



**... A Little Clarity of Purpose, Please**

by Robert B. Zoellick and John Hillen

*The following is an opinion article written before the NATO bombing campaign began over Yugoslavia. While the action is remote to the Asia-Pacific region, the questions being asked (and as yet largely unanswered) have much broader relevance.*

The United States needs to consider carefully the strategic aim of its Balkan policy. We know the problems in Kosovo will not go away, so the United States should be prepared to relate tactics and negotiations to long-term objectives. The president also should level with Congress and the American people about the true nature of the U.S. commitment.

Thus far the United States has responded to the various crises in the Balkans to stop brutal widespread killings. When its sensibilities have been offended, it has brandished the threat of force – but for very uncertain ends. At times the U.S. logic has been circular: We flex NATO's power to punish, but once it appears that an objective is unattainable, we then feel compelled to protect NATO's credibility. Officials have referred vaguely to concerns about spillovers and dominoes. This approach has been too narrowly focused and reactive.

This was the approach in Bosnia, where the parties fought their way to balance on the ground and the United States and NATO applied power to draw and reinforce the cease-fire lines. A one-year, \$2 billion intervention has since slipped into an endless, \$20 billion – and counting – peacekeeping mission among parties that do not want to live with one another.

If U.S. policy is to be effective, and if NATO is to be a useful instrument for that policy, America's actions should be directed toward the ultimate cause of the killing and destabilization in the Balkans – Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic manipulated ethnic hatreds in Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia and the rest of former Yugoslavia to establish and maintain dictatorial control. As long as he remains in power, he will continue this strategy. Therefore, every U.S. and allied action should contribute to the goal of weakening and ultimately removing Milosevic from power. This is not what the United States did in Bosnia.

Although Milosevic is the source of the problems that keep drawing American diplomacy, troops and money to former Yugoslavia, the United States does not perceive a serious enough interest to pay the price of removing him directly. We must keep this hesitancy in mind before we send U.S. forces to another dangerous place manipulated by Milosevic. Moreover, Kosovo is land within Serbia. As we consider further commitments, the United States should recall historian Sir Michael Howard's three rules for intervening in civil wars. First, do not. Second, if you do, pick a side. Third, pick the side that will win and make sure that it

does. The uncertain arrangements coming out of the Kosovo negotiations before they broke down did not suit either the strategic goal of weakening and deposing Milosevic or Howard's guidance about intervention in civil wars. The plan presumed a deferral of Kosovar ambitions for independence. Those ambitions will not be stilled by these arrangements.

If the United States is unwilling to pick sides, it must, at a minimum, not agree to enforce any eventual truce that enhances Milosevic and Serbia. A deal should not give Serbia economic assistance or offer Serbia associations or memberships in international forums. It should not lift the threat of prosecution of war crimes from Milosevic. Any deal should make clear to Serbia that Milosevic's brutal policies have lost ground for Serbia and that their continuation will hurt the country more.

On the other hand, the United States must specify to the Kosovars that our involvement with their defense is dependent on Kosovo's not expanding its reach into neighboring countries. Indeed, we should require the Kosovars to cooperate in stabilizing relations with their neighbors.

Harried negotiators will consider these terms too demanding. But that is precisely the point. If Kosovo diplomacy resumes, the United States' goal cannot simply be to reach any deal that commits NATO to deploy troops among parties that still want to kill one another.

It is inconceivable that the Kosovars, after being brutalized and chased from their homes by Milosevic, will agree to live under his authority in the future. We should accept only an arrangement that weakens Milosevic and puts the Kosovars onto a path of de facto independence, which we must assume will eventually become a reality.

Before the United States commits its power and people to Kosovo, we should decide whether America is willing to fight for the Kosovars – because that is what the United States will be doing if it is pressed into bombing Serbia or defending Kosovo's "autonomy." If America is not willing to pay the price of that fight, it should stay out. If America is willing to pay the price of defending Kosovo, then it should do so in a way that moves the situation toward the strategic objective of getting rid of Milosevic and minimizing the danger Kosovo could present to its neighbors. These are the realities the president should discuss with the American people, and that Congress should debate, before the United States commits its soldiers, resources and standing as a world leader.

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