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PERSPECTIVES

Flying Blind

NATO needs to redefine goals for Kosovo conflict

The crisis in Kosovo was brewing long before the phrase "ethnic cleansing" worked its way into the contemporary vernacular.

The conflict centers on the ethnic Albanian citizens of the Kosovo province and their struggle to secede, or at least acquire autonomy from Serbia. This desire for independence is violently opposed by Serbs who feel that Kosovo belongs to their country, even though ethnic Albanians make up an overwhelming majority of Kosovo's population.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been attempting to broker a peace agreement between the two sides but has met formidable opposition from Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, who refused to sign the agreement earlier this month.

That brings us to the present. Today, NATO forces will likely launch air strikes against Serbia for the sixth consecutive day.

The Serbs' ongoing brutal attack against Kosovo civilians has been heavily emphasized as justification for the bombings. President Clinton has gone so far as to cite a "moral imperative" for action.

NATO air strikes were intended to send a message to Milosevic, to tell Serbs that their actions will no longer be tolerated and, above all, to rescue the Kosovars from violence and tyranny.



Giocarrri Salimera/Emerald

Unfortunately, the goals have not been reached.

The single-mindedness that Milosevic has dedicated to crushing the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo is chilling. Even as bombs rain down, destroying key military targets, Serbian forces continue to burn villages and execute civilians. Some Washington officials suggest that the Serbs have stepped up the pace of these atrocities in retaliation for the air strikes.

As NATO is faced with the present failure to meet its primary objectives, one would hope it has a plan B. However, none of its actions inspire much faith.

Clinton, and other military advisers,

have repeatedly stressed that they have no intention of committing U.S. troops, but it seems increasingly unlikely that the lofty goal of ending the human-rights abuses against ethnic Albanians can be accomplished from the air.

Milosevic has been stalwart in his refusal to cooperate with the peace process and NATO demands. His actions have more than amply proved that peace is not one of his priorities.

Now, the stakes are too high for anyone to back away from. Milosevic's supporters remain firm in the face of the bombing. If Milosevic was to bow to NATO's demands, it would likely be a severe blow to his credi-

bility in Serbia. And the United States and NATO, having issued solemn declarations about their commitment to protecting the Kosovars, can't back out without results.

Or can they?

If this campaign continues on its present course, or escalates to a ground war while Kosovars continue to be slaughtered and run out of their homes, public support for the conflict could quickly erode.

Currently, the only plan approaching an exit strategy that NATO has is to force Milosevic to relent or to effectively destroy the country's ability to make war.

It probably is not too big of a leap to suppose that the latter objective is the one NATO and the United States would find most desirable. Even the suggestion of war engulfing the Balkans, the flash point of both World Wars, is an understandable reason for caution.

So it appears NATO is digging in, but because it has adopted a human-rights stance, NATO must proceed with that objective in mind. If

Milosevic's past actions are any indicator, this could mean a long, costly engagement.

NATO needs to come to terms with the knowledge that it might not be possible for them to end the Serb attacks against the Kosovars.

At this point, the best course of action is to come up with one. NATO needs to identify clearer goals and then establish a workable strategy to accomplish them, otherwise it could end up with no return on a very costly investment.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Thumbs



THUMBS UP

To spring: Although you couldn't tell by this weekend's weather, it is spring at last. Get ready for shorts, barbecues and the summer countdown.

To the freedom to feed:

The Senate will hear a proposal today that would protect women who breast feed in public from indecent exposure statutes.



THUMBS DOWN

To stifling activism: A recently proposed bill would make it illegal to get too close to a logging operation, even on public land. Environmental activists who protest at such sites are opposed to the measure, which could slap violators with a five-year prison sentence and a \$100,000 fine.

To faulty logic: In the wake of an alcohol-related death, the University of Pennsylvania plans to ban alcohol at on-campus undergraduate parties. Restrictive policies tend to increase irresponsible drinking, not deter it.

LETTERS POLICY

The Oregon Daily Emerald will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community. Letters must be limited to 250 words. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length, clarity, grammar, style and libel. Letters may be dropped off at EMU Suite 300.

