

## **About the "Powell Doctrine" ...**

Politicians, news analysts, and others have gone to some length in explaining what Operation Allied Force in the Balkans proved about the so-called "Powell Doctrine."

Rowan Scarborough of the Washington Times said, "The 'Powell Doctrine' became the Pentagon's biggest war casualty. Named after Gen. Colin Powell, the former Joint Chiefs Chairman, the 1980s rule said American troops would never again enter battle without decisive force and clear objectives. In other words, no more Vietnams."

Mortimer B. Zuckerman of US News & World Report wrote that Kosovo was a vindication of "the doctrine of limited power for limited ends. The Powell Doctrine ... was right in the Gulf [War] but wrong here: Incremental escalation of precision guided munitions worked when used long enough."

In fact, the Powell Doctrine was actually the Weinberger Doctrine, and the experience in Kosovo may not have done it as much damage as some of the recent interpretations suggest.

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger made major headlines when he presented the concept in a speech at the National Press Club Nov. 28, 1984. The Washington Post dubbed it the Weinberger Doctrine. He spoke against the backdrop of not only Vietnam but also the deaths of 241 American servicemen, most of them Marines, killed when a truck bomb blew up their barracks in Beirut in 1983. The Marines, not configured or equipped for combat, were in Lebanon on a fuzzily defined peacekeeping mission as what the State Department called an "interpositional force."

Weinberger said that six tests should be met before US forces are committed to combat abroad. Is a vital US interest at stake? Will we commit sufficient resources to win? Are the objectives clearly defined? Will we sustain the commitment? Is there reasonable expectation that the public and Congress will support the operation? Have we exhausted our other options?

The Gulf War of 1991 met these criteria-in contrast to Vietnam, the Marine disaster in Lebanon, and the use of lethal military force in a series of loosely defined and tentatively prosecuted military actions to come during the Clinton Administration.

In 1984 Powell was Weinberger's military assistant. In his biography, *My American Journey* (Random House, 1995), Powell says he first saw the concept when Weinberger asked him to take a look at a draft document listing the six tests. "Weinberger had applied his formidable lawyerly intellect to an analysis of when and when not to commit United States military forces abroad," Powell said. Powell became further identified with the Weinberger Doctrine because he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War.

Its transformation into the Powell Doctrine, however, happened in the run-up to the 1996 Presidential election. Powell's right wing opponents, seeking to block his nomination as a Republican candidate, misconstrued the Weinberger Doctrine as a weakness and timidity, relabeled it, and then used it as an instrument in a "Stop Powell Movement."

Writing in the New York Times April 12, 1999, Weinberger said the Kosovo operation, then in its third week, met the guidelines of the doctrine "to some extent," in that "the principal feature of my thinking was that the United States should enter a conflict only if it was vital to our national interest. That is the case here. The Balkans have been at the heart of two world wars in this century, so stability of the region is important." He added that: "As a NATO member, the United States cannot ignore an assault in Europe against all our values by a thug who has directed brutal atrocities in Kosovo and Bosnia."

However, he said, the objective in Kosovo had to be victory and that the United States and NATO had to be willing to apply sufficient force to win.

Operation Allied Force began in the classic mold of previous "Limited Force" actions of the 1990s. It opened in March with attacks on a handful of targets and obvious indecision about objectives. The incrementalism and gradualism of the operation were a throwback to the strategies of Vietnam.

"By the time of NATO's summit in Washington-almost a month into the air campaign-it became apparent to NATO that a constrained, phased approach was not effective," Gen. Michael E. Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff, said in a newspaper column June 4. "At the insistence of US leaders, NATO widened the air campaign to produce the strategic effects in Serbia proper." The operation finally began moving with determination. The Serbian agreement to NATO's terms then followed in early June.

—John T. Correll