area known as Bosnia-Herzegovina. It consisted of two concurrent major operations: the airlift effort which brought aid into Sarajevo through its international airport and the airdrop missions into eastern Bosnia. The purpose of the airdrop relief efforts was to supplement United Nations (UN) ground relief efforts by air dropping food and medical supplies to besieged villages that had not received any resupply by UN ground convoys. USAF specially modified C-130 aircraft delivered the aid initially, and, subsequently, the French and Germans joined the efforts with C-160 aircraft. The airdrops began on 28 Feb 93 and ended on 9 January 1996.

Operation Provide Promise was the first military operation other than war (MOOTW) in which a Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) played the central role and conducted air operations in the face of an ostensibly non-permissive, if not hostile, environment. Supplying relief to the enclaves of Bosnia presented unique opportunities to employ airpower that had never been encountered to such a degree in the 85 years of airpower's history. All facets of this operation were extemporaneous, requiring the ingenuity and innovation of all concerned with providing assistance to besieged civilians, combatants and non-combatants. While the commander of the Joint Task Force (JTF) Provide Promise conducted an extremely successful operation, the Joint Force Air Component Commander, Major General James E. Chambers, USAF, was faced with extraordinary challenges to bring it all together. This case study will explore the role of the JFACC in providing humanitarian assistance (HA) through the use of airdrops in the non-permissive environment of Bosnia for the initial six weeks prior to the enforcement of the UN Security Council No Fly resolution.

Joint Publication 3-07 labels humanitarian assistance as a “*non-combat operation*.”³

President Clinton envisioned the operation similarly: “It has no combat connotations whatever, and it’s purely humanitarian and quite limited.”⁴ In fact, the airdrop portion of Operation Provide Promise (OPP) was more than a benign military operation other than war. It required the same level of detailed planning and intense conduct as combat operations do, along with the same need for clearly defined political objectives and desired end state. As in any modern combat operation, HA in a non-permissive environment demands the JFACC integrate allies into the operation, target airpower accurately and measure the success of the operation in view of political goals.

In contrast, Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) was an HA operation conducted in a more permissive environment in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq. It did not pose the same geographical or threat problems that Bosnia did. After the initial airlift response to the Kurdish refugee problem, the relief effort became a predominantly ground operation working under the umbrella of US defensive airpower enforcing the UN No Fly Resolutions imposed on Iraq. Additionally, the military played its role of protector and comforter of the Kurds in OPC from a position of strength obtained through victory in Desert Storm. Bosnia had no such resolution; there was no victor to impose its will on the warring parties as the UN did in northern Iraq. The JFACC for Operation Provide Promise faced a hostile environment in which the aggressor could not be clearly discerned and in which all parties would have benefited if the US had suffered any losses or was dragged into the conflict. The loss of an aircraft would probably have evoked a response that either side would have considered a victory. As the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, indicated in a letter to the UN “Muslims could shoot down a US plane and blame it on the Serbs in hopes of provoking full-scale US intervention in the conflict and a wider Balkan war.”⁵

KEY ISSUES FOR A JFACC IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The JFACC was the primary actor in the humanitarian assistance rendered during Operation Provide Promise. The commander of the JTF provide the JFACC his mission through the “Intent”

section of the CJTF Operations Order: "...demonstrate US determination to provide humanitarian relief...the operation must be executed so as to minimize the risk to aircraft and crew while achieving acceptable delivery accuracy..."⁶ His airlift forces conducted the main effort while the warfighters played a supporting role to the airdrops in Bosnia- Herzegovina. While aligned under a functional joint task force structure, the JFACC's effectiveness in providing humanitarian assistance was complicated by three key tasks. These tasks, while relatively straightforward in combat operations, were problematic, albeit essential, for the success of Operation Provide Promise. The role of the JFACC in integrating the allies, targeting of the relief effort and measuring the success of it were the most salient issues that affected the JFACC's orchestration of the air effort. These tasks were prominent because, if not done correctly, the political implications of a failed operation would have been disastrous for US foreign policy. "All military operations are driven by political considerations."⁷ Yet, the JFACC was confronted with conducting military operations in a non-permissive environment with only the ambiguous and open-ended political guidance quoted at the beginning of this case study.

Foremost among these tasks, the role of allies underscored the continued legitimacy of the initial US operation. "The US cannot proceed here unilaterally... We need the support of the Europeans who are much closer to the situation."⁸ The participation of the allies was important to the political realities of the situation. It demonstrated European concerns and it relieved the burden on the US crews and aircraft. Allied involvement could be a precursor for allied offensive action in support for the UN Security Council Resolutions to monitor and enforce the UN-imposed No Fly Zone over Bosnia or to conduct offensive action in support of the UN Protection Force, making a transition to NATO command and control easier and more probable. The operational integration and participation of allies in the relief airdrops occupied the JFACC's attention throughout the first month of the airdrops. While the political ramifications of German and French participation needed to be resolved at the strategic level, the JFACC had to reconcile their eventual participation with the realities of the

threat. US employment doctrine and equipment. Tactical capabilities, training and equipment incompatibilities posed a serious problem. None of the allies were trained in high altitude airdrop operations. Lack of standardized equipment for communications, navigation and targeting hampered the JFACC's efforts to orchestrate a comprehensive effort. Command and control issues also complicated the tasking and tactical control of the allies.

The Germans confronted a particular concern as the likelihood of their involvement grew more real. Because of the historic animosities between the Germans and the Serbs and their quick recognition of Croatia and Slovenia following their split from the Yugoslav Republic (which precipitated the Bosnian crisis), the Serbs, through diplomatic communiqués, threatened to attack any German aircraft that flew in Bosnian airspace and if it flew in a formation, all the aircraft in the formation would be attacked.* Since the airdrop aircraft flew in formations to minimize exposure to any threat and to put as much aid as possible into a drop zone as quickly as possible, the probability of all aircraft being at risk to attack was high. The JFACC had to address these concerns from the outset. Additionally, the constant demand from the UN to increase the amount of aid being delivered taxed the US aircraft and crews. The addition of allies helped to meet the need. The JFACC, faced with the ambiguous political objective of meeting the needs of the starving and isolated Bosnians, had to react quickly to meld untrained and inexperienced crews into a capable adjunct force and accomplish his mission with minimal exposure of his assigned forces to an uncertain threat.

The process of target selection and planning for the airdrops involved many considerations that the JFACC had to address to ensure each mission complied with the intent of the political guidance for the operation. The threat of small arms fire and a plethora of man-portable surface-to-air missiles made the air drops decidedly more difficult than flying aid directly into the Sarajevo airport. The process of selecting primary and alternate targets and determining drop zones was almost as

* Memorandum was delivered to the 435th Airlift Wing commander at a meeting held at Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, on 24 March 1993 by the Bosnian Serb inspector responsible for inspecting relief supplies, Mr. Slobodan.

difficult as targeting the combat operations. But "hitting the target" was just as political, if not more so, because determining the need to "hit" a specific target was done by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In an attempt to maintain US neutrality and impartiality, President Clinton declared the drops would be "accomplished without regard to ethnic or religious affiliation."⁹ Determination of which enclave needed aid more urgently than another was made by the UNHCR. The delivery of aid was both a humanitarian and a political statement. Selecting the right target for it was essential. Overriding factors included the ability of ground convoys to make it to the enclaves most affected by Serbian siege and the flow of refugees escaping the Serbian conquests of eastern Bosnian villages. Initially, the target nomination process was day-by-day, choosing one target for the next night's mission. This complicated the JFACC's planning, forcing him to work a tight timeline to select drop zones and plan the approaches and deliveries. The visibility of the operation on the world stage and the proximity of the targeted enclaves to the Serbian border mandated the JFACC's close scrutiny of each mission.

Selecting drop zones around the targeted villages was another element of the operation requiring inordinate time. Intelligence could not define siege lines around the villages nor could it differentiate Serb positions from Muslim. Maps with sufficient detail to determine clear areas were produced by the Germans in 1943. One drop on March 6th landed in the village of Konjevic because the maps used for planning were outdated. Borders restricted directions from which the aircraft could approach the drop zones. Revisiting the same enclaves repeatedly put the crews at risk because of their predictability. Incorporating allies with differing capabilities to do the mission required tactics standardization, adding to the predictability and minimizing the surprise allied forces could achieve. Weight of effort and the ability to meet the need of the refugees had to be balanced by the JFACC with the available clear area around an enclave. Balancing the right mix of aircraft to ensure a maximum number of pallets into a drop zone also had to be weighed against the potential risk of losing

an aircraft due to prolonged exposure to a predictable flight profile. These concerns underscored the ultimate operational question: Is it successful?

Measuring success was a complex issue with varying facets that reflected the perspective of one's profession. The political expectations of the international community and the American public determined the measures of merit that judged the effectiveness of the air drops. "Planes flying at 10,000 feet to avoid ground fire will not be able to get many relief packages near their intended recipients."¹⁰ During the first night of the operation, relief was dropped to the besieged village of Cerska. Unsure of the line delineating the Serbs and the Muslims, the planners picked drop zones close to the village but large enough to give themselves a reasonable chance of success. Initial reports indicated the US had dropped supplies outside the Muslim lines as well as grossly off the mark. Subsequent reports revealed the pallets had landed within 300 yards of the desired impact point but Cerska had been overrun the same night as the airdrop. The incident highlighted several issues the JFACC had to wrestle with in judging whether or not he was accomplishing the mission: accuracy of the drops, proximity to the place of need, tracking the pallets, assessing the effectiveness of the relief effort to a particular area and others. In addition, because of the limited tonnage air drops can provide, questions arose concerning the numbers of aircraft and sorties being tasked.

International organizations complained the American effort was not meeting the need and, at times, was doing more harm than good. "The United States airdrop of supplies to besieged Muslim towns... appeared if anything to be pushing the Bosnian Serb aggressors to greater efforts."¹¹ Pallets of food were being dropped outside of the towns, away from the people that needed it—the weak, injured and sick. The strong and the soldiers of the Bosnian Army were keeping the food to themselves. In several instances, the Serbs shot or shelled those who went to retrieve the aid from the fields surrounding the enclaves. "It is certain... that when the deliveries arrived, the Serbs did not pull back to let the food pass to the enemy. Rather, their attacks grew in ferocity."¹² When Srebrenica was deluged with refugees from Cerska and Konjevic, the UNHCR requested aid be dropped in the center

of town to reach those who most needed it. Pallets, weighing 1500 pounds, slammed into the ground at approximately 60 miles per hour. Dropping them in the villages would have been catastrophic. The JFACC, recognizing the need, explored numerous options to get the aid closer.

Locating the pallets once they had been dropped proved to be a challenge. Determining where they had fallen would provide an accurate gauge of each mission's success. Operational success could then be inferred from the tactical successes. Various means were explored: aluminum foil on the pallets to provide radar reflectivity; beacons in the parachute harnesses of the pallets to pinpoint locations; chemical glow sticks on the pallets, activated just prior to release from the aircraft. In-country feedback was the most effective method of assessing the accuracy of the drops. Once the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) had gotten through to Srebrenica, General Phillippe Morrillon and his aide remained behind to assist and communicate the situation back to the JTF.

In combat, assessing the tactical successes of each mission enabled the JFACC to evaluate the operational effects of the operation and measure it against the political objective. Measures of effectiveness determine when success is achieved; the political objective and the desired end state define success. But the political objective had never been clearly articulated for this HA operation. "...there are a lot of people over there who need the food and can't get it by road, so it's a humanitarian gesture."¹³ The overall objective of HA operations, though, cannot be thought of in classic military terms. Humanitarian assistance meets a need. If everyone who has a need for food in an intended target area does not get the aid that is dropped, is the operation successful?

Humanitarian operations which supply aid to one of the combatants that is being starved out by another borders on siege-breaking and supporting one side over the other. "Food, or more precisely starvation, is a weapon in a civil war there... To get involved in supplying food is to get involved in an aspect of the war."¹⁴ If the warring factions have not settled on peace terms or a cease-fire, then the environment surrounding them is hostile. As the UNPROFOR knew very well, any third party venturing into such a non-permissive environment risked hostile fire. Gen Morrillon himself

stated: "In the current climate of paranoia, everybody will shoot at everything in the air."¹⁵ The JFACC confronted this issue every day; each mission had to be treated as a combat mission. A full complement of surveillance aircraft, combat search and rescue, and defensive and offensive counterair forces supported the handful of transports that flew into hostile airspace each night, unsure which night would be the one when one side decided to retaliate for prolonging the war on the ground. Orchestrating the entire effort demanded as much attention as combat operations did.

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE KEY TASKS

The JFACC, by Joint Doctrine, is the single manager of all air operations. As such the JFACC for OPP was the sole agent for orchestrating the air effort and integrating the allies into the effort. It was essential to get allied support for the airdrop effort. Once obtained, the JFACC was responsible for making their contributions seamless with the US effort. Ensuring their ability to interact with the US airdrops was essential to achieving a unity of effort politically and militarily. Equipment and training were the two issues that prevented the JFACC from blending them into the missions seamlessly.

The Germans and French had no capability to operate at night or in adverse weather—the exact conditions Americans favored to minimize the threat. The Americans themselves had little training in high altitude cargo airdrops, a mission not routinely performed since the closing days of the war in Vietnam.¹⁶ Yet the US was the only nation with a vintage "all weather aerial delivery system" (AWADS) installed on seven C-130E aircraft.¹⁷ This system allowed the crew to drop supplies accurately using radar for aiming. In order to achieve unity of effort, the allies would have to fly in the US formations and drop in conjunction with the Americans. Initially, the allies did not have the proficiency or the onboard equipment to deliver aid as accurately as the US. Therefore, they were assigned area targets and tasked to deliver "Meals, Ready-to-Eat" (MREs) using the Halvorsen drop

method.* This method entailed using cardboard boxes loaded with individual and loose MREs. As the boxes were released from the transports they would rip apart and scatter the MREs over a wide area. This method was used to put aid directly into the villages.

Operational reserve and sustainment issues created another challenge for the JFACC. The US only had 20 crews trained and seven aircraft equipped to conduct this mission. Allies contributed another four aircraft and crews but needed training in order to participate. Precious few US sorties were available to dedicate to training the allies. Therefore, the allied crews deployed to Rhein-Main AB, Germany, where they flew with American crews on airdrop missions to observe how the flights were conducted. American instructors would then fly with the allies as they trained over the ranges of Germany. Once proficient, the allies, with American observers onboard, were included in the US flights over Bosnia. Given these requirements, the JFACC had little capability to increase the effort to respond to changes in the situation on the ground.

For example, General Morrillon toured eastern Bosnia on March 6-7, 1993, and relayed via satcom about the fall of Cerska, the need at Srebrenica for 100 tons of aid per week and that the reports by the media and all parties concerned were off by two zeroes. The flood of refugees was much worse than believed and much more aid was required. The pressure to do more increased steadily on the commander of the JTF. The lack of crews and the number of aircraft equipped with IRCM and station keeping equipment were not sufficient to meet the demand. On March 19th the JFACC conducted the largest airdrop of the operation using nine aircraft. In order to do so the airland operation into Sarajevo had to be canceled for that date. The ability to do more with so few forces was not feasible. Yet the following day, the UNHCR requested the US double its airdrop efforts to abate a worsening refugee situation in Srebrenica.

* This method was used to put aid directly into the villages; a test of this delivery indicated that air in the MREs expanded, making each MRE packet resemble a pillow. The MREs floated to the ground with a velocity of less than 30 mph. It was called the "Halvorsen drop" in commemoration of Lt Halvorsen who dropped candy to children during his approaches into Tempelhof Airfield during the Berlin airlift.

Operational command and control of the NATO Airborne Early Warning (NAEW) force, the allies' transports and the US defensive counterair forces was another factor the JFACC needed to address. NAEW E-3 aircraft flew in support of monitoring the UN-mandated No Fly Zone over Bosnia. In order to maintain control and deconflict/detect any Serbian air traffic from the US missions, NAEW played an active role in the operation. The JFACC and the commander of the NAEW force worked out procedures for the NAEW crews to provide threat warnings through USN E-2 Hawkeye aircraft, maintain administrative control of the air operations over Bosnia and provide the link for the recognized air picture* to the JFACC. As coordinated with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE), the NAEW would hand off to the E-2 any aircraft engaged in hostile action for prosecution by the US defensive counterair forces. NAEW missions in support of the airdrops were tasked on the JFACC's air tasking order. Command communications with the allied aircraft had to be relayed through US aircraft due to satcom cryptology restrictions.

Once the German Bundeswehr had approved their forces' involvement, the threat to the German forces from the Serbians confronted the JFACC with one of several operational protection issues for the airdrops. While the JFACC could not absolutely guarantee the safety of the Germans nor any aircraft in formation with them, he would not be intimidated by the threat, considering it to be "rhetoric and sabre rattling... (he) will not be bullied."¹⁸ However, the cover of darkness, timing the flights to correspond to minimal moon illumination, flying above 10,000 feet agl and orchestrating surveillance, defensive and offensive counterair forces to be ready to respond to any hostile intent minimized the ability of anyone on the ground to threaten the mission.

The focus of the airdrop missions in eastern Bosnia limited the direction and axes in which the JFACC could orient the operation to minimize his forces' exposure to possible threats. The airdrop missions had to fly to the farthest parts of Bosnia unprotected by any friendly forces. Unlike Operation Provide Comfort where the allies had air supremacy over the area they flew relief supplies

* "Recognized air picture" is a near-real-time depiction of all observable air traffic within a certain area that is

into, the crews of OPP were exposed to a host of ground threats belonging to any number of factions. The political restraints levied to ensure the appearance of neutrality prevented the JFACC from positioning defensive counterair forces over the Bosnian territory or accompanying the transports to their target areas. Consequently, the DCA forces were positioned over the Adriatic Sea. The location of the target areas put the C-130 aircraft at the very edge of the counterair aircraft's ability to render assistance if the C-130s were intercepted by hostile aircraft. The rules of engagement for the airdrop effort prior to Operation Deny Flight, in which NATO enforced the No Fly Zone over Bosnia with lethal force, prevented any armed aircraft from flying over the Bosnian territory. Therefore, given the time required to effect an intercept from combat air patrol positions over the Adriatic Sea, the C-130 aircraft were defenseless (except for infrared countermeasures)¹⁹ once they passed Sarajevo inbound to the target areas and until they returned outbound. The risks of achieving the operation's objectives were particularly acute given the number of potential threats to the operation across the width of Bosnia. Any faction could attempt to shoot down an airlift aircraft and blame the other side in order to force the withdrawal or intervention of the US forces. The JFACC had only the natural elements of darkness and adverse weather to conceal his operation. Consequently, the JFACC attempted to be as unpredictable as the limited number of drop zones, the proximity to the border and the constraints of equipment and allies would allow. In a briefing to his staff, the JFACC admonished the planners to "remain as unpredictable as possible [for] going to the same place over and over again..."²⁰ Varying time over targets to coincide with a shrinking window of available darkness and changing moon illumination cycles played havoc with support coverage times and the cycle times of the aircraft carrier providing counterair support to the missions.

Targeting humanitarian assistance was as complex as integrating the allied air effort into the US operation. Numerous issues affected the JFACC's ability to target the enclaves selected by the UNHCR to receive aid. Those issues included selecting alternate targets, locating drop zones

compiled from several surveillance sources and downlinked to an air operations center.

accessible to refugees and the needy, obtaining maps with sufficient detail to identify suitable drop zones and the lack of intelligence on the areas selected for aid by the UNHCR. Unlike combat operations in which the Joint Targeting Coordination Board nominated targets, the UNHCR determined which villages needed aid. The targets were then passed to the JTF and forwarded to the JFACC for his action. Targets were identified two days prior and the missions were planned the day prior. This complicated the JFACC's ability to thoroughly plan the missions because the short lead time precluded the JFACC from tasking national assets to provide accurate and current information about the proposed targets and the status of the ground situation. This seriously hampered the selection of adequate yet varied drop zones until well into the operation after a library of intelligence data and imagery had been collected and processed.

In assessing the risk to all parties on the ground, the JFACC had to weigh their safety with the requirement to get the aid as close to the refugees. Drop zones had to be clear of houses and population centers and large enough to accommodate the stick of relief bundles dropped from 10,000 feet above ground level. The relief pallets fell in a rectangular area measuring 700 yards by 1100-1600 yards.* This footprint drove the planners to use large clear areas that could handle the bundles within a 700 foot circle of the desired impact point.** The surrounding terrain also affected the selection of the DZs. Steep terrain around the villages of Srebrenica and Konjevic limited the number of suitable drop zones. Selection of the DZs was so critical because they were directly linked to the accomplishment of the JFACC's mission. His ability to put aid as close to the need as possible determined his success at meeting the political objective of the entire effort. Therefore, the JFACC only approved drop zones that met the following criteria: 1) clear of people and buildings; 2) suitable

* The length of the "stick" depended on the altitude from which the bundles were dropped and the forward velocity of the aircraft at release. The width was a factor of dropping two rows of 6-7 pallets each from the C-130s simultaneously.

** A circle of 700 feet was used based upon the expected trajectory of a 1500 pound pallet if the wind was ten knots different from the forecast.

approaches and egress flightpaths; 3) suitable emergency jettison and threat avoidance areas; 4) international border deconfliction; and, 5) appropriate drop zone size.²¹

Dropping palletized aid was more efficient than using the Halvorsen method, but it required large clear areas to minimize casualties and collateral damage. However, when it became apparent that the aid was needed in the cities and the refugees could not get to the palletized aid, the Halvorsen method put a plentiful amount of individual aid packages (MREs) very close to the target audience.

The lack of operational intelligence was a sensitive part of the targeting issue from the very first mission. The physical environment and the limited presence of friendly forces in the area hampered the intelligence system's ability to accurately determine the ground situation. Cloud cover, snow, forests and steep, mountainous terrain degraded the collection of information that analysts could process into useful intelligence for the JFACC. This lack of operational intelligence contributed to the Cerska incident referred to previously. Subsequent drops around Konjevic fell into the hands of Serbs also or the bundles were used as bait to lure Muslims into the open areas where Serb snipers could shoot them. Other drops into contested areas were shelled as the Muslims attempted to retrieve the supplies. The media and skeptics seized upon these unfortunate outcomes as an illustration of the futility of the airdrop effort: "...intelligence estimates reaching Capitol Hill called the drops 'a disaster,' suggesting that only a small percentage reached their intended beneficiaries."²² The intelligence system worked diligently to compile a comprehensive database, synthesizing information from all sources. The UNPROFOR was a vital source once they managed to establish a presence in eastern Bosnia. Feedback from UNPROFOR indicated the pallets were killing the Muslim refugees who would camp in the drop zones. Eventually the UNPROFOR began to select drop sites for the relief pallets because they were in a position to secure the areas, retrieve the pallets and then distribute the supplies to those needing it.

The JFACC also undertook a psychological operations effort to advertise the impartiality of the US humanitarian airdrops and the risk to the people on the ground from the falling pallets. The

first missions were leaflet drops to advise not only the populace of the intent of the airdrops and the associated dangers of 1500 pound pallets falling from the sky, but also to inform the belligerents that the US was providing aid on a non-partisan basis. The leaflets were intended to set the stage for success and minimize the risk of hostile reaction to the effort.

The political and civilian expectations of the military's ability to accomplish the mission to alleviate the suffering of the villagers in eastern Bosnia created much of the fervor over measuring the success of the airdrops. Their insistence that the military fly more aircraft and deliver more aid on every mission reflects their belief that airdrops would make a difference in the ground crisis. The heavy pressure to do more was countered by the maximum effort that the aircrew and maintenance personnel were performing with a limited number of capable aircraft. The units, operating at an exhaustive tempo, could not afford the time to train more AWADS crews because their total effort was dedicated to the operational missions. To offset such pressure, the military must advertise its own efforts and expectations of the airlift to provide the public with realistic appraisals of their abilities. As the JTF commander indicated in the "Intent" portion of his operations order for the airdrops: "...develop a public affairs strategy that conveys the technical difficulty of this operation but yet captures the goodwill resulting from our efforts."²³ But the strategy took time to convince the public of the airdrops' limited capability to affect the crisis on the ground.

These external expectations led the JFACC to judge success by criteria such as proximity to the target village, tonnage delivered, locating all of the pallets dropped and the lack of casualties. In fact, the commander of the JTF Provide Promise reinforced the criteria: "...if the aid is getting there we can call the operation a success. We know that the aid is arriving. It is reaching the people for whom it is intended."²⁴

The military objective, as understood by the JFACC, was to meet a political need: "demonstrate concern for the people caught in this situation."²⁵ The airdrops were a token demonstration and could not be construed as an effort to sustain any group in the targeted areas.

Tactically, the missions met their objective of providing aid as directed while, operationally, they illustrated the serious constraints of conducting military operations without a clear military objective and with incomplete and inaccurate information. As Joint Pub 3-07 emphasizes, the objective is as important in MOOTW as it is in war.²⁶ Given the ambiguity of the political direction, it was difficult to define an achievable operational military objective that could have yielded an effective measurement of the operation's success. A military end state could not be clearly defined because the political guidance implied the operation would continue until something beyond the control of the JTF commander happened, such as a cease fire or peace agreement. Since the disposition of the ground situation could not be discerned, it was impossible to accurately assess whether or not the relief effort made a difference in the outcome of the battles for, and the suffering at, Cerska, Konjevic, Srebrenica, Zepa and their surrounding areas. The JFACC could only surmise as to the airdrop missions' utility in meeting the political intent of OPP. The UNPROFOR could only validate the effectiveness of the airdrops in the area they were located.

An enormous effort was expended by the JFACC staff on developing some means to effectively gauge the success of the airdrops. Most of it focused on the tactical aspects of placing pallets on target and locating them once they had landed to judge the accuracy of the drop. This served to evaluate the effectiveness of the planners to pick appropriate radar offset aiming points, large enough landing zones and the weather officer's forecast of the winds at altitude. But, as with counting dead bodies or destroyed tanks, it did little to measure the operational effectiveness of the effort and whether or not the supplies got to their intended target population and whether or not the supplies made a difference in their well-being. This is an inherent problem in trying to measure success or effectiveness in operations other than war where the benefits of particular actions might not be evident for a long time during which those actions need to be persistently applied/accomplished. Perseverance in view of minimal feedback is a requisite of military operations other than war. The benefits of delivering aid may not be readily apparent until the resolution of the crisis precipitating the

need for the assistance. This may require the imposition of a cease fire, peace treaty or a change in the level and type of assistance being provided.

In-country feedback was the most reliable source of information about the success of the airdrops. While not an accurate measure of how much aid got to the refugees, it yielded an indication that the aid was getting to the villages. Relying on Gen Morrillon for feedback was a useful method for determining success at one location where the UNPROFOR could control the retrieval and distribution of aid. However, while he evaluated the success at Srebrenica, the JFACC flew numerous missions to Zepa, Gorazde, Gabela, Bacuta and other villages in southeastern Bosnia. With no capacity to assess the success of the overall effort, it was difficult for the JFACC to balance the risks of increasing the efforts and exposing more aircrew to possible hostile fire with the benefits more aid might yield. Given the lack of progress in resolving the crisis, supplying HA appeared to only prolong the agony of the victims. Because of the Serbian threat against the Germans and other incidents which indicated their willingness to test the allied perseverance, the JFACC deemed the risks real but considered the safeguards sufficient to cope with the threat. The lack of clear political objectives made his position tenuous and required a sizable force of surveillance and warfighters every night the operation launched in order to counter the risks.

CONCLUSION

Integrating the entire air effort and target selection were thorny issues for the JFACC. Civilians determined the locations the military would fly and international constraints forced the missions to be relatively predictable. Rules of engagement and the political considerations of remaining unbiased in providing aid to all who needed it forced the JFACC to expose valuable forces and resources to an unpredictable threat in a non-permissive and, certainly, non-cooperative environment. As an "operation other than war" the humanitarian assistance rendered by the JFACC of OPP was unlike any other operation a JFACC had confronted before the winter of 1993. While he had the forces and the capability to put aid on target, the potential risks in doing so were very high.

Humanitarian assistance in a non-permissive environment demands clear objectives and end states. They are required in order to adequately assess the risks of the any action the JFACC undertakes against the benefits to be gained in meeting the goals of the operation. The ends, ways and means must justify the risks. If the end state has not been clearly defined, the risks cannot be evaluated against measures of effectiveness that reflect the conditions necessary to achieve the political objective. It will also provide opportunities to make tragic mistakes if the focus is on the day-to-day tactical successes with no clear idea of the operational destination and the strategic setting. Committing forces in the interest of poorly defined policies has little margin for error for the operational commander.

The political guidance for Operation Provide Promise did not provide intermediate or long-term goals. The operational objective derived by the JFACC was to provide aid through airdrops to those who need it as determined by the UNHCR. He had the ways and means to accomplish that mission but, without a clear end state to work toward, he could not adequately balance the success of the overall airdrop effort with its risks. Therefore, the costs of accomplishing his mission entailed an enormous effort by air forces throughout Europe to support the three to nine cargo aircraft that flew into harm's way every night, despite the minimal chance of defending the transports once they entered the Bosnian airspace. Once Operation Deny Flight was launched, the costs and potential risks for OPP dropped significantly because the airlifters flew under the umbrella of an active defense. But the airdrops continued for three years and ended only when NATO forces entered Bosnia. In these times of shrinking budgets and competing priorities, no military can afford to enter a military operation where the risks are as uncertain as those in Provide Promise because the political leadership failed to commit to a clear and achievable political objective.

NOTES

- ¹ U.S. President, Proclamation, "Statement Announcing Airdrops Providing Humanitarian Aid to Bosnia-Herzegovina," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (1 March 1993), p. 318.
- ² "This Week: News in Brief," Air Force Times, 22 January 1996, p. 2.
- ³ U.S. Joint Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, Joint Publication 3-07 (Washington: 16 June 1995), p. I-5.
- ⁴ U.S. President, Statement, "Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (1 March 1993), p. 306.
- ⁵ Peter Maass, "Bosnian Serbs Press Attack, Propose Civilian Evacuation," The Washington Post, p. 1.
- ⁶ CJTF Operations Order, dated 260945Z Feb 93.
- ⁷ U.S. Joint Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, Joint Publication 3-07 (Washington: 16 June 1995), p. I-1.
- ⁸ "World Outlook: An Airdrop and A Massacre," US News & World Report, 15 March 1993, p. 13.
- ⁹ U.S. President, Proclamation, "Statement Announcing Airdrops Providing Humanitarian Aid to Bosnia-Herzegovina," Weekly Compilation Of Presidential Documents (1 March 1993), p. 318.
- ¹⁰ Anthony Lewis, "Lessons of Yugoslavia," New York Times, 26 February 1993, p.27.
- ¹¹ Peter Grier, "US Airdrops Show Little Sign of Easing Troubles in Balkans," Christian Science Monitor, 5 March 1993, p. 2.
- ¹² Daniel Williams, "U.S. Airdrops in Bosnia Highlight Pitfalls of Intended Neutrality," The Washington Post, 5 March 1993, p. 24.
- ¹³ U.S. President, Proclamation, "Statement Announcing Airdrops Providing Humanitarian Aid to Bosnia-Herzegovina," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (1 March 1993), p. 318.
- ¹⁴ Daniel Williams, "U.S. Airdrops in Bosnia Highlight Pitfalls of Intended Neutrality," The Washington Post, 5 March 1993, p. 24.
- ¹⁵ Gen Philippe Morrillon, quoted in Brooks L. Bash, Major USAF, The Role Of United States Air Power in Peacekeeping. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1994), p. 27.
- ¹⁶ Interview conducted by the author with 1st Lt John Wilkins on 29 March 1993 at the USAFE Operational Support Center (OSC), Ramstein Air Base (AB), Germany.
- ¹⁷ For a detailed explanation, see "Military Air Operations Grow Over Balkan Crisis" by Craig Covault, Aviation Week & Space Technology, 19 April 1993, pp. 58-61.
- ¹⁸ Comments made by Major General James E. Chambers during a briefing to the JFACC staff at the USAFE OSC, Ramstein AB, Germany, on 24 March 1993.
- ¹⁹ For a thorough explanation, see "Self-Protection Systems Added to Relief C-130s," by John D. Morrocco, Aviation Week & Space Technology, 12 July 1993, pp. 42-43.
- ²⁰ JFACC briefing to the JFACC staff at the USAFE OSC, Ramstein AB, Germany, on 7 March 1993.
- ²¹ As personally briefed by the JFACC to the C-130 Planning Cell at the USAFE OSC, Ramstein AB, Germany, on 1 March 1993.
- ²² "Washington Whispers: A Relief Disaster," US News & World Report, 15 March 1993, p. 21.
- ²³ CJTF Provide Promise Operations Order Message, dated 260945Z Feb 93.
- ²⁴ CJTF Provide Promise Message dated 181527Z Mar 93.
- ²⁵ JFACC briefing at the USAFE OSC, Ramstein AB, Germany, on 1 March 1993.
- ²⁶ Joint Pub 3-07, p. II-1.

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