SHAUN CLARKE (RNZAF), STRATEGY, AIR STRIKE AND SMALL NATIONS

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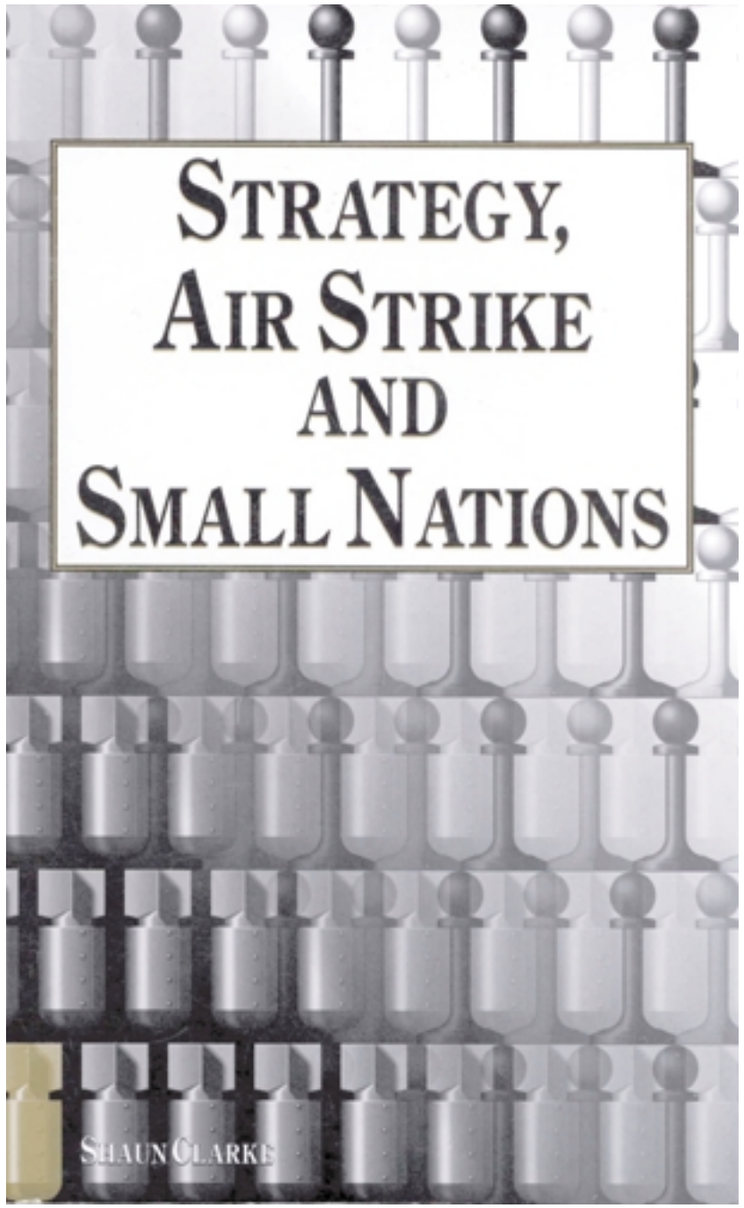
Wing Commander Shaun Clark is the author of *Strategy, Air Strike and Small Nations*, where he examines the fundamentals of air power strategy and explores the potential of offensive air power in the context of small-to-medium-sized defence forces. This review essay will present the current air power debate on strategic bombing, discuss Clarke's thesis, and finally provide a brief assessment of the author's contribution to the existing literature.[1]

Part One: The Current Air Power Debate

Air power has in the last decade increasingly become the profound instrument of choice for American and European policy-makers in dealing with recalcitrant regimes. It was the principal means of military force in "Operation Desert Storm" (1991) and the only one in "Deliberate Force" (1995), "Desert Fox" (1998) and "Allied Force" (1999).[2] Russia used air power extensively against Chechnya (1994-1996) and no-fly zones have been implemented against Bosnia and Iraq throughout the 1990s.[3] Political leaders and military commanders around the world seem to find air power an unusually tempting instrument of force, as "it appears to offer the pleasures of gratification without the burdens of commitment".[4] Air power



seems not only to offer the prospect of decisive action without accompanying risk of unacceptably heavy casualties, but also has the additional attraction of being relatively easy to control in terms of application and degree of intensity. As a result, political and military commanders now consider air power as a central component to complex international problems. Despite air power's augmented role in crisis-management, its employment has been shrouded in controversy and certain analysts contend that air power is not widely understood even among professional military officers.[5] The remoteness associated with air power may be one factor, but the difficulty in measuring the erosion of an adversary's political resolve seems to discourage qualitative diversity within the air power debate.

The current debate is, nevertheless, in reasonable shape, as two contemporary air power theorists define their concepts in clear terms.[6] Colonel John Ashley Warden III had the unique opportunity of articulating an air power concept that witnessed execution. He was the main architect of the strategic air campaign against Iraq in 1991, and through subsequent articles he argues consistently that air power is best applied directly against the enemy regime's political leadership. Warden argues that one should attempt to paralyse the enemy's ability to wage war by concentrating attacks on key targets vital to the regime's survival. Robert Anthony Pape has seriously challenged the whole notion of strategic attacks, favouring short-range theatre air attacks that seek to thwart the enemy's military strategy in the theatre of operations. He argues that interdicting supplies to, disrupting the movement and communication of, and destroying forces in the field rather than attacking an opponent's political centres is the key to winning wars.

While Warden argues that incapacitating the political leadership is essential in an air campaign, Pape argues that one should focus on the enemy's ground forces on the battlefield. Both use "Operation Desert Storm" to argue their case, since that campaign included both a strategic and a tactical dimension. These two views are extremes on a clearly defined spectrum, and they tend to be the starting point for discussions on whether air power can or cannot do the job alone. While that question may well be relevant for the United States, it is not necessarily so for the rest of the world. The Americans can confidently expect to possess relatively large and technologically sophisticated forces in the near future, but for most of the world there are restraints, commitments and vulnerabilities that have to be taken into consideration. Importantly, as one moves from war to conflict, or from "High Intensity Conflict" to "Low Intensity Conflict", the very nature of the confrontation itself may change.[7] As such, it is hardly possible to simply adopt a miniature version of an

American strategy. Thus, smaller nations have to look for solutions outside the American context, and moreover, no single air power strategy is feasible in all circumstances. Although discussions on air power theory, strategy and doctrine for small nations do take place in seminars at air power centres all over the world, it is still rare to find comprehensive analyses. Wing Commander Shaun Clarke, currently director of the RNZAF Air Power Development Centre, is one such exception with his timely study *Strategy, Air Strike and Small Nations*.[8] This review essay aims at presenting his ideas, and discussing them in the wider context of the current air power debate dominated by Warden and Pape.

Part Two: A Discussion of *Strategy, Air Strike and Small Nations*

Clarke argues that nations with relatively small air forces, that is air forces with less than approximately one hundred strike aircraft, should consider strategic air operations as one of their functions.[9] His thesis is founded on a discussion of the nature of strategic air strike, using samples from history to verify his point, and defining the concept of strategic bombing beyond the traditional terms of reference. The refined concept is applied to a discussion on coercion, resulting in a paradigm for small nation air strike strategy termed "Strategic Persuasion Oriented Targeting (SPOT)". Thus, in extracting maximum value from modest means, "small nation strategic strike", he argues, may not be the oxymoron it first appears to be.[10] The author contends that strategic air strike is not defined by aircraft, weapons, mass or scale, or by the distance covered, or necessarily by the nature of the target, but by the objective of the mission. As such, it is better defined by its effect at the strategic level of war, but more accurately he argues that one should define strategic air strike by the intended outcome. Strategic air strike is defined as "the direct pursuit of primary or ultimate political objectives through air power", and therein "high strategic order" focuses on the resolve of the enemy's supreme decision-making body, while "low strategic order" settles for more immediate military prospects confined to the battlefield. Clarke has a point when he argues that strategic effects can occur on different levels of war and, as such, "intention" is a better criterion for planning than "effect", but at the end of a successful day "intentions" and "effects" are two sides of the same coin. The difficulty resides in the problem of transferring physical destruction into the aspired political endgame, but detaching strategic air strike from the correlation of mass and scale is valid. In providing a synopsis of several campaigns throughout the century that includes strategic operations, three stand out as qualified within the means of small nations. "Operation Babylon", the Israeli attack against an Iraqi nuclear reactor in Baghdad in June 1981; "Operation Eldorado Canyon", the combined American attack on Colonel Muanmmar al-Qaddafi in April 1986; and "Operation Deliberate Force", the NATO attack on the Bosnian Serb Army in the autumn of 1995. Nevertheless, the validity of strategic coercion for small nations does not reside in these historical examples, but in our way of thinking. Clarke suggests three propositions that partly change the terms of reference on the traditional perception of strategic air power applicability.

The first proposition states that "In limited war, small nations need not aspire to unconditional surrender or the collapse of the enemy regime". Clarke acknowledges that wars have limited utility, or as Carl von Clausewitz states, "in war the result is never final".[11] Studies of the many wars since the Napoleonic era of "decisive battle" suggest that military victories do not themselves determine the outcome of wars, they merely provide political opportunities, and even those opportunities are severely limited by political constraints and restraints.[12] Not even in "Desert Storm" and "Allied Force" did the Coalitions declare unconditional surrender or the collapse of the enemy regime as their objective. Annihilation, capitulation or strategic paralysis is then, according to Clarke, not a prerequisite for

conducting strategic air strikes. Rather than disrupting the enemy leadership's means, one should persuade him to make concessions. As such, Clarke brings in the coercive element to a larger extent than Warden does. Rather than incapacitate or isolate the enemy leadership with the intention of a coup or revolt that will in turn overthrow the leader, Clarke argues that one should be less ambitious, and offer the belligerent state a way out of the predicament. Thus, Clarke is in favour of a dialogue with the enemy, while Warden would prefer that the outcome did not rely on the enemy. Warden argues that one cannot plan military operations that are dependent on the enemy leader's resolve, but according to Clarke small nations cannot aspire to strategic paralysis whether they prefer to or not. "Strategic Paralysis" is about removing the actual capability of maintaining the offending policy, and as such it is just as much "brute force" as it is "coercion". Small nations, Clarke argues, have to seek the art of the possible, they have to look less ideally and more practically at the challenge, and as such it is about influencing the enemy and at best removing his resolve. In essence Clarke offers a model where hesitation/reduction and concessions/negotiations are the desired outcomes, and therein strategic air strike will give the politicians the diplomatic leverage necessary to achieve the objectives. While strategic bombing has been used to destroy or "paralyse" the enemy leadership in the past, Clarke argues that one should "persuade" by allowing for less ambitious incentives.

The second proposition states that "The ultimate subject of war is the supreme decision- making body". The argument is that the Iraqi troops occupying Kuwait, or the Serb forces stationed in Kosovo, were the manifestation, or the symptom, of the real problem, namely the Iraqi and Serbian political leaderships. It is at the end of the day the politicians who decide if and when to start and end a war. The political leadership is therefore the nucleus of a conflict, and although a cultural and historical legacy complicates such simplicity, the war-making decisions rest with the selected few. One may take the logic one step further: if the enemy regime represents the national resolve, then it might not be a question of breaking its resolve, but merely making it irrelevant. In either case, all efforts should be directed against the enemy leadership. Although Pape agrees that war is about coercing the decision-making apparatus, he argues that only when regimes are convinced of the certainty of defeat on the battlefield will they comply with the demands made of them. Pape categorically states that no strategic bombing campaign has ever yielded decisive results, nor were any significant opportunities missed.[13] Although one aspect of that debate is whether air power's utility lies in the tactical or strategic realm, there is a more philosophical aspect to it. Warden suggests victory on the battlefield is irrelevant to winning the peace for which the war is waged, while Pape argues victory on the battlefield is a condition for victory and the necessary means to fulfil national security objectives. Warden's thesis is therefore diametrically opposed to Pape's only as far as "means" are concerned, and not the ultimate "objective". Clarke does not go into this debate, but settles for the fact that all military operations should be directed to have the maximum impact on the decision-making apparatus.

The third proposition states that "The large nation issue of air power primacy is a distraction to the true root of air power success – joint strategy". One of the problems of strategic bombing is that advocates have often argued that air power can do the job alone. While seductive in its own right, it may easily confuse a "war" for a "campaign", and ultimately, by excluding a comprehensive and integrated military campaign, it cannot guarantee victory. Professors William S. Lind and Robert A. Pape argue that the problem with strategic air operations is that they are executed separately from ground engagements, and thus,

even though the enemy finds himself partly paralysed or in shock for a short period of time, he will soon adapt to the new circumstances.[14] Consequently, only by going after the enemy ground forces in the occupied land can one prevail. While one has sympathy for Warden's argument, that strategic air campaigns have always been compromised for parochial and political reasons, and thus never really been given the chance to show their full potential, Clarke makes a strong case when he suggests that strategic air strikes add to a range of pressures that should be applied simultaneously against the enemy. It is, ultimately, the accumulated product of pressures on the supreme decision-making body that results in change of policy. While joint strategy is normally associated with combining all military services, there is something to be said for combining the military aspect with diplomacy. Strategic air strikes, more than any other air power mission, provide direct diplomatic leverage. The combination of "bullets and words" is often underestimated in the actual execution of an air campaign: the diplomatic game does not end when military action starts, as seen recently in "Deliberate Force" and "Allied Force".[15] Moreover, the very existence of a strategic air fleet may well have a deterrent effect on the opponent. As a "force in being", strategic air power capability has a role both in preventing war and in the conduct of operations. While "war is a continuation of politics by other means", many air power advocates would seem to strip the concept of strategic bombing of its political context. The unprecedented accuracy and destructiveness of air power today means that every bomb is a potential political bomb, and therefore air power needs to be considered in terms of both political and diplomatic perspectives. While Warden argues that air power can be decisive when applied in the strategic realm, and Pape argues that all such applications have proved irrelevant in the past, Clarke argues that strategic air power should at least be an option.

Having established these three propositions, Clarke next discusses the strategic air strike methodology in its relation to small nations, by building on Pape's taxonomy of four coercive strategies. Clarke discusses whether small nations should adopt a "punishment" or "risk" strategy, which tries to push a society beyond its economic and psychological comprehension, a "decapitation" strategy, which neutralises or isolates an adversary's leadership, national communications, or other high value centres, or a "denial" strategy, which attempts to neutralise an adversary's military ability to wage war. Pape essentially argues that coercive mechanisms provide a better basis upon which to categorise air strategies than targets do,[16] but as the argument develops Pape starts to equate each category with a common set of targets. Moreover, as his deductive reasoning progresses he excludes one option after the other, concluding that there is strong evidence in support of "denial" applied at the tactical level as the superior coercive strategy. Clarke considers all four mechanisms at the three levels of war, but in the context of small nations, and without suggesting that one is always preferable. He acknowledges that the four coercive strategies are easily distinguished on paper for analytical purposes, but that in reality they overlap. By stressing that leadership-centred rather than military-centred approaches provide small nations with new leverage, he merges the strategic focus of Warden with the coercive focus of Pape. After a discussion of various targeting theories and the caveats therein, Clarke explores the possibilities of a paradigm termed "SPOT bombing". It emphasises targeting the belligerent leadership, but it does not aspire to overwhelm, paralyse or even generate dominant tempo, as that is beyond the means of small nations. It is about persuasion and "high impact", that is, discrete operations optimising the combination of shock, visibility and damage.[17] The author offers an orientation, or mentality, rather than a force structure, and since it merely adds a new dimension to air power options, Clarke

argues that his thesis can be implemented without substantial changes in the current structure of most air force organisations.

Clarke has developed a convincing and comprehensive argument for small nations to consider strategic operations as a central part of their military doctrine. There are, nevertheless, a few issues that deserve further attention. First, for small nations to buy bombers in addition to fighters is expensive, and it might well be difficult within the allocated budgets, but "swing" and "multi" role functions might bridge that gap. Second, air strikes against high-value targets are likely to provoke retaliation, and thus an unintended escalation may well be the result. The whole of the argument pre-supposes that the state in question can control the terms of reference, set the agenda and act in exactly the way it wants. If a small nation is fighting a large nation it may not have the means to follow-up such attacks, and the whole endeavour might be counterproductive. In this context it would also be interesting to explore one's own vulnerability to the described operation. Or, just as importantly, discuss how small nations can contribute to Coalition warfare: how likely is it to have circumstances in which a state with less than one hundred strike-aircraft might seek to act offensively alone? Third, there are problems within international law when it comes to non-military targets, and one has to assume that future belligerents will mix high-value targets with sensitive elements of the overall society. Fourth, any given country has to assess its likely enemy? If it is a revolutionary guerrilla movement, a civil war scenario or a country without considerable high-value targets, then the utility of strategic air operations decreases. Moreover, sometimes one does not want to negotiate with the enemy; one needs to eliminate his means of threat. This is often the case with nuclear, biological and chemical production centres, and herein Clarke provides an opening by acknowledging that "fait accompli" has its role in modern conflicts. Finally, even if it is a "classical war", would it be politically acceptable to execute a strategic offensive? Lieutenant General Michael C. Short was prevented from using air power in the suggested fashion for political rather than military reasons in 1999.[18] Still, Clarke's thesis might be more acceptable for politicians than going "for the head of the snake [Milosevic] on the first night".[19] These reservations are fair, but Clarke does not argue that one is obliged to use the strategic air strike option. Indeed, if the risk assessment concludes that the chance for retaliation is huge, that it might breach international law or that it is not politically acceptable, then strategic air strikes should not be preferred over the "traditional" air power roles. Clarke makes his case about the feasibility and implications of a "SPOT bombing" approach based on deductive reasoning combined with a solid theoretical framework, and as such it adds to the list of air power options that should be included in military doctrines. "SPOT bombing" is an important tool as the erosion of leadership resolve is based on influence rather than elimination, but it does not do away with the problem of assessing the enemy's political power structure and the traditional difficulties related to human intelligence.

Part Three: Overall Assessment

In conclusion with reference to the Warden-Pape air power paradigm, Clarke sides with Warden in the fundamental belief that strategic air power can make a difference. But by accounting for small-scale operations, he differs from Warden in that he does not believe strategic air power can make the whole difference. Clarke sides with Pape on his analysis of the rationale and mechanisms behind aerial coercion, but he differs from Pape in believing that there is not a sole strategy with universal applicability. Clarke argues that one might search in vain if looking for a single-handed decisiveness in air power, as it is really about improving probabilities of gaining some concessions. While Pape seeks a

single solution within the choices of coercive strategies (denial) and Warden seeks a selection of prioritised target-sets (the Five Rings), Clarke concludes that at the end of the day the only sure thing is that "every man has his price". Thus, one needs to understand the cost-benefit calculus of the enemy, subsequently search for what actually constitutes his "price", and determine whether one is willing to exceed that price by using military power. If there is political commitment to such a task, then strategic air power will add significantly to the required leverage. Strategy is all about creating the circumstances in which the enemy leader will change his behaviour, and as such removing the enemy leader from power is not as important as having him comply with declared objectives. There is importantly no aspiration to paralyse the enemy in "SPOT bombing", only irritate, cause personal sacrifice and ultimately weaken the leadership's resolve for offensive action.[20]

Strategy, Air Strike and Small Nations is overall an important book on air power doctrine, strategy and theory within the context of small nations, as it examines the essence of strategic bombing. It is not an exhaustive analysis of air power or doctrine, as it only deals with one aspect within a range of air power functions, but it is an essential contribution to strategic acumen, professional mastery and the overall defence debate. In brief, Clarke argues that the key to "high strategic order" air strike lies in understanding the mechanism of coercing the political leadership, the advantages of joint strategy, and acknowledging that limited wars are fought for limited objectives. Herein one must sensitively comprehend cause and effect relationships in a field of the non-linear and intangible, which necessitates intelligence that accounts for cultural, social and psychological aspects combined with the art of military strategy. In the end, the utility of air power has more to do with imaginative and innovative thinking than with high technology and aircraft, and countries like Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, all involved in revising their air power doctrines, would therefore do well in thinking through Clarke's findings – in terms of both offence and defence. Rather than suggest one strategy that is most likely to work in all cases, Clarke suggests a coherent and holistic view within the reality of small nations. His thoughts are aligned with Warden's, in focusing directly on the political realm of war, but there is a big difference between targeting for paralysis and targeting for persuasion. The logical and deductive thesis is, in conclusion, educational as it encourages lateral, creative and independent thinking, and one can only agree with Colonel Phillip S. Meilinger that it is currently "one of the freshest and most original books on airpower theory".[21]

1 The book is available, free of charge, at the Aerospace Centre, RAAF Base, Fairbairn ACT 2600, Australia (apsc@dynamite.com.au). I would like to thank Dr. H. P. Willmott at the British MoD and lecturers Nils Naastad, Øystein Espenes and Patricia Aresvik at the Royal Norwegian Air Force (RNoAF) Academy for comments on this review essay.

2 "Deliberate Force" was a 42 day air campaign conducted by NATO against the Bosnian Serb Army between 30 August and 20 September 1995, involving 3,500 sorties against 56 target complexes, particularly supply dumps, with the result that the Serbs returned to the negotiation table (Dayton Peace Accords); "Desert Fox" was a 70 hour air campaign against the Iraqi regime between 15 and 18 December 1998 encompassing 650 sorties against 99 targets with the mission to strike military and security targets in Iraq that contribute to Iraq's ability to produce, store, maintain and deliver weapons of mass destruction; and "Allied Force" was a 78 day air campaign conducted by the 19-member NATO Alliance against Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic's forces occupying Kosovo and Serbia proper between 24 March and 10 June 1999 with the objectives of stopping the Serb offensive in Kosovo; forcing a withdrawal of Serb troops from Kosovo; establishing democratic self-government in Kosovo; allowing a NATO-led international peacekeeping force into Kosovo; and allowing the safe and peaceful return of Kosovar Albanian refugees. On *Allied Force*, see particularly General Wesley K. Clark, "The United States and NATO: The Way Ahead", *Parameters* XXIX, No. 4, (Winter 1999-2000), pp. 2-14, and on objectives particularly, see William Clinton, "Statement of Objectives", 24 March 1999, quoted in *Air Force Magazine* 82, No. 8, (August 1999), p. 66.

3 Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Russia's Air Power In Crisis*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1999), pp. 117-144.

4 Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Revolution in Warfare? Air Power in the Persian Gulf*, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1995), p. 213.

5 Colonel Phillip S. Meilinger (ed.), *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1997), p. ix. See also Eliot A. Cohen, "The Mystique of US Air Power", *Foreign Affairs* 73, No. 1, (January/February 1994), pp. 108-123; and Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 55-82.

6 See Robert A. Pape, "The Limits of Precision-Guided Air Power", *Security Studies* 7, No. 2, (Winter 1997/98), pp. 93-114; Barry D. Watts, "Ignoring Reality: Problems of Theory and Evidence in Security Studies", *Security Studies* 7, No. 2, (Winter 1997/98), pp. 115-171; Colonel (ret.) John A. Warden, "Success in Modern War: A Response to Robert Pape's *Bombing to Win", Security Studies* 7, No. 2, (Winter 1997/98), pp. 172-190; Karl Mueller, "Strategic Coercion: Denial, Punishment, and the Future of Air Power", *Security Studies* 7, No. 3, (Spring 1998), pp. 182-238; and Benjamin S. Lambeth, "Bounding the Air Power Debate", *Strategic Review* 25, No. 4, (Winter 1997), pp. 42-55.

7 See Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

8 Shaun Clarke, Strategy, *Air Strike and Small Nations*, (Fairbairn, Canberra: Air Power Studies Centre, 1999).

9 Shaun Clarke provides an appendix listing the air strike capability of 129 nations. The list only accounts for aircraft, not missiles.

10 Shaun Clarke, *Strategy, Air Strike and Small Nations*, p. 2.

11 Carl von Clausewitz, On War, (London: Everyman's Library, 1993), p. 89.

12 Michael Howard, "When Are Wars Decisive?", *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 1, (Spring 1999), pp. 126-135. See also Brian Bond, *The Pursuit of Victory: From Napoleon to Saddam Hussein*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

13 Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, (Ithaca: Cornell Univeristy Press, 1996), pp. 314-331.

14 William S. Lind, presentation at the RNoAF Academy, 22 September 2000; and Robert A. Pape, presentation at the RNoAF Academy 20 September 2000.

15 Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War*, (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 94-111; and Jamie Shea, "Modern conflicts, the media and public opinion: The Kosovo example", Presentation at the Royal Norwegian Military Academy, 18 September 2000.

16 Karl Mueller, "Strategic Coercion: Denial, Punishment, and the Future of Air Power", p. 187.

17 Shaun Clarke, *Strategy, Air Strike and Small Nations*, p. 140.

18 Lieutenant General Michael C. Short, correspondence with author, 21 October 2000.

19 Dana Priest, "Air Chief Faults Kosovo Strategy", *The Washington Post*, 22 October 1999. See also John A. Tirpak, "Washington Watch: Short's View of the Air Campaign", *Air Force Magazine* 82, Vol. 9, (September 1999), pp. 43-49.

20 The implications of Clarke's thesis can be lifted to the grand strategic level of war. Take Scandinavia as an example. Norway and Denmark envision the defence of their territory as part of a NATO operation. Sweden relies on marginal defence: it assumes that it can only be attacked in the context of a larger conflict, and in such a case only a limited amount of force will be directed towards the Swedish homeland. Sweden sizes its armed forces in the context of that calculation. Finland uses a third model. It holds the opinion that there is a limit to what an adversary would be willing to "pay" for conquering parts of its country, and applied an armed force structure that is able to exceed that price. Clarke's thesis is aligned with the "Finnish model": a small nation that cannot depend on an alliance needs to define the price the enemy is willing to pay, and make sure that the perceived cost is contested. (I am grateful to Nils Naastad for this comparison).

21 Phillip S. Meilinger, *Aerospace Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (Fall 2000), pp. 119-120.

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