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The War for Kosovo

Barry R. Posen

Serbia's Political-Military Strategy

Why did Slobodan Milosevic decide he would rather fight the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) than agree to the Rambouillet formula for Kosovo? Why did he agree to settle the war on June 3, 1999, after some eleven weeks of NATO bombing? This article examines these two questions through the lens of strategy. First, I argue that Milosevic probably had a political-military strategy for his confrontation with NATO; he had a plausible theory of victory or at least of partial success. Milosevic's strategy was to split the coalition, and he had the political and military means to try, which he skillfully employed. Second, I argue that the strategy on the whole worked surprisingly well. For the most part, Yugoslavia's military machine lent excellent support to Serbia's political efforts, though the Serbs did make one serious mistake: the early large-scale expulsion of Kosovar Albanians. Third, I try to show that an understanding of Milosevic's strategy helps one understand how and why the war ended when it did. In particular, starting roughly in mid-May, Milosevic received a barrage of evidence that his strategy had stopped working—it had achieved what it could achieve. NATO was offering a compromise, and if Serbia did not accept it, meager though it was, the state would suffer serious damage in the coming weeks, with little chance of any additional concessions. This was not much, but it was something. The Serbs could not keep NATO out of Kosovo, but they did manage to get the United Nations (UN) Security Council into Kosovo. At that point, a continuation of the war held more chance of great costs than it did of significant gains, as NATO was starting to pound Serbia's economy to pieces.

Scholars and policy analysts are already asking questions about what the war in Kosovo may teach us about coercion—the manipulation of the threat of force and the use of force to compel others to do what an actor wishes. The conflict may prove a particularly instructive case, because NATO was obviously much more powerful than Serbia, but had a difficult time achieving its

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objectives. Clearly, NATO's threats of force before the war did not elicit Serb cooperation, and its use of force during the war neither lent much succor to the Albanians, nor for many weeks put much pressure on Milosevic. NATO did, in the end, offer the Serbs a better deal than was tendered at Rambouillet. But this is no isolated instance; the United States tried to coerce many state and nonstate actors over the last decade, and coercion is thus an important public policy issue. But to study coercion thoroughly, it is necessary to think about the strategy of the other side.

Although journalistic and official public relations material about most aspects of the Kosovo crisis and war is plentiful, much of this information is open to question. Without access to documentary evidence from all the key actors, it is difficult to judge the reliability or significance of the information that is available. Nevertheless, those most intimately involved in making and analyzing U.S. foreign and security policy will try to draw lessons from the Kosovo war. Given the panoply of bureaucratic and political motives that come into play in such exercises, it is by no means certain that they will do the best job that can be done even with the admittedly poor database that exists. In addition, such "lessons of the recent past" can easily lead policymakers astray in the not too distant future. Scholars who have devoted their careers to the study of military force ought therefore to do the best they can to make a preliminary appraisal of the evidence.¹ Although scholars should be hesitant to exploit the available information to either support or undermine larger generalizations about the use of force, they need not forgo the preliminary winnowing of the available material to generate working hypotheses that may prove useful as more information becomes available.

I proceed as follows. First, I discuss the political background of the war. Second, I lay out the likely Serbian political-military strategy for the war over Kosovo.² I have inferred the existence and content of a Serb political-military

1. Adam Roberts, "NATO's 'Humanitarian War' over Kosovo," *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 102–123, offers a useful preliminary analysis of several of the key political questions raised by the war, with a focus on international legal aspects. Other early treatments are more polemical but still useful. See Michael Mandelbaum, "A Perfect Failure," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 5 (September/October 1999), pp. 2–8; Javier Solana, "NATO's Success in Bosnia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 6 (November/December 1999), pp. 114–120; James B. Steinberg, "A Perfect Polemic, Blind to Reality on Kosovo," *ibid.*, pp. 128–133; and Stanley Hoffmann, Michael Mandelbaum, and John Koopman, "Letters to the Editor," *ibid.*, pp. 167–168.

2. Throughout this article, I generally employ the term "Serbia" for the opposing nation-state, rather than the still official title "Yugoslavia." This obscures important legal technicalities that permit Serbia to maintain a political hold on Montenegro and now on Kosovo, but highlights what I consider to be central aspects of this war: the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) is now largely

strategy from the pattern of political and military events in the war, and from the disparate evidence of considerable Serb preparation for the war. I show that the key elements of the hypothesized strategy are consistent with political judgments that the Serbs were making about NATO during the weeks before the war, and are consistent with the political-military doctrine of the Yugoslav armed forces since the late 1960s. Third, I then reassess the war in light of this hypothesized strategy to show both the strategy's political-military success phase and the "turn of the tide," when it seems likely that Milosevic would have suspected on the basis of the evidence available to him that the strategy had achieved about as much as it could. I acknowledge that this methodology is unsatisfying; it would be preferable to review Serb official records, private papers, tape recordings, e-mail, and so on to discern whether or not the Serbs went into this conflict with a genuine political-military strategy, as well as the content of that strategy. This method is not available, however; thus I have simply hypothesized the existence of a strategy, developed the content of that strategy from disparate information, and tried to show that key Serb decisions do make sense in light of the hypothesized strategy. Finally, I analyze the diplomatic endgame to show that Serbia took the terms of the Group of Eight (G-8) offer seriously, in particular the posited political role for the UN Security Council, and continued to fight and negotiate until it was sure that these terms would indeed be included in the final settlement.

The Decision for War

The Serb decision to wage war over Kosovo must be approached on two levels. First one should ask: why would the Serbs care so much about maintaining control of Kosovo that they would be willing to consider war to defend it? Then one needs to ask: did the Serbs have a strategy that would make war a reasonable proposition? This article is largely concerned with the strategy question. That said, a brief consideration of why the Serbs cared about the status of Kosovo provides the necessary context for what follows.

a Serb country; the Yugoslav National Army is now largely a Serb army; and Serb nationalism provided the underlying popular legitimacy for this war. Slobodan Milosevic, though formally the president of Yugoslavia, and not of its largest republic, Serbia, is treated as the leader of the Serbs and of Serbia. I continue to employ the term "Yugoslavia" where for technical or legal reasons the term seems appropriate.

WHY OPPOSE RAMBOUILLET?

Kosovo is a small province, with a little mineral and agricultural wealth, but it is hardly a treasure. It is inhabited mainly by Albanians (perhaps 1.8 million at the population's peak), who have resisted Serb rule for many years and would have remained difficult if not impossible to govern. At most, 200,000 Serbs lived in Kosovo by the early 1990s.³ Many Serbs had left even before the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991, partly to seek a better life in more prosperous parts of Yugoslavia, partly due to their discomfort with the growth in the size and politicization of the Albanian majority, and partly in reaction to anti-Serb violence and threats of violence.⁴ Kosovo contains a number of important historic and religious sites that matter to the national identity of the Serbs.⁵ During the 1999 war, these were often compared by commentators to the significance of Jerusalem in the Jewish religious and Israeli national identity.⁶ It is hard to know if such comparisons truly capture the degree of Serb emotional attachment to Kosovo. To be sure, a renascent Serbian nationalism has been the only viable integrative force in Serb politics since the collapse of the Yugoslav Communist Party. Thus the symbolic and immediate emotional value of Kosovo to Serbs today may be higher than it was in Tito's time when a kind of cosmopolitan, socialist, Yugoslav patriotism was the state ideology.

In addition, one should not underestimate the more general interest any state would have in defending its borders. It is common for states to resist seces-

3. For population estimates and economic assets, see U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The Former Yugoslavia: A Map Folio*, CPAS 92-10003 (July 1992), "Serbia and Montenegro." Roughly speaking, Kosovo can be described as a box, sixty-five miles per side, tilted to perch exactly on one of its corners.

4. Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 152-153, 156-157. See also Him Naureckas, "Rescued from the Memory Hole: The Forgotten Background of the Serb/Albanian Conflict," *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* (FAIR) (May/June 1999), <http://www.fair.org/extra/9905/kosovo.html>.

5. Bogdan Denitch, *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 113-115, calls "the Kosovo Myth" one of the three central nationalist myths of modern Serbia. Although he employs the term "myth" for how the history of Serbs in Kosovo has been politicized, he agrees, as do most others, that the Serbs have an important history in Kosovo: "Kosovo is where the greatest monuments of Serbian medieval culture are located. It is the battleground where the medieval Serbian kingdom was destroyed by the invading Muslim Turks, who ruled over the defeated Serbs for five hundred years." See also the map "Kosovo's Treasures," *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/balkans/contents.htm>.

6. Alissa J. Rubin, "Crisis in Yugoslavia: Religious Identity at the Heart of Balkan War," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1999, p. A21, quotes a Serbian-American orthodox priest, Rev. Blastko Taraklis: "We cannot give up Kosovo, because it is the Serbian Jerusalem. The birthright of the Serbian Orthodox Church is in Kosovo, and must remain there as part of Serbia." See also Michael Kranish, "Why Kosovo Isn't Bosnia: No Pressure on the Ground," *Boston Globe*, April 10, 1999, p. A15; and Richard Whitt, "Serbs in Atlanta See Bombing as Unjust," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 13, 1999, p. A8.

sionist movements as the Serbs have done in Kosovo. Modern nation-states and their citizens do not take kindly to external powers that side with such secessionist movements. They usually resist outside powers that presume to detach pieces of their real estate. For every Serb who was willing to fight for Kosovo for religious or historic reasons directly associated with the province, there were probably several others willing to go to war on the principle that nobody takes their land without a fight.

It is not the purpose of this article to recount the recent history of Kosovo, but some stage setting is warranted.⁷ In February 1998 the Serbs seem to have perceived that violent Albanian resistance to Serb rule had begun to accelerate, or was preparing to do so. The Serbs responded (or preempted, depending on one's interpretation of disparate evidence) with considerable force, particularly in the Drenica Valley region, which further aroused the already restive Albanian population of Kosovo and increased the number of individuals willing to take up arms. Serbia quickly escalated the violence, mounting an intense counterinsurgency campaign in the summer of 1998, which caused many Albanians to flee their homes and disperse in the mountains and forests. This humanitarian emergency, coupled with the general level of violence in the province, attracted the attention of both Europe and NATO. NATO coerced the Serbs into a kind of armistice in October 1998; the agreement has not been published. Serbs were meant to reduce their forces in the province with the understanding that the Kosovar Albanian militants, dubbed the Kosovo Liberation Army (abbreviated KLA in English, UCK in Albanian), were meant to reduce their military activity. Eighteen hundred unarmed observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were to supervise the accord. As far as one can tell, neither side fully abided by the understandings, and the KLA quickly recovered from the battering it received from the Serbs in the summer fighting, imported more arms, recruited more soldiers, and moved to expand its presence in areas from which the Serbs had withdrawn.⁸ The Serbs, not entirely living up to the October agreement in any case, responded accordingly. The Europeans and Americans began to fear a general resurgence of violence in the spring of 1999. In early January 1999, the discovery of forty-five Albanian bodies in the village of Racak, most apparently murdered by Serb security forces or paramilitaries, added urgency to these

7. Elaine Sciolino and Ethan Bronner, "How a President, Distracted by Scandal, Entered Balkan War," *New York Times*, April 18, 1999, p. A1, provide a useful account of the evolving conflict in Kosovo in 1998 and early 1999 and the diplomacy surrounding those events. Some judgments that follow, however, are my own.

8. Justin Brown, "Rebel Rebound Clouds a Deal," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 22, 1998, p. 1.

fears. Thus all the parties were summoned to Rambouillet, France, to try to achieve a permanent negotiated solution.

Britain, France, and the United States controlled the February negotiations, drafting the settlement document with little input from the Albanian and Serb delegations that were present. The proposed Rambouillet accords would have provided Kosovo with substantial autonomy, essentially self-government for its Albanian majority.⁹ The province would have been policed by NATO for three or more years. The Serb regular army would have been required to leave Kosovo except for 2,500 border troops permitted to remain in the province to survey its external borders. Twenty-five hundred Serb interior ministry police would have been allowed to remain for one year. NATO forces would have had complete authority over Kosovo. A military clause, added near the end of the March meeting in Paris, would also have allowed NATO forces complete and unimpeded military access (including basing rights) anywhere in Yugoslavia.¹⁰ After three years the will of the population of Kosovo, and the views of other interested parties, would have been considered in a diplomatic process to produce a final settlement of the status of the territory. Although one cannot know the outcome, the Serbs had every reason to fear that this process would have resulted in independence for Kosovo, because there was no obstacle in the accord to ultimate independence. At Rambouillet the Serbs expressed a willingness to agree to an autonomy formula, but adamantly opposed the presence of NATO and the notion of a final settlement after three years.

SERBIA'S WAR AIMS

Serbia's plausible war aims can be divided into objectives intrinsic to Kosovo and objectives indirectly related to Kosovo but energized by NATO's challenge. The Serbs undoubtedly hoped to retain Kosovo. To foreshadow, their April 6,

9. *Rambouillet Agreement*, http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/ksvo_ambouillet_text.html. During most of the Kosovo war, a copy of the text was unavailable at any NATO or U.S. website, as far as I could discover. This was a bit peculiar, given the energy that NATO, Britain, and the United States put into disseminating information about the war on the World Wide Web. During the war, a draft of the Rambouillet accords could be found only at the website of a U.S.-based Balkan politics advocacy group, the Balkan Action Council.

10. *Ibid.* This clause reads as follows: "NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft, and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY including associated airspace and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right of bivouac, maneuver, billet, and utilization of any areas or facilities as required for support, training, and operations." The clause is to say the least undiplomatic, and its introduction into the accords raises questions about either the wisdom or the motives of whoever introduced it.

1999, Orthodox Easter cease-fire offer did not even hint at any other possible outcome. Fourteen days into the war, the Serbs were still offering only autonomy and inviting only the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross to help with the return of refugees to Kosovo.¹¹ Given the disparity in power between Serbia and NATO, however, Slobodan Milosevic already had good reason to suspect that he might not be able to retain Kosovo unconditionally. It seems likely therefore that Serbia had a hierarchy of objectives.

One often suggested possibility is that Milosevic hoped to partition Kosovo on terms favorable to the Serb minority, and favorable to Serb control of historical and religious sites and mineral wealth. There is no evidence, however, that Serb officials suggested this possibility—not at Rambouillet and not during the war.¹² Other parties in Serbia have suggested it as a policy at various times, but the government did not.¹³ Many observers before and during the war speculated that partition might be an objective.¹⁴ There is

11. "Full Text of Yugoslav Offer," BBC News, Monitoring, World Media Watch, April 6, 1999, <http://news2.this.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/monitoring/newsid%SF313000/313071.stm>.

12. Carlotta Gall, "Serbs' Fear Puts Segregation Back on the Table in Kosovo," *New York Times*, August 26, 1999, p. A1, however, says that "Milosevic had pushed the plan for the partition of Kosovo during negotiations before the war." She says that Western negotiators rejected the idea. This is, however, the only report of such an offer that I have found. One of the most prescient prewar discussions of Milosevic's possible plans is "BETA Examines Milosevic's Kosovo Options," BETA News Service, Belgrade, March 4, 1999, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service—East Europe-1999-0304 (hereafter FBIS-EEU), which argued that Milosevic had already decided to fight NATO, to launch operations all over Kosovo against the KLA, and "when possible NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia and international pressure reach a climax, Milosevic can always call off the operations and offer talks to the international community, having in mind the division of Kosovo, and trying to secure that the Yugoslav Army and security forces keep the positions they had reached." This report does not, however, refer to any prior offer by Milosevic to negotiate a partition agreement. Further, although the article predicted much about the pattern of the war, partition suggestions from Belgrade were not forthcoming.

13. Justin Brown, "The Dispute over Splitting Kosovo," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 14, 1999, p. 1. The idea was first proposed in Yugoslavia in 1968 by Dobrica Kosic, a later president of Yugoslavia, who proposed it again in the mid-1980s.

14. See, for example, Jonathan Steele, "Kosovo Crisis: Province At Stake as Milosevic Considers the Spoils of War," *Guardian*, June 9, 1998, p. 11. Vladimir Kuznechevskiy, "Primakov May Have Suggested Kosovo Partition to Milosevic," *Moscow Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, March 31, 1999, in FBIS-SOV-1999-0331, p. 1, suggests that Primakov made a partition proposal to Milosevic during his visit to Belgrade in the first days of the war. This proposal was not reported in the Western press, and neither is there any subsequent discussion of negotiating positions from Belgrade based on a partition plan. It seems plausible that this was a trial balloon from the Russian foreign ministry. Steven Erlanger, "Crisis in the Balkans: The Serbs; Milosevic's New Version of Reality Will Be Harder for NATO to Dismiss," *New York Times*, April 8, 1999, p. A12, reports that an anonymous Yugoslav analyst speculated that Milosevic may then have contemplated waiting for and contesting a NATO ground attack, and then once real casualties began to affect Western decisionmakers, agreeing to a partition.

nothing obvious in the pattern of Serb operations in Kosovo to suggest that partition was a priority objective. There does seem to be a pattern of greater physical destruction to Kosovar Albanian property in certain areas in the northern part of the province where the KLA was said to be strong.¹⁵ Through early April, some observers noted an apparent pattern of expulsions of Albanians concentrated in these same areas and inferred a partition motive.¹⁶ Yet this pattern could also be explained by the KLA's strength in those areas.¹⁷ Moreover, relatively early in the war, Serbs are reported to have engaged in ethnic cleansing in southwest central Kosovo, in an area that does not fit neatly into any partition plan that might seek geographic contiguity with Serbia or Montenegro, or that might seek to separate areas of comparatively dense Serb settlement.¹⁸ Nor has anyone suggested a pattern to Serb military preparations in Kosovo that would indicate de facto partition: the Serbs could have fortified key areas inside Kosovo.

In the diplomatic endgame, Western commentators and officials feared that the Russians' desire for a military sector of their own was a stealthy partition project, but no evidence has surfaced supporting the proposition that the Serbs and Russians seriously attempted such a project. In particular, the Serbs did not try to create any facts on the ground to produce a stealthy partition that the Russians could secure. During their military withdrawal, the Serbs might have tried to relocate Serbs from elsewhere in Kosovo to the semicircular swathe of territory running along the borders of Montenegro and Serbia that contains many (though not all) Serbian historic and religious sites, and that also contained the most Serbs. They did not. The absence of evidence cannot

15. See Carlotta Gall, "Kosovo Aid Groups Fall Short as Winter Nears," *New York Times*, November 2, 1999, p. A12, which displays a map showing the percentage of homes damaged in various parts of Kosovo as of June 1999.

16. Charles Bremner, "Nato Expects Serb Partition Gambit," *Times* (London), April 9, 1999.

17. An OSCE report on human rights abuses in Kosovo "suggests a kind of military rationale for the expulsions, which were concentrated in areas controlled by the insurgents and along likely invasion routes." Steven Erlanger, "Monitors' Reports Provide Chronicle of Kosovo Terror: Both Sides Are Blamed," *New York Times*, December 5, 1999, p. A1. Regrettably, the full reports were unavailable before this article was completed.

18. See the NATO map "Ground Activity Update," April 2, 1999, <http://www.nato.into/pictures/1999/990402/b990402a.gif>, showing an inverted triangle of "cleansing," on the line Pristina, Pec, Prizren, encompassing the Pagarusa Valley. An undated map of suspected mass graves, prepared by the United States Information Agency, indicates a substantial number of graves in this area, as well as in the north of the country. See <http://www.usia.gov/regional/eur/balkans/kosovo/map-grave.htm>. This same inverted triangle seems to contain roughly one-half of the areas of Kosovo with the highest uniform density of damaged homes, suggesting again a lot of violence against the local population. See Gall, "Kosovo Aid Groups Fall Short." These were also areas where, roughly speaking, the Serb percentage of the population was quite small.

of course prove that partition was not one of Milosevic's fallback positions, but given the amount of speculation on this objective, the absence of direct evidence is noteworthy.

What then might have been Milosevic's diplomatic fallback position? It is plausible that for reasons both of domestic political expediency and of future diplomacy, he did not want to sign any document that simply relinquished any Serb claim to Kosovo. His own domestic nationalist credentials, the sincerity of which are often doubted, would come into question with his own nationalist supporters—putting his rule at risk. He would prefer not to sign such a document at all, and certainly not sign it without a fight. That said, had Milosevic simply wanted the cover of NATO's superior force to sign the document, he could have let NATO's air attacks proceed for a week or two, launched a lot of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) in a big fireworks show for Serb television and CNN, and then agreed to the terms of Rambouillet. With his control of the media, he ought to have been able to sell this as sufficient resistance to preserve his nationalist credentials. The April 6 cease-fire offer provided a convenient symbolic occasion for such a move, but Milosevic was still standing firm.

A "real" Serb nationalist would prefer to leave Kosovo's future open to political challenge through diplomatic and even military means at a later date. This would have been worth a fight. At Rambouillet the Serbs attempted to break the proposed accords into two parts: the political agreement for Kosovo's autonomy, which they accepted (at least in principle), and the security agreement calling for NATO military control of the province, which they rejected as an infringement of Serb sovereignty. The Serbs are reported to have floated many trial balloons on possible alternatives to a NATO force, including peacekeepers under OSCE or UN auspices.¹⁹ The United States rejected these ideas. Whether these Serb hints were genuine or not when offered, in a March 1 meeting with the chairman of the OSCE, Milosevic rejected any foreign forces in Kosovo, supporting only a continuation of the OSCE verification mission.²⁰ Even if force majeure were to impose a negotiated deal, such a deal could not

19. See Steve Rendall, "Forgotten Coverage of Rambouillet Negotiations," FAIR, May 14, 1999, www.fair.org/press-releases/kosovo-solution.html; Tom Walker, "Peace Talks Stall Despite Kosovo 'Breakthrough,'" *Times* (London), February 22, 1999; and Jonathan S. Landay, "Unspoken Key to Kosovo Talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 22, 1999, p. 1.

20. "Milosevic Rejects Peace Force," BBC, March 2, 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid%SF288000/288716.stm>. It is plausible that as of this date Milosevic had resolved to fight rather than accept the Rambouillet accords. The trial balloons may have been his best offer.

merely consign the future of Kosovo to NATO. A deal would need provisions that formally protected Serbia's claims. This may seem a minor point to outsiders. Why should Serbia believe that it could ever get Kosovo back once its security apparatus left? The answer may be that someday NATO would leave, and it is reasonable for Serbia to put itself in the best possible diplomatic position to regain the province when it did. This means trying to place as many obstacles as possible in the way of formal independence for Kosovo.

Issues extrinsic to Kosovo, but related to it, may also be central to the Serbian decision to fight. The aggressive diplomatic posture assumed by NATO in the Rambouillet negotiations—the extent of its political and military demands—almost certainly suggested to Milosevic and his supporters that agreement would simply be followed by more demands.²¹ Milosevic addressed the public on March 24, asserting: “This has not been just a question of Kosovo, although Kosovo, too, is of immense importance to us. The freedom of our entire country is in question, and Kosovo would have only served as a door for foreign troops to get in and put in question precisely these greatest values of ours.”²² There are other parts of Serbia with sizable minorities, for example, Vojvodina and the Sandzak. If these became restless, would NATO support their secession? Montenegro, the only other independent republic besides Serbia still in Yugoslavia, might also bolt. Would NATO use such restlessness, in combination with the provisions allowing NATO military presence throughout Serbia, as a vehicle for a slow-motion takeover of the country? Milosevic himself, for strictly personal reasons, could not want to give NATO this chance. If Serbia did not fight now, would NATO not be emboldened?

21. Credible reports have appeared suggesting that U.S. negotiators hoped to present Milosevic with a deal that he could not sign, so that the coalition would have a chance to bomb Serbia. “What Reporters Knew About Kosovo Talks—But Didn’t Tell,” FAIR, June 2, 1999, www.fair.org/press-releases/kosovo-talks.html; Robert Fisk, “The Trojan Horse That ‘Started’ a 79-day War,” *Independent*, November 26, 1999, <http://www.independent.co.uk>, speculates that the purpose of the last-minute addition to the Rambouillet accords of the military appendix allowing NATO forces access to all of Yugoslavia was to provoke Serb rejection of the document. Defenders of the clause claim that it was put in entirely for logistical reasons, and that it differed little from similar provisions accepted by Belgrade in the 1995 Dayton accords that established NATO in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is wrong; although a similar clause does exist in the Dayton accords, that clause gives NATO access to all of Bosnia-Herzegovina, not all of Yugoslavia. Access to all of Yugoslavia is profoundly different, and has major political and military implications for the Serbs that the drafters of the Rambouillet accords ought to have understood. See *Dayton Peace Accords: Annex 1-A—Agreement on the Military Aspects of the Peace Settlement*, Article 1, para. 9(a). <http://pdq2.usia.gov>.

22. “Yugoslav President Milosevic Addresses the Nation,” March 24, 1999, SERBIAINFO News, <http://www.serbia-info.com/news/1999-03/24/10032.html>.

The U.S. attitude toward Serbia had become increasingly contemptuous. U.S. negotiators in particular seemed to believe that Serbia did not have the stomach for a fight.²³ A general disrespect for Serb military prowess had emerged since the end of the Bosnian war. From both Milosevic's personal perspective and a Serb national perspective, the question might have been: when is the best time and where is the best place to fight an aggressive, U.S.-led NATO? If war with NATO is inevitable, is it better to fight it over Kosovo or let NATO move a lot of military power into Kosovo without any international political constraints on the use of that power?

Serbia's Political-Military Strategy

The bald facts of Serbia's strategic situation were discouraging. NATO's combined gross domestic product (GDP) is nearly 900 times that of Yugoslavia. NATO's combined defense budgets sum to 300 times that of Yugoslavia. NATO's combined population sums to nearly 70 times that of Yugoslavia.²⁴ NATO represents an assemblage of countries with most of the advanced military capabilities in the world. NATO is next door, operating from a base structure built up over nearly a half century of superpower competition. The

23. Although contradictory views were presented by the intelligence community, over the year of negotiations preceding NATO's initiation of combat operations, the view that Milosevic could be intimidated by air strikes seems to have become widespread, so much so that the language of threat may have been common currency in direct diplomacy with the Serbs. When early disagreements arose over the terms of the October 1998 agreement negotiated by Richard Holbrooke, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) Gen. Wesley Clark declared to Milosevic, "Mr. President, get real. You don't really want to be bombed by NATO." After these negotiations, NATO left in place an earlier warning order that gave the secretary-general the ability to launch air strikes against Serbia without additional formal consultation. Milosevic insisted that he understood this condition was to be lifted as one of the conditions of the deal with Holbrooke. In January 1999 after the Racak killings, General Clark again accused the Serbs of violating the October agreement and warned Milosevic that NATO would soon start telling the general to move aircraft. See Sciolino and Bronner, "How a President, Distracted by Scandal, Entered Balkan War," p. A1. Milosevic may not have taken these threats as conditional, dissuasive messages, but rather as more general evidence that the United States simply believed he could be easily pushed around. The pattern of the Rambouillet meeting, in which Serbian views were scarcely taken into account in the drafting of the accords, probably reinforced this perception.

24. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1998/99* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). For defense expenditures, see pp. 295–296, 1997 figures, U.S.\$454 billion to Yugoslavia's \$1.5 billion. Calculating from the individual country entries in that publication, in 1997 NATO's combined GDP was \$16,500 billion, to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's \$19 billion, for a ratio of 870:1; NATO's population was roughly 710 million, to Yugoslavia's 10.6 million, for a ratio of 67:1.

armed forces of Yugoslavia had missed at least a generation of military technological modernization. Yugoslavia had no military allies and only a small, relatively basic military industry. Its principal diplomatic support would come from Russia, and perhaps China. Russia's military and economic weakness was common knowledge, though Russia's sympathy for Serbia was clear. China was probably perceived to be too distant and disinterested to provide anything but moral support. Finally, though smuggling has been a lively business in the Balkans, and Serbia survived economic sanctions through its mastery of this expedient, in a full-fledged war it could expect to suffer from NATO's command of the sea. Given these facts, it is no wonder that many observers thought that, in the end, the Serbs would back down over Kosovo rather than fight a war with NATO, or at the very least fight a short, largely symbolic campaign.

Serbia's political and military leaders were no doubt aware of these unfavorable strategic facts. Milosevic, unlike Saddam Hussein, is a much traveled man. And unlike Saddam, there is little evidence that it is dangerous for subordinates to disagree with Milosevic about facts. One can lose one's job for that, but not one's life. How could Serbia hope to hold Kosovo if NATO had the will to take it? But it is in the realm of "will" that Serbia probably sought its theory of victory.

Given the unfavorable military situation, Serbia had to find a way to reduce NATO's willingness to fight. A typical method that small states employ to this end is the infliction of pain on their enemies. States such as Finland, Switzerland, Sweden, and Tito's Yugoslavia organize themselves militarily to hurt an invader for as long as possible, a strategy of conventional deterrence. They may need to suffer more than the invader to inflict punishment, but the calculation is that the defender can make the pain exceed the gain. Prospectively, the promise that the pain may exceed the gain is meant to steer away big states. Yugoslavia had followed this strategy generally since the end of World War II, and with particular attention since the late 1960s. In the case of Kosovo, however, NATO did not have to invade Serbia to attack Serbia, so the Serbs might not get much chance to hurt NATO troops directly. This is not to say that the credible threat to resist if NATO did invade was not useful. It worked; it caused NATO to confine its challenge to the air. But the Serb military probably understood that it would have a difficult time shooting down enough NATO aircraft to truly hurt.

THE POLITICAL STRATEGY

The Serb theory of victory centered on the cohesion of the NATO coalition. Milosevic had had ample opportunity to see dissension among NATO allies in the previous Yugoslav wars. Although this had not in the end prevented NATO action, it had slowed and limited NATO's engagement. It is difficult to know whether Milosevic thought he could produce enough division to drive NATO away altogether or merely hoped to get a better deal. Milosevic would have had four possible wedges to divide the alliance. I list them in what I imagine would have been roughly the Serb perception of their relative utility.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE. NATO's arm of choice, air power, would be weakened by discord in the alliance, and any mistakes in the application of that air power would cause more discord in the alliance. The European members of NATO, in particular, would be squeamish about causing collateral damage to civilians. The European political Left has a long-standing flirtation with pacifism. Milosevic had some sense that there might be limits on the extent of NATO's bombing from the fact that NATO's 1995 bombing to end the civil war in Bosnia was confined to Bosnia. There had been some discord among NATO members about that bombing. NATO had conducted alerts and exercises over the preceding months that would have given Serb intelligence a sense of the limited size of the operations NATO envisioned.²⁵ Thus the Serbs had a plausible political theory about limitations on the intensity of NATO's air offensive. If the political restraints on the bombing were nevertheless to ultimately break down, then inadvertent killing of Serb civilians and destruction of civilian targets might cause dissension within the alliance.

RUSSIAN DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT. Russia was sympathetic to the Serb cause, both for historical reasons and out of resentment of NATO's perceived decade-long effort to dominate Europe.²⁶ Although Russia was weak, it still scared

25. Although it is difficult to be certain, it appears that Serb intelligence did have one or more agents or sympathizers inside NATO. A French officer was detained for questioning in October 1998, but later released for lack of evidence. General Clark reportedly has admitted that a security risk had been identified and dealt with during the war. See Paul Beaver, "Mystery Still Shrouds Downing of F-117A Fighter," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, September 1, 1999, p. 4. See also Beaver and David Montgomery, "Belgrade Got NATO Attack Plans from a Russian Spy," *Scotsman*, August 27, 1999, p. 1. Whether or not an agent was involved in the F-117A incident, it is very likely that much data on NATO's plan reached the Serbs before the war.

26. The Serbs probably counted on the norm of respect for sovereignty in international politics to create some diplomatic support for their stand. In his March 23 address to the Serbian parliament, Serb President Milan Milutinovic stressed the fundamental legitimacy of Yugoslavia's position: "Did we ever attack a neighboring country? Did we ever harm the interests of NATO? Did we

the Europeans. If the Russians “thumped the table,” some European members of NATO might find the situation uncomfortable.²⁷ Russia had helped the Serb cause in the “Contact Group,” the cooperative diplomatic effort of Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States organized in the spring of 1994 to negotiate an end to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Russia generally opposed the use of military force against the Serbs, as well as the intensification of sanctions.²⁸

REFUGEES AS A WEAPON. The European members of NATO probably wanted to avoid the arrival of another wave of Balkan refugees.²⁹ Although European diplomacy was no doubt energized by the belief that leaving Serbia alone to run its brutal counterinsurgency campaign in Kosovo was going to produce

ever do anything in that sense? We fight only for what everybody is fighting for, including America. We fight against terrorism.” He noted that neither within the United States nor among the rest of the members of the NATO coalition was there complete support for the war: “Even there [the United States] the conscience is awakened if the sovereign country which never attacked anyone should be attacked or not.” “Speech of the Serbian President to the Republic of Serbia’s National Parliament,” SERBIAINFO, March 23, 1999, www.serbia-info.com/news/1999-03/23/10002.html.

27. “BETA Sees Belgrade Profiting from Strikes,” March 18, 1999, FBIS-EEU-1999-0318, reports: “Milosevic counts on divisions within the Contact Group, hoping that Russia—in the event the situation escalates, that is, a military intervention becomes highly likely—would side with Belgrade.” Speculating that the Europeans would be concerned about Russia’s reaction to a Balkan war is Peter Schwarz, “The Failure of the Rambouillet Conference,” February 26, 1999, World Socialist website, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/feb1999/kos-f26.shtml>: “The Europeans fear the consequences of military escalation. They calculate this could unleash an even greater exodus of refugees into the West. Moreover, souring relations with Russia would have unfavorable results for neighboring eastern European countries that have applied to join the European Union in the not too distant future.”

28. Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 298–307.

29. Dusko Vojnovic, “American and European Views on Kosovo and Metohia—Reasons for Differences and Disputes,” SERBIAINFO, March 5, 1999, <http://www.serbia-info.com/news/1999-03/05/9445.html>. This is a Serb government-sponsored outlet, but it ought, therefore, to reflect the perceptions of the Serb government. The author argues that the Europeans have a greater fear of refugees and of a spreading war than do the Americans, and that therefore the chances for a split are great. He also exhorts the Europeans to put a brake on the Americans: “Putting the one-way pressure on Serbs, probably under the influence of powerful lobbies . . . the American administration continually disregards the voices of reason coming from the Old continent. Europe is well justified in doing so since the perspective on Albanians can’t be the same from Washington . . . and . . . Rome, where you can see boats full of desperate and aggressive Albanian immigrants along with Shiptar mafia. . . . Italy is not the only one faced with this problem. The situation is similar in Germany, France, and even Great Britain.” The author then cites Henry Kissinger to the effect that “the unity of countries within the Contact Group that represent NATO could crack, while Russia . . . may become firmer in its support of the Serbian position.” In a March 5 meeting with President Bill Clinton, Italian Prime Minister Massimo D’Alema warned that if the Serbs did not accept Rambouillet, and bombing did not quickly subdue them, 300,000–400,000 refugees would pass into Albania and then cross the Adriatic to Italy. He asked, “What will happen then?” Sciolino and Bronner, “How a President, Distracted by Scandal, Entered Balkan War.”

many refugees, Serbia could demonstrate that NATO attacks would produce even more refugees.³⁰ NATO's fear of a ground war, and its potential political inability to escalate the air war, could cause some members of NATO to understand that they had no military solution to the refugee problem. They would then have to negotiate if these refugees were to get back to Kosovo.

Kosovar Albanian refugees could also be used tactically, to influence the attitude of Macedonia. Large numbers of additional Albanians in Macedonia would exacerbate political divisions in that country. It is plausible that Milosevic hoped to get something out of this fear. So long as Macedonia feared the arrival of many more Albanians, its interest would lie in ending the war through negotiation. If Macedonia permitted NATO to build up ground forces there in preparation for an invasion, the Serbs could drive still more Albanians across the border. Although a successful NATO war might ultimately allow the Kosovar Albanians to return home, Macedonia could not count on this. Fear and uncertainty might thus make Macedonia a voice for moderation, and one with influence disproportionate to its size insofar as it was the most usable direct route for NATO land forces into Kosovo. The refugees would also complicate NATO's logistical problems in Macedonia and Albania, if NATO ever did decide to begin building up for a direct ground attack on Kosovo.

MILITARY ACTION. While NATO attacked Serbia, Serbia would attack the Kosovo Liberation Army. For the preceding year, the Serb internal security forces and the Serb army had tried to crush the KLA. Although it is unlikely that the Serbs thought that victory over the KLA would cause the Kosovar Albanians to willingly accept Serb political authority, they probably did believe that they could return the situation to one of passive resistance and sullen acceptance. If the Serb military should prove successful, the weakening of the KLA might help remove an occasion for the war. Some members of the alliance

30. R. Jeffrey Smith and William Drozdiak, "Serbs' Offensive Was Meticulously Planned," *Washington Post*, April 11, 1999, p. A1, argue at length that the Serbs had begun to plan a campaign to destroy the KLA and expel many thousands of Kosovar Albanians sometime in late November or early December 1998, in a plan dubbed "Operation Horseshoe." The article's principal contribution is to show how efficient the expulsions were, and that the planning and organization of the campaign antedated NATO's air attacks. They imply that the plan would have been launched whether or not NATO attacked, but they have no evidence on this point. And they admit that they do not know why Milosevic believed the expulsions were a good idea. They quote Western officials who speculate that the expulsions served two purposes: altering the ethnic balance in Kosovo and diverting the attention of NATO forces in Macedonia. The reported confiscation of documents at the border does support the hypothesis that the Serbs intended to alter the ethnic balance in Kosovo overall, or in particular parts of the country.

might wonder if there was any point to continuing the war if fighting inside Kosovo died down and Milosevic indicated a willingness to allow Albanians to return.³¹

Milosevic could have believed that a policy of murder, terror, and expulsion would help subdue the Albanians. It may be true that Milosevic did not actually envision using refugees as a lever against the West at all, but rather Serb police and military forces were simply driving out the civilian support structure upon which the KLA depended for intelligence, food, and shelter. Insofar as the Serbs were fighting a tough counterinsurgency campaign under the unprecedented condition of direct support of the insurgents by a greatly superior air force, they may have decided that only the most extreme and brutal measures would permit success. Thus the normal brutality of counterinsurgency campaigns that usually stretch out over many years was concentrated in time, and intensified in breadth and depth.

Serb air defenses should have been able to shoot down some NATO aircraft and impose at least some small military cost. Given that Milosevic perceived that not all members of NATO supported the war equally, he may have calculated that the loss of a few airplanes would weaken NATO's resolve and increase its interest in a compromise settlement.

THE MILITARY STRATEGY

The Serb military strategy was directed at the achievement of these political goals. The Serb military needed to pursue two interrelated military objectives: gaining time and preserving tactical freedom of action for Serb military and police forces in Kosovo. Time would provide the opportunity for Russian pique and European squeamishness to erode NATO's cohesion.³² Time plus

31. "Different sources close to the Yugoslav Army and the Serbian authorities also mention the possibility of a worst-case scenario, according to which NATO air strikes would bring about a massive campaign by the Yugoslav Army and security forces, who would try to seize as much of Kosovo territory as possible, and suppress the KLA, which has been spearheading the Kosovo Albanian armed rebellion. Such an action would have to be a short one. In that case, a massive exodus of Albanian population would follow, which would only increase a possibility of air strikes against targets in Yugoslavia. If that happens, military and perhaps industrial installations in Serbia and Yugoslavia would suffer great damage from the NATO airforce, which the Yugoslav anti-aircraft defense cannot possibly resist, while the Yugoslav Army's infantry in Kosovo would remain mixed with the Albanian people, which would make them a relatively unfavorable target to the air force." The article goes on to speculate that the purpose of this campaign would be a de facto partition of Kosovo, which would occur after Milosevic offered and NATO accepted a truce. "BETA Examines Milosevic's Kosovo Options," BETA News Service, Belgrade, March 4, 1999, FBIS-EEU-1999-0304. Although the predicted diplomatic scenario did not occur, the military aspects of the war did develop as predicted here.

32. "What is the object of defense? Preservation. It is easier to hold ground than take it. It follows that defense is easier than attack, assuming both sides have equal means. Just what is it that makes

tactical freedom of action on the ground in Kosovo would allow the fight against the KLA, and permit the exploitation of the threat of turning ever greater numbers of Kosovar Albanians into refugees. The survival of Serb ground forces and the preservation of some degree of tactical freedom on the ground for them would also help keep NATO members worried about the possible costs of a land invasion of Kosovo—which would in turn buy more time.

Milosevic had a military instrument well suited to the pursuit of these military objectives. The Yugoslav military was organized to pursue the conventional deterrent strategy outlined above—inflict more pain on a potential invader than the country is worth. The basic concept of operations of the Serb military is the preservation of the combat capability of its forces as long as possible. A great power cannot be deterred from invasion if it believes that it can win a quick cheap victory. The Yugoslav military had had the mission of presenting the Soviet Union with the risk of a long, indecisive, costly war.³³ Everything about the organization and training of the Yugoslav military was directed at this goal, and the Serb military, though reorganized after its poor performance in Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, probably did not abandon this legacy. The entire society is trained and organized for war. The Serb army, when fully mobilized, can generate many combat units. The army has depth and can take a beating and still retain combat power. The combat forces in the field expect to operate in a dispersed fashion against greatly superior forces, and thus must be adept at all the time-honored tactics necessary to facilitate lengthy resistance against a superior foe—camouflage, cover, concealment, deception, and mobility.

The military infrastructure of the Serb armed forces—its bases, fuel dumps, depots, and the like—is hardened, camouflaged, and dispersed. The Serb military is supported by a national scientific, engineering, and industrial base. Although it is by no means capable of autonomously producing the full range of modern weaponry, it produces many basic items such as army weaponry

preservation and protection so much easier? It is the fact that time which is allowed to pass unused accumulates to the credit of the defender. He reaps where he did not sow. Any omission of attack—whether from bad judgment, fear, or indolence—accrues to the defenders' benefit." Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 357.

33. See, for example, Adam Roberts, *Nations in Arms: The Theory and Practice of Territorial Defence* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), chap. 6; Pierre Maurer, "Defence and Foreign Policy: Switzerland and Yugoslavia Compared," in Marko Milivojevic, John B. Allcock, and Pierre Maurer, eds., *Yugoslavia's Security Dilemmas*, (Oxford: Berg, 1988) chap. 3; and Karl Wheeler Soper, "National Security," in *Yugoslavia: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 1992), chap. 5.

and ammunition, and can adapt and repair more sophisticated items of equipment—such as surface-to-air missile systems, radars, and communications equipment. The Serbs are also adept at understanding the more modern weaponry that others can bring against them. The Serb military has a professional cadre of officers. As a professionally officered force, backed by a small military scientific and engineering infrastructure, it can learn tactical lessons. The Serbs had little combat experience until the 1990s when conflicts in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia allowed them to develop their combat skills. In Bosnia, Serb soldiers had both shot down NATO aircraft and evaded their attacks. In the Bosnia endgame, many experienced sustained NATO air attacks and, at least around Sarajevo, did not crack. The British government has revealed that the Serbs benefited from extensive conversations with the Iraqi military about air defense and other military issues during the six months prior to the war.³⁴ The Serb military thus knew a lot about NATO air capabilities and how to counter them. To some extent, the civilian administrative structure of the society has a war plan. Civil defense is sufficiently well organized that the society will not crack at the first blow.

The key to fighting NATO would be to limit the effectiveness of its air power. This would serve two purposes. In Serbia it would protect the society, transportation infrastructure, public utilities, and economy to the greatest extent possible, allowing essential services to be maintained as long as possible. As noted earlier, the Serbs relied in part on NATO squeamishness to limit attacks on the country's infrastructure and economy. It would allow the Serb military and police to remain in Kosovo and give them freedom to maneuver—permitting operations against Kosovar Albanian civilians and the KLA, and continuing the threat of a stalwart defense against a NATO ground attack.

The best way to achieve these objectives, given the limitations of Serb capabilities, was to encourage NATO aircraft to operate at medium-to-high altitudes (i.e., 15,000 feet and higher) and at night. The Serb military leadership probably expected that NATO's ability to find targets of any kind and to deliver weapons would be inhibited the higher that NATO planes flew. Relatively large fixed strategic targets in Serbia were of course inevitably more vulnerable than mobile tactical targets in Kosovo. There was not much that Serbia could do about this, other than to use its air defenses as best it could to complicate and limit NATO's attacks.

34. Philip Shenon, "The Iraqi Connection: Serbs Seek Iraqi Help for Defense, Britain Says," *New York Times*, April 1, 1999, p. A16.

The Serb forces in the field would rely on long-understood concealment tactics to improve their survivability against air attack from high altitudes. Serb commanders had every reason to believe in the effectiveness of such techniques, which most militaries understand.³⁵ U.S. tactical attacks on Iraqi ground forces in the Kuwait Theater of Operations in Desert Storm were much less effective than originally believed. Mobile Scud targets were hardly hit by NATO air power. Kosovo was much more favorable to the survival of ground forces than was the Kuwait Theater of Operations. Kosovo has forests, small towns, dispersed farm buildings, mountains, hills, and valleys to provide intelligent defenders with cover and concealment. It was also full of Kosovar Albanians, whom NATO intended to assist, not kill. Thus, hugging the population was probably also perceived as a plausible tactic. The Serbs are also reported to have improved their situation by prepositioning sufficient supplies in Kosovo to make themselves relatively immune from attacks on their lines of communication for an extended period of combat.

SERB AIR DEFENSES. Serbia deployed a diverse array of short- and medium-range air defense cannon and surface-to-air missiles. Although obsolescent, they could still make life dangerous and complicated for NATO aircraft—especially at lower altitudes. Simple short-range air defense weapons, anti-aircraft automatic cannon, and shoulder-fired and/or light vehicle-mounted infrared surface-to-air missiles do not rely heavily on radar, and thus cannot be neutralized through electronic warfare. Their small size and high mobility make them difficult to target directly. Thus they are lethal against even sophisticated low-flying aircraft, and encourage a casualty-averse enemy to fly at medium altitudes (i.e., 15,000 feet).

The Serbs also deployed a small, but extremely well organized system of obsolescent, Soviet-designed, radar-guided, low-to-medium altitude SAMs—the 1970s' vintage SA-3 and SA-6 systems.³⁶ Although it is believed that these systems have been upgraded somewhat beyond their initial designs, they were unlikely to be significantly better individually than the same Iraqi systems that coalition forces encountered in 1991. The Serb air defense network, a command-and-control system that linked these SAM batteries with early-warning radars and with other intelligence sources, was very capable and redundant.

35. *Battlefield Deception*, Field Manual 90-2, Department of the Army, Headquarters, Washington, D.C., October 3, 1988, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm90-2>. Many of the principles in this U.S. manual are drawn from careful study of Soviet materials.

36. By way of comparison, the total number of SA-6 launch vehicles attributed to Yugoslavia did not exceed the number that one would have expected to find in a single, Soviet tank army in East Germany during the Cold War. There were five such armies then in East Germany.

Serbian planners would have known that their system was much better than the Iraqi system. From the Iraqis they would surely have learned that the United States would attempt to destroy that system as quickly as possible. The Iraqis had been too bold in their initial effort to use their radar-guided missiles to shoot down coalition aircraft. This provided coalition commanders and pilots with lots of intelligence that compromised the system, revealed the location of important radars, and facilitated their attack. In Desert Storm, the United States and its allies rather quickly established considerable freedom of action at medium altitudes. The Serbs had a different concept. The name of the game was to stay in the game. The Serbs wanted to be able to mount some defense, even at medium altitudes, every day. Moreover, though the SA-3s and SA-6s were the only assets the Serbs had with any possibility of shooting down NATO aircraft at medium altitudes, these systems are probably even more lethal against lower-flying aircraft, so their survival would assist in the effort to drive NATO higher. In addition, it would require NATO to mount a significant air defense suppression effort in support of every major attack. This would complicate those attacks and, to some extent, ration them to the availability of scarce suppression assets.

The Political-Military Strategy in Action

A comprehensive history of the NATO-Serb war is beyond the scope of this article. Here I enumerate what the present inventory of facts suggests were the key military and diplomatic developments of the war. I proceed first to a military discussion, as it was the evolving military situation that for the most part set the conditions for the evolution of diplomacy.

THE AIR WAR

NATO's air campaign conformed initially to the expectations of Serbia's political-military strategy. NATO's early air attacks fell well short of the level of air attack that was visited on Iraq in the first three nights of Desert Storm, January 17–19, 1991, when a total of 2,700 "strikes" were executed.³⁷ It is useful to note that although these attacks reduced the Iraqi air defense network to very low

37. Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey [GWAPS] Summary Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), fig. 5, "Coalition Air Strikes by Day against Iraqi Target Sets," p. 13 (numbers estimated from graph). *Strikes* are defined as "occasions on which individual aircraft released ordnance against distinct targets or aimpoints." One thousand of these strikes were against *strategic* targets, which include command, control, and commu-

effectiveness, they did not cause Iraq to surrender. Yugoslavia is of course a smaller country than Iraq, one-third the size, one-third the (1988) GDP, and one-half the population. Its fully mobilized military was a bit less than half the size of the Iraqi military, measured in personnel or major items of equipment—excluding tanks, where Iraq had more than 5,000 in 1990, and Serbia had at most 1,300. This might suggest that a somewhat smaller effort would have been adequate. On the other hand, Yugoslavia had long organized itself to fight a great power, with the military doctrine discussed above, and thus the military assets that it did possess may—given hardening and dispersal—have constituted as difficult a target set as the larger Iraqi military.

Although the data available on the initial NATO air strikes against Serbia do not match the level of detail now available on Desert Storm, we do have rough estimates of the numbers of major NATO aircraft available during the early attacks of the recent war. These data show that it was simply impossible for NATO aircraft to have mounted anything like the Desert Storm effort.³⁸ There were perhaps 48 U.S. fighter aircraft in theater capable of launching a maximum of 132 laser-guided one-ton bombs, plus another 30 aircraft capable of firing as many as 60 antiradar missiles. Even if a third of the 150 European aircraft reportedly committed to the operation were willing and able to bomb on the first night of the war, the overall effort, at 130 attacking aircraft, is small compared to the perhaps 500 attack and air defense suppression aircraft employed on the first night of Desert Storm.³⁹

These limited attacks were all that NATO was collectively willing to bring against Serbia. Although there has been some finger-pointing toward the Europeans as the main brake on larger early attacks, it appears that U.S.

nications facilities; nuclear/biological/chemical-related targets, ammunition storage, logistics, and repair facilities; ballistic missiles and their support; electric power; oil refineries; and key bridges and railroad facilities. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

38. John Pike, Federation of American Scientists, http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/kosovo_orbat.htm, from information downloaded on March 28 and April 11, 1999. Some of the D-day estimates seemed wrong, so I corrected them on the basis of intuition, which produced somewhat higher bomber totals.

39. I estimate that perhaps 500 attack aircraft would have been available for the first night of air attacks in Desert Storm. Sixty-four F-111Fs, 42 F-117s, and perhaps a dozen F-15Es were capable of laser-guided bomb (LGB) delivery at night and were regularly so employed. Perhaps 95 U.S. Navy and 20 U.S. Marine Corps A-6s were capable of delivering LGBs at night but were not often employed that way. Forty-eight Harm-firing F-4G wild weasel air defense suppression aircraft were also employed. Other aircraft were capable of delivering unguided ordnance at night. See Keaney and Cohen, *GWAPS Summary*, pp. 103, 203. It should be noted, however, that the initial attacks on Serbia probably included nearly half as many aircraft capable of delivering precision-guided munitions at night as the initial Desert Storm attacks. The U.S. Air Force has roughly quadrupled its ability to deliver LGBs at night in the last decade.

political decisionmakers also underestimated the force necessary to affect Serbian thinking. The underlying premise was that once Milosevic saw that NATO was serious, he would agree to Rambouillet. In the words of one U.S. inter-agency intelligence report, "Milosevic doesn't want a war he can't win. . . . After enough of a defense to sustain his honor and assuage his backers he will quickly sue for peace."⁴⁰ A false lesson was drawn by U.S. decisionmakers from the endgame in Bosnia in 1995, to the effect that bombing could easily influence the Serbs. The U.S. negotiator, Richard Holbrooke, for example, attributes Milosevic's turn toward cooperation mainly to NATO's brief air strikes, though he does give some credit to the large-scale ground offensives by the expanded and improved Bosnian Muslim and Croatian armies.⁴¹

Although NATO's political leaders hoped that the mere fact of air attacks would bring Serb acceptance of Rambouillet, NATO war planners had the suppression of Serb air defenses as their initial military objective. Once air defenses have been suppressed, other attack aircraft can be more effective and suffer fewer losses. In this war, losses were especially to be avoided because the political leaders of NATO feared that there was not enough political support at home to continue the war in the event of sustained losses. The Serbs seem to have understood NATO's tactical hopes, and operated to thwart them.

So long as Serb air defenses survived and continued to engage NATO aircraft, NATO's overall effectiveness could be diminished. Thus the Serbs took great care in each potential engagement to weigh risk against opportunity. They had to show NATO that their air defenses were still dangerous, every day. So they had to launch some weapons. At the same time, the Serbs had to take into account the limitations of their own systems vis-à-vis those of NATO. If radars were left on too long in the hopes of completing an engagement, a NATO hunter-killer aircraft, the F-16CJ equipped with high-speed antiradiation missiles and special targeting gear to locate Serb radars, would surely attack them. The Serbs played cat and mouse. As the Iraqis learned to do, the Serbs would turn off their engagement radars if they thought they would come

40. Sciolino and Bronner, "How a President, Distracted by Scandal, Entered Balkan War," p. A1.

41. Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1999). Bombing, as well as the Croatian and Bosniak offensives, are discussed in too many places in the book to review and interpret here. The following quote gives the flavor of Holbrooke's belief in the influence of bombing. Communicating with Gen. Rupert Smith on the strict enforcement of the terms for Serb withdrawal from around Sarajevo, "This is the time to challenge the Serbs. We finally have a written arrangement and a mechanism with which we can go back to Milosevic and force compliance. We can hold the threat of resumed bombing over their heads." Ibid. p. 163.

under attack. On average, they fired only about 10 SAMs per night for the duration of the war—but occasionally as many as three dozen.⁴² Moreover, the Serbs constantly relocated their air defense systems. NATO claims to have destroyed most of Serbia's less mobile SA-3s; it claims very little damage against the more mobile SA-6s.⁴³ Although the Serbs shot down only two NATO combat aircraft, they were still launching missiles at the end of the air war.

The Serbs thus “virtually” degraded NATO's air forces. At 15,000 feet, clear weather precision-guided munition attacks on large fixed targets are effective, but clouds and smoke often obscure the target. With “dumb bombs” accuracy is not likely to be very good. To ensure aircraft survival at medium altitudes, NATO had to continually threaten the surviving Serb SAM systems. It appears that NATO flew roughly one mission to attack Serb air defenses directly for every three missions flown to attack other targets. Most if not all missions, even stealth aircraft missions, were flown with jamming support. As both jamming aircraft (EA-6b) and lethal suppression aircraft (F-16CJ) were somewhat scarce, it seems plausible that the pace of NATO air attacks was somewhat limited by their availability. Although NATO moved fairly quickly from operations mainly at night to operations around the clock, the Serb air defenses largely kept NATO aircraft at higher altitudes for the duration of the war.⁴⁴ This limited success could not save Serbian economic and infrastructure targets once the weather cleared, NATO's strength in combat aircraft more than doubled, and NATO political leaders approved new classes of targets. Serb ground forces, however, continued to profit greatly from NATO's tactical conservatism until the end of the war. While some of this conservatism was self-imposed

42. U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) news briefing, June 2, chart, “Serbian Air Defense,” suggests some 700 Serb SAMs had been fired and observed by NATO intelligence by the seventieth day of the campaign. See <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun1999/990602-J-0000M-003.jpg>.

43. DoD news briefing, June 10, 1999. See the slide “Air Defense BDA,” <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun1999/990610-J-000K-004.jpg>.

44. DoD news briefing, April 8, 1999. In response to a question expressing surprise that the briefing indicated that day missions were now under way, Maj. Gen. Chuck Wald responded: “We are flying day and night missions, and some of the day packages are what we would consider large packages.” The sturdy, if old and relatively scarce, U.S. Air Force A-10 attack aircraft seems to have begun flying some missions at lower altitudes along the periphery of Kosovo sometime in early May. John Tirpak, “The First Six Weeks,” *Air Force Magazine* (June 1999), p. 27. “By early May, the air defenses in Serbia and Kosovo had not been sufficiently damaged to permit free air action by Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopters or lower-flying A-10 attack airplanes. However, it was expected that these aircraft would be employed along the perimeter of Yugoslavia, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said.”

due to extreme casualty aversion, the canny tactics of the Serbs reinforced and sustained this conservatism.

THE GROUND WAR

The Serb army in Kosovo appears to have pursued three missions: deter a ground attack by NATO forces; in combination with the internal security troops, attack and destroy the KLA; and in combination with internal security troops and irregular units, organize the expulsion of large numbers of Kosovar Albanians. The Serbs achieved the first and third missions, and it appears that they did very substantial damage to the KLA in Kosovo, though that organization was able to rebuild itself across the border in Albania, under the shelter of NATO's air force. The Serb military strategy for its ground war in Kosovo worked.

Serb ground forces successfully attacked the KLA throughout Kosovo. Initial KLA efforts to stand and fight proved fruitless and self-destructive. In the early weeks of the war, NATO's air attacks had little effect on the activities of the Serb military, police, and irregulars. Evidence suggests that there were few sorties seriously directed against the ground forces in Kosovo until roughly the end of the second week in April, the end of the third week of the war (April 14, day 23).⁴⁵ It is difficult to know exactly how much damage was done to the KLA by Serb forces prior to April 14, but most reports stressed KLA weakness.⁴⁶

The KLA did not prove much of an obstacle to Serb expulsions of Albanians. Some 10,000 Kosovar Albanians are said to have been killed in the eleven-week war.⁴⁷ Substantial numbers were murdered, probably to terrorize others into

45. DoD news briefing, June 10, 1999. See the slide "NATO Effectiveness against Serb Ground Mobile Targets in Kosovo (Cumulative)," from the Pentagon briefing of June 10, 1999, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun1999/990610-J-000K-007.jpg>.

46. Peter Finn, "Kosovo Guerrilla Force Near Collapse," *Washington Post*, April 1, 1999, p. 1. According to Finn, "One U.S. official in Washington called the rebels' position desperate. Another described recent attacks by government forces as devastating. He added: 'What are the [rebels'] prospects? Dim. They've been running out of ammo and supplies, they've been reduced to isolated pockets.'"

47. John Kifner, "Inquiry Estimates Serb Drive Killed 10,000 in Kosovo," *New York Times*, July 18, 1999, p. A1; see also R. Jeffrey Smith, "Kosovo Death Chronicle Lengthens," *Washington Post*, July 19, 1999, p. A15. For a more skeptical view, reviewing both claims and evidence to date, see "Where Are Kosovo's Killing Fields?" *Stratfor.com*, October 17, 1999: "Our own research and survey of officials indicates that the numbers of dead so far are in the hundreds, not the thousands." The authors concede that they may be wrong, but the pattern of reports thus far does suggest that the 10,000 figure is probably too high. See also Jon Swain, "Lost in the Kosovo Numbers Game," and

leaving. The most rapid outpouring of refugees during the entire conflict, some 400,000 people, reportedly occurred between roughly March 31 and April 8.⁴⁸

NATO reported fighting across Kosovo between Serbs and the KLA throughout the war, so Serb success was not complete. Three hundred Serb soldiers and policemen may have been killed fighting the KLA.⁴⁹ An examination of NATO maps of Kosovo indicating where this fighting was thought to have occurred, cross-referenced to NATO maps of its combat sorties in Kosovo, suggests that allied sorties were often directed at these areas. NATO spokespeople admitted that NATO was trying to exploit Serb vulnerabilities associated with their concentration of forces to battle the KLA, though they often denied that NATO was trying to render assistance to KLA forces. This is a distinction without a difference. While one cannot know much about the course of the fighting deep in Kosovo, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the KLA profited from these NATO attacks. It is plausible, given the poor performance of the KLA in the initial fighting when NATO's direct attack sorties were few, that the organization would have had a difficult time sustaining any combat inside Kosovo without NATO's help. But given that NATO's air forces seem not to have done much damage to the Serb ground forces, NATO's principal contribution may have been to make it difficult for the Serbs to concentrate combat power, thus permitting the KLA to engage and disengage under more favorable conditions.

Nicholas Rufford, "Cook Accused of Misleading Public on Kosovo Massacres," *London Sunday Times*, October 31, 1999, www.sunday-times.co; and Steven Erlanger and Christopher Wren, "Early Count Hints at Fewer Kosovo Deaths," *New York Times*, November 11, 1999, p. A6.

48. See the slides "Daily Refugee Flow" and "Total Refugee Flow" from the May 13, 1999, NATO briefings, <http://www.nato.int/pictures/1999/990513/b990513d.gif> and [e.gif](http://www.nato.int/pictures/1999/990513/e990513e.gif). The *Economist* speculated that the pattern of refugee expulsions suggested an effort to bring about a de facto partition of the province, and "send a stark warning to the neighboring states: if you help Serbia's enemies, Serbia can bring you down with it." "War with Milosevic: A Week Is a Long Time in a War," *Economist*, April 3, 1999, pp. 17-18. The *Economist's* reporter in Skopje noted that during the first week of the war most refugees were forced into Albania, not Macedonia, and speculated that the Macedonians had made a deal with Milosevic to avoid the worst. Over the course of the war, roughly half as many refugees found shelter in Macedonia as did in Albania, which could have been a result of deliberate Serb policies, but could also be explained by the warmer welcome that Albanian Kosovars could expect to receive in Albania.

49. Robert Fisk, "Serb Army 'Unscathed by NATO,' KLA Killed More Serbs Than NATO Did," *Independent* (London), June 21, 1999, p. 1. Fisk writes, "Yugoslav military sources said that more than half the 600 or so soldiers who died in Serbia were killed in guerrilla fighting with the Kosovo Liberation Army rather than by Nato bombing." He goes on to say that "according to figures given to the *Independent* by a Yugoslav military source, only 132 members of the armed forces were killed in NATO attacks." See <http://www.independent.co.uk/stories/B2106902.html>.

Once NATO began to concentrate attacks on Kosovo proper, its claims of success mounted accordingly, but these claims were wrong. President Bill Clinton stated on May 23 on the editorial page of the *New York Times* that NATO had already “destroyed or damaged one-third of Serbia’s armored vehicles in Kosovo” and “half its artillery.”⁵⁰ Some 500–600 major weapons had ostensibly already been damaged or destroyed.⁵¹ Even within NATO circles, these claims seem to have been understood to have been inflated.⁵² The president’s numbers were three or four times too high. On June 10, the Pentagon had revised the mid-May estimate downward, suggesting roughly 40 tanks, 50 armored personnel carriers, and 60 guns and mortars destroyed.⁵³ The Pentagon itself claimed that attacks on Serb ground forces became substantially more successful once the KLA began its offensive from Albania near the end of May. In less than two weeks, perhaps 650 major Serb weapons were ostensibly damaged or destroyed.⁵⁴ Nobody who has visited Kosovo since the end of the war has seen any evidence of such wholesale destruction, and many Serb units and much equipment were seen leaving Kosovo in good shape; it is unlikely that the Pentagon’s claims of June 10 will stand up to scrutiny. Indeed, it now appears that NATO’s air forces did little damage to Serb ground forces in Kosovo.⁵⁵

50. William Jefferson Clinton, “A Just and Necessary War,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1999, p. 17.

51. I infer these numbers from a later response by Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon to a question on Serb employment of decoys: “In general numbers we believe that before this began there were approximately 1,500 tanks, armored personnel carriers, and artillery pieces in Kosovo. We destroyed approximately 700 of those, and approximately 800 exited during the 11 days when the Serb troops left. That’s in round numbers what we think happened. DoD news briefing, June 24, 1999, <http://www.defenselink.mil>.

52. Some well-informed observers already believed in mid-May that NATO’s claims were wildly exaggerated. “Belgian Maj. Gen. Pierre Seger, chief of operations for his nation’s general staff, estimated this week that the NATO air raids have managed to destroy no more than 6% of the estimated 300 Yugoslav tanks stationed in Kosovo—markedly less than the 20% estimated by NATO.” John-Thor Dahlburg, “Crisis in Yugoslavia: War Aims under Attack, but NATO Counsels Patience,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1999, p. A14.

53. DoD news briefing, June 10, 1999. See the slide “NATO Effectiveness against Serb Ground Mobile Targets in Kosovo (Cumulative).”

54. *Ibid.*

55. It has been reported that the Kosovo Force (KFOR) counted 250 tanks, 350 armored personnel carriers, and 650 artillery pieces leaving Kosovo. See BBC, “UK Talking Up the War,” July 8, 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk/newsid_388000/388617.stm. I have done my own estimate of the amount of heavy combat equipment in Kosovo on the basis of published reports of the identity of major Serb combat units. It is entirely plausible to me that the Serbs lost very little major equipment in Kosovo. Most sources suggest 2 armored brigades, 3 motorized infantry brigades, and an artillery brigade in Kosovo. The Serb interior ministry forces could add up to perhaps a half dozen small, lightly armed brigades. I attribute to the Serb forces equipment that would be consistent with how such units are typically organized, especially in non-Western armies.

Despite NATO air attacks, the Serbs were able to generate several pulses of expulsions, suggesting that they maintained their tactical freedom of action inside Kosovo. There was a significant spike between April 15 and April 20, and apparently a second series of pulses between April 30 and May 13.⁵⁶ Although these later pulses did not match the early days of the war, they appear substantial. One cannot know exactly how orchestrated they were, as some people probably did flee NATO's bombings, but it seems that the Serbs were still able to generate organized expulsions.

The final bit of evidence supporting the argument that the Serbs did succeed in preserving their freedom of action is to be found in the fighting around Mount Pastric, associated with the KLA offensive that began in the last week of May. This offensive, which seems to have amounted to a conventional infantry assault, did force the Serb army to maneuver and concentrate. NATO planners probably knew enough about the plan in advance to hope that it would create many lucrative targets. NATO intelligence assets tried to exploit the expected Serb concentration. The battle occurred on the Kosovo-Albania border, close to ground-based intelligence assets, such as counterbattery radars, and close to the aerial sanctuaries of NATO's flying intelligence (JSTARS) and command-and-control assets. NATO apparently poured on the sorties. Briefers claimed at the time that the sorties were doing great damage to the Serbs; journalistic accounts suggest massive destruction.⁵⁷ The Serbs were not, however, prevented from maneuvering and concentrating their forces. The Kosovar Albanians did not succeed in breaking through the Serb defenses. Although the Serbs were ostensibly taking prohibitive casualties in this fight, the Serbs stretched out their negotiations with NATO for a week beyond Milosevic's initial decision to settle. The Serbs wanted certain things and were prepared to wait. The offensive around Mount Pastric apparently did not let up during

On this basis I estimate that there were 280 tanks, 80 infantry fighting vehicles, 250 light, armored-reconnaissance or anti-aircraft artillery vehicles, and 400 heavy artillery pieces, multiple rocket launchers, and heavy (120 mm) mortars in Kosovo. I have not tried to estimate the number of lightly armed, armored personnel carriers and command vehicles, trucks, 82 mm mortars, or towed anti-aircraft guns that might have been present.

56. Philip Shenon, "The Iraqi Connection," p. A 16.

57. William Drozdiak and Anne Swardson, "Diplomatic, Military Offensives Forced Belgrade's Hand," *Washington Post*, June 4, 1999, p. A1; The authors state: "A resurgent army of ethnic Albanian guerrillas managed to flush out Serb-led Yugoslav troops dispersed around Mount Pastric. . . . The sudden, apparent submission today by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic came in the wake of enormous losses of government tanks, artillery, and ground forces in recent weeks, according to officials." See also Ben Macintyre, "KLA 'Drew Serbs into NATO Sights,'" *Times of London*, June 8, 1999, www.sunday-times.co.uk.

these negotiations and probably worsened. Serb troops in the field almost certainly had enough transistor radios to understand that they were fighting a tough fight over diplomatic subtleties. It made no difference; they did not crack. Since the Serb evacuation from Kosovo, there has been plenty of time for NATO soldiers, as well as journalists, to find evidence of large-scale Serb losses. Little has turned up.⁵⁸

The weight of evidence suggests that NATO forces began the war over Kosovo without a well worked-out plan for employing air power to affect directly the ability of Serb forces to operate in Kosovo. President Clinton's initial claim that the purpose of the war was to punish Serb forces that were attacking Kosovar Albanians, and reduce their ability to do so, had not been translated into an operational plan. Once it became clear that the initial limited air attacks would not influence the Serbs, two parallel campaigns were launched: one against Serbia proper and one against the Serb forces in the field. NATO never came up with an answer to Serb forces in the field, though it often claimed to have them on the ropes.

Political Developments: The Success Phase

From the outset of the war through mid-May, it was reasonable for Milosevic to believe that his political strategy was working, if not perfectly. The Russians provided substantial diplomatic support. Germany, Italy, and Greece proved uneasy about the war. The expulsion of the Albanians had not, however, worked to undermine NATO's cohesion.

Russia immediately proved deeply distressed with NATO's action, suspending most formal cooperative arrangements with NATO after the first night of the war.⁵⁹ On April 1, a Russian intelligence ship was dispatched to the region, while other naval vessels were alerted in the Black Sea. Anti-Western sentiment became particularly acute among the Russian public. Early Serb diplomatic démarches, in particular the Orthodox Easter cease-fire gambit of April 6, were greeted approvingly by the Russians. By April 9 Boris Yeltsin was, with his usual grim incoherence, warning of the risks of a European war, perhaps a world war. And on April 17, the cover of the influential *Economist* magazine asked, "A new cold war?" As late as April 25, in a phone call with President

58. Dana Priest, "A Decisive Battle That Never Was," *Washington Post*, September 19, 1999, p. A1, supports this interpretation.

59. Blaine Harden, "Crisis in the Balkans: Doing the Deal," *New York Times*, June 6, 1999, p. A1.

Clinton during NATO's fiftieth anniversary festivities, President Yeltsin was still advancing Russian and Serb solutions for ending the war that gave short shrift to NATO's stated war aims.⁶⁰ On May 4 the Russian defense minister, Igor Sergeev, threatened reconsideration of recently concluded agreements on amendments to the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and called the NATO operation in Yugoslavia a "road back to the Cold War."⁶¹ Although Russian spokesmen generally tried to assure Western audiences that Russia had no intention of entering the war on the side of Yugoslavia, the overall Russian diplomatic posture must have been gratifying to Milosevic.

Russian pique quickly got the attention of Germany. Then-Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov visited Belgrade on March 29, and Bonn on March 30. His message to the Germans was reportedly truculent and supportive of Belgrade.⁶² On April 7 the German foreign minister stressed the Russian role in finding a peaceful solution to the Kosovo war. On April 14 the Germans put forth proposals on how to end the war that differed subtly but importantly from NATO's official war goals issued by the North Atlantic Council just two days earlier. NATO had demanded an end to all Yugoslav military and police action in Kosovo; withdrawal of all Yugoslav military, police, and irregular forces; unconditional return of all refugees; an assurance of Yugoslavia's willingness to establish a political framework in Kosovo on the basis of the Rambouillet document; and finally an "international military presence," understood to be NATO. The Germans repeated these provisions but added several critical conditions that found their way into the ultimate settlement: suspension of NATO bombing as soon as the Yugoslav troop withdrawal began and termination of bombing once the withdrawal was completed; KLA agreement to disarm and to cease its attacks; and most important, some kind of major UN role in the administration of Kosovo. Viktor Chernomyrdin was appointed by President Yeltsin as Russia's special envoy on the Balkans on the same day, April 14. Although the German proposal could scarcely be counted a great victory, it did show that the Russians had a wedge into NATO.

EUROPEAN MEMBERS OF NATO

Serbia probably hoped that some NATO members would oppose the war regardless of Russia's role. Although the Serbs knew they had a friend in

60. Ibid.

61. David Hoffman, "Moscow Threatens Pullback on NATO Treaty," *Washington Post*, May 5, 1999, p. 26.

62. Harden, "Crisis in the Balkans," p. A1.

Greece, they also had to understand that Greece's opinions would not weigh heavily in NATO counsels. Germany and Italy offered more hope. The German coalition relied on the allegiance of the traditionally pacifist Green Party. The Italians were also governed by a left-leaning coalition. These two states proved steadier throughout the war than the Serbs had hoped, but they still gave signs of wavering.

If the Serbs did indeed intend to use refugees as a political weapon, the gambit probably undermined the strategy of dividing NATO, at least at the outset of the war. The wholesale expulsions of the first week of the war, coupled with refugee accounts of large-scale Serb brutality, helped cement European public support for the air war in its early weeks. Support for the war in early April ranged from 50 percent to 60 percent across most of the major European countries.⁶³ Without minimizing the Serb depredations, exaggeration was the order of the day in NATO circles; rumors of horrors were transformed into facts within twenty-four hours.⁶⁴ Kosovo was occasionally compared to Pol Pot's Cambodia.⁶⁵ Heart-rending television coverage of the plight of these refugees, including the particularly pathetic situation of those confined in "no man's land" at the border for several days by Macedonian police, helped galvanize support for the war.⁶⁶ The *Economist* speculated on April 17 that Milosevic must have figured out that the gambit was proving

63. Richard Boudreaux, "Europeans Hardened By Reports of Serb Atrocities," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1999, p. 8. Public opinion polls showed more than half of respondents in Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Germany favored the bombing raids. Although another poll found that 58 percent of Germans feared that the crisis could lead to a "new Cold War."

64. Frank Bruni, "Dueling Perspectives: Two Views of Reality Vying on the Airwaves," *New York Times*, April 18, 1999, p. A11, discusses how refugee reports that Serbian soldiers were using rape to coerce Albanian flight "went from an assertion to an assumption of a systematic pattern in the span of a day."

65. United Kingdom Ministry of Defence briefing, April 10, 1999, "Transcript of Press Conference Given by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Doug Henderson," <http://www.fco.gov.uk/news/newstext.asp?22239>. See also Katherine Butler, "War in the Balkans: Briefings—NATO Spokesman Accused of Exaggerations by French," *Independent*, April 10, 1999, p. 3, alluding to NATO press spokesman Jamie Shea's comparison of Milosevic to Pol Pot.

66. The reaction of the majority Slav Macedonians to the influx of refugees was perhaps the only political gain Milosevic reaped from the expulsions. Although it is difficult to judge, it appears that the Macedonian government remained sympathetic to Serbia throughout the war. It is not clear whether NATO could ever have induced Macedonia to permit a land invasion of Kosovo to be mounted from its territory. Some of this sympathy may have reflected fear that Serbia would drive many more hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians into Macedonia, producing a major change in the demographic balance that might ultimately catalyze an Albanian-Macedonian civil war, and ultimately an Albanian secession. These Macedonian fears, which Milosevic almost certainly wanted to exploit, caused the Macedonians to behave so callously to the arriving refugees, which ironically provided the arresting television footage that helped mobilize European public opinion against the Serbs.

counterproductive, as he tried to close the border to Kosovar Albanian departures the preceding week.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, there was plenty of opposition to the war across Europe. Postwar accounts suggest that the divisions were even greater than they appeared at the time.⁶⁸ On April 24 large anti-NATO protests occurred in Germany and Italy. A number of German peace activists showed up in Belgrade on the same day. On the previous day, Belgrade clarified the most recent settlement terms it had discussed with Chernomyrdin, agreeing only to the presence of a UN “observer force” in Kosovo, and indicating that Greece might be the only NATO country whose forces could participate. Most NATO members rejected these terms, but Italy and Greece wanted to explore the Yugoslav offer.⁶⁹ The German public did on the whole support the air war, but they did not favor ground action, and even the Christian Democrats explicitly ruled out a ground war.⁷⁰ Although it is difficult to know exactly why, support for the war in Germany and Italy began to deteriorate sometime in May. This waning of support was reported in the press, and could have encouraged Milosevic in his hopes for a split.⁷¹

THE G-8 PROPOSAL AND THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Although Milosevic probably did not know it, the agreement of Russia and the G-7 nations to a seven-point peace plan on May 6 marked the limit of what

67. “Exporting Misery,” *Economist*, April 17–23, 1999, pp. 23–27.

68. BBC News, Online Network, “NATO’s Inner Kosovo Conflict,” August 20, 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_425000/425468.stm, reporting on a BBC Two *Newsnight* documentary developed by Mark Urban. The principal findings of the report are that Germany, Italy, Greece, and perhaps even France resisted the escalation of the bombing, in particular the escalation to various communications and power supply targets as well as other targets in central Belgrade. Gen. Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, seems to have frequently ignored their concerns. The report notes that Germany and Italy tried to propose bombing pauses in support of diplomacy, but that these suggestions were rejected by the United States and Britain. Although squeamish about bombing, some of the Europeans were even more resistant to a ground war. Simultaneously, out and out NATO failure over Kosovo was viewed by all as too damaging to the alliance even to contemplate. The report concludes that had the war continued, NATO would have had an extremely difficult time deciding to mount a ground offensive, which was widely opposed in Europe: “The decision to go on bombing was the only thing the Allies could agree because hawks and doves cancelled one another out.” According to Strobe Talbot, the U.S. deputy secretary of state, “there would have been increasing difficulty within the alliance in preserving the solidarity and the resolve” had the war continued.

69. Ian Black and Tom Whitehouse, “War in Europe: Yugoslav Offer on Kosovo Scorned,” *Guardian*, April 24, 1999, p. 4.

70. Roger Cohen, “Schroeder’s Blunt ‘No’ to Ground Troops in Kosovo Reflects Depth of German Sensitivities,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1999, p. A14.

71. In mid-May an Italian poll showed that 49.5 percent of Italians believed the war unjustified, with 35.4 percent approving. Two weeks earlier, it was the reverse—so the trends were not in

Serbia's political strategy could achieve. The provisions of this agreement were essentially identical to those of the German initiative launched three weeks earlier, with a firming up of the role of the UN and the addition of a crucial statement on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Russians might have been able to pressure the Serbs to accept the deal at that point. It is likely, however, that the Serb political-military strategy had not run its course. In particular, the Serbs may still have hoped that a frustrated NATO would begin to make a lot of mistakes that would produce more collateral damage, as well as more dissension within the alliance.

Military factors continued to favor the strategy. NATO's accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy on May 7 probably encouraged the Serbs to stay in the game. Bombing of downtown Belgrade was suspended for nearly two weeks after this mistake. Given the minor diplomatic firestorm that immediately ensued, it was reasonable for Milosevic to wait and see if he could profit from the error. And the change in NATO targeting no doubt suggested to him that he was profiting from it. On the other front, little damage was done to the Serb forces in Kosovo between May 8 and May 29, so Milosevic would not have felt under any great pressure in the province. And another colossal NATO targeting error on May 13, in which perhaps eighty-seven Kosovar Albanian civilians were killed in bombings of the village of Korisa, might also have convinced the Serbs that there was still hope that collateral damage would produce internal fissures in the alliance.

In mid-May, the two most concrete efforts by key European states to restrain NATO's bombing campaign failed in a public and visible way. As late as the May 13 special Green Party conference, the Serbs had reason to hope that German or Italian domestic divisions might help produce a better offer from NATO. The conference was marred by violent differences of opinion, and deteriorated into egg and paint throwing, including a bucket of paint on the head of Joschke Fischer, the German foreign minister and highest-ranking Green in the government. The conference ended, however, with a watered-down statement of support for the German government. Similarly, on May 19 the Italian parliament held an animated debate that revealed substantial divi-

NATO's favor. Dahlburg, "Crisis in Yugoslavia," p. A14. Similarly, public support in German drifted down from 61 percent in April, to 51 percent in mid-May. Cohen, "Schroeder's Blunt 'No' to Ground Troops," p. A14.

sions on the war; it ended with a resolution calling for the government to pursue a suspension of the bombing campaign. The resolution did not, however, seek to impose any specific immediate restraint on Italian cooperation with NATO.⁷² Thus, although Milosevic might have seen public support in key European states beginning to wane, concrete political efforts to restrain government support for NATO's war failed.

The Russians also probably began to put serious pressure on the Serbs to settle in mid-May. It was no doubt seen as a bad omen that Yeltsin sacked Primakov on May 13, as Primakov had long been a critic of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy. On May 19 Chernomyrdin visited Belgrade to discuss the G-8 proposal. It seems likely that it was at this meeting that Milosevic first learned that the Russians had gone as far as they could and would on Yugoslavia's behalf. Chernomyrdin described the talks as "tense."⁷³ Milosevic then accepted the G-8 plan as the basis for negotiations, although the prospective role for the UN was highlighted as a critical element.⁷⁴

The Russians were not completely in NATO's camp, however. On May 21 the Russians complained that their mediation efforts were stymied by Western resistance. This probably reflected differences of opinion on the specific interpretation of the G-8 plan's allusion to the role of the UN—a stumbling block that persisted even after the war ended. A meaningful role for the UN seems to have been a key area of agreement between the Russians and the Serbs, and one where each had its own national interest to pursue. The Russians bargained hard with NATO about the UN role, and in an editorial in the *Washington Post* on May 27, Chernomyrdin threatened to abandon the negotiations. The now weak Russians wanted to impose some international limits on the exercise of U.S. power. The Serbs almost certainly wanted to place Kosovo's ultimate political future in the hands of an institution friendlier than NATO.

72. Eric Schmitt, "Germany's Leader Pledges to Block Combat on Ground," *New York Times*, May 20, 1999, p. 1.

73. "NATO Pounds Belgrade for Second Straight Day," CNN, May 20, 1999, <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9905/20>. See also "G-8, Russia Draft Kosovo Proposal in Moscow Talks," *ibid.*: "A senior Russian foreign ministry official tells CNN he is 'not that optimistic' about what was accomplished by Chernomyrdin in Belgrade, but said 'small steps, small movements' were made."

74. Paul Richter and David Holley, "Serb Desertions Reported as NATO Boosts Media War," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1999, p. 1. According to Richter and Holley, "Yugoslav officials said Milosevic had accepted as a starting point for talks a vague peace proposal drafted by Russia and seven Western nations two weeks ago but wanted to participate in negotiations and continued to demand an end to NATO bombing."

Russian and Chinese veto power in the Security Council made it a much preferred custodian of Kosovo for the Serbs, and a much preferred diplomatic venue for the Russians.

ACCELERATED BOMBING, MORE EVIDENCE THAT NATO WILL NOT SPLIT. NATO's military moves provided Milosevic with additional concrete evidence that the alliance would not split, and that politics would no longer constrain NATO's air attacks. On May 13 the United States announced that NATO would step up the bombing, and over the next several days evidence mounted that this was in fact the case. On May 20, in the closest raids to central Belgrade following the Chinese embassy incident, NATO strikes managed to damage the residences of the Swiss, Swedish, Norwegian, and Spanish ambassadors.⁷⁵ The Swedes complained, as did the Germans, but NATO's attacks intensified in the following days. The transformers of the largest coal-burning power plant in Serbia were destroyed on Sunday, May 23.⁷⁶ NATO then began systematic destruction of the key power transmission installations of the Serb electricity grid.⁷⁷ Previously, NATO had employed special weapons that would temporarily disrupt power; now it was using real explosives and doing more substantial damage. On May 27 reports surfaced that NATO Cmdr. Gen. Wesley Clark had received approval the previous day to further expand the target list to include the phone system, more government buildings, and the homes of Serb leaders.⁷⁸ He warned of the unavoidable risk of more casualties to civilians, risks that apparently did not move NATO's political authorities to demand restraint. On that same day, NATO conducted its heaviest raids of the war.

Given the improvement in weather, the increase in the number of available NATO aircraft, and the evaporating constraints on NATO bombing, Serbia faced for the first time the possibility that its economic infrastructure would

75. "NATO Pounds Belgrade for Second Straight Day."

76. "NATO Strikes at Yugoslav Power Plants," CNN, May 23, 1999, <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9905/23/>. One Serb source claimed that 70 percent of Serbia was deprived of electricity and that Belgrade was very low on water reserves. "Serb Water and Power Hit," BBC, May 24, 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_351000/351387.stm.

77. Maj. Gen. Charles Wald showed photos of three transformer stations that had been bombed and badly damaged. DoD news briefing, May 27, 1999, <http://www.defenselink.mil>. The actual hard-to-replace generating plants had not been struck, so Serbia still had a lot to lose. See also "NATO Piles It On," *Economist*, May 29, 1999, pp. 45–46, noting the evaporation of dissension within NATO and broad if grudging support for continued bombing.

78. William Drozdiak, "Allies Target Computer, Phone Links," *Washington Post*, May 27, 1999, p. A1; and Neil King, Jr., "General Warns NATO to Expect More Bombing, Civilian Casualties," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 1999, p. A21.

be systematically destroyed. I estimate that weapons were delivered during the last four weeks of the war at roughly twice the rate of the first seven weeks.⁷⁹ According to U.S. sources, the number of NATO strike aircraft had risen from roughly 200 at the outset of the war to nearly 500 by the end of May.⁸⁰ Serb air defenses had done what they could, but the network itself had taken a beating, losing perhaps as much as half of its ability to launch surface-to-air missiles—with no ability to replace lost air defense equipment.⁸¹ Unlike the North Vietnamese, the Serbs did not have a charge account in the arsenals of the Soviet Union, and they had never produced top-of-the-line air defense missile systems or fighter aircraft themselves.

Serbia was in an unusually poor position, by historical standards, to resist systematic bombing of its industrial base. As an economically developed society, the Serb people depend on the industrial economy and associated infrastructure to survive. In the words of the deputy mayor of Belgrade, “I can see a small village surviving months or years in these conditions, but in such a big city—I simply cannot imagine it. . . . This is not Phnom Penh. We cannot force-march everyone to the countryside.”⁸² Moreover, if the infrastructure and the economy were destroyed, Serbia was so isolated diplomatically that it could not expect to get much outside assistance to rebuild. Unlike Iraq, it had no significant wealth buried in the ground out of reach of enemy bombers. NATO’s threat to destroy the country’s crucial and essentially irreplaceable assets had become credible, and the consequences were potentially horrendous for the Serb people.

MINOR INFLUENCES ON SERB DECISIONMAKING. An erosion of national morale, the threat of a ground war, and the indictment of Milosevic for war crimes are sometimes advanced as important influences on Serb decisionmaking. The evidence is not compelling.

79. Author’s estimate based on diverse sources. For example, Major General Wald reports that “the number of bombs is getting close to 10,000.” DoD news briefing, May 12, 1999, <http://www.defenselink.mil>. Numerous sources report 24,000 weapons delivered by the end of the war.

80. DoD news briefing, June 10, 1999, table, “Strike Aircraft Buildup,” www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun1999/990610-J-0000K-004.

81. DoD news briefing, May 27, 1999. Rear Adm. Thomas R. Wilson suggested that 80 percent of the SA-3 systems, 11 of 14 batteries, had been destroyed, along with 3 of perhaps 20 SA-6 batteries. These were the major Serb surface-to-air missile systems of the war. That said, the Serbs fired 33 SAMs the preceding night, a large number compared to their daily average of 8–10, suggesting that they were still very much in the game.

82. Quoted in Richard Boudreaux, “Lack of Water, Power Disrupt Life in Belgrade: Yugoslavia: Air Attacks Lead to Prolonged Outages. Residents Learn to Cope,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1999, p. A12.

Signs of some deterioration in Serb national cohesion began to emerge in mid-May. On May 18 protests of some kind occurred in two Serb towns, and were followed six days later by reports of reserve troops on leave refusing to return to duty in Kosovo. These developments, though highlighted in the West, do not seem so serious or widespread as to force Milosevic to deal, but they may have been worrisome.

On May 23 President Clinton suggested that he had not ruled out a ground war. As this statement was not backed by much action, and was followed by many statements to the contrary, I doubt that Milosevic took it very seriously. NATO did announce plans to strengthen somewhat its occupation force-in-waiting in Kosovo. It is possible that had this occurred, and had NATO's air raids in Kosovo proper become much more successful, then Milosevic would have started to worry about Clinton's "change of heart."⁸³ But he still had plenty of time before this threat would become imminent.⁸⁴ By contrast, the intensification of strategic bombing had already begun.

Finally, on May 27 the UN International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague indicted Milosevic for war crimes in Kosovo. It is hard to see why such an indictment would have caused him to negotiate, but it may have helped convince him in the context of these other developments that the tide had

83. Priest, "A Decisive Battle That Never Was," reports that the defense ministers of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy met on May 27 to discuss a possible ground war, and concluded that they would have to decide whether to assemble the troops necessary for such a war within days. He notes that the decision for a land invasion was never made. He alludes to NATO's improvements of the roads in Albania to support armored vehicles, and mentions that by mid-May SACEUR Commander Clark had developed a plan for an attack from Albania by 175,000 troops, "mostly through a single road." Without a look at the plan, one can say little about its workability, but so many troops on a single road is peculiar. I interpret the evidence in the story to support the proposition that a ground war was still a distant prospect, and that Milosevic had as of late May been presented with little real evidence to the contrary. It is difficult to understand the reasoning behind General Clark's assertion in September 1999 that "President Milosevic had plenty of intelligence and all of the indicators that would have made him conclude that we were going in on the ground."

84. Steven Erlanger, "NATO Was Closer to Ground War in Kosovo Than Is Widely Realized," *New York Times*, November 7, 1999, p. A4, reports that "senior Yugoslav officials have said that Russian support for NATO's terms, the prospect of more intensive air strikes against Belgrade's bridges and electrical and water systems, and perhaps most important, the understanding that a ground invasion was imminent were enough for Mr. Milosevic, who had won some important diplomatic shifts in NATO's stand." Insofar as the same story notes that U.S. military planners thought it would take 90 days to ready an invasion force, and British planners thought that it would take 120 days, the notion that a ground invasion was "imminent" is clearly wrong. Given that none of the ground reinforcements necessary to launch such an invasion had even started to move, and that NATO as an organization had barely begun to consider a ground attack, it is difficult to imagine what evidence the Serbs would have had that might have convinced them that a ground attack could occur anytime soon. They did have evidence that the destruction of their infrastructure and economy was imminent.

turned. For example, he may have surmised that NATO would not likely offer many concessions to an indicted war criminal.

By the beginning of the last week in May, it seems fair to say that the strategy that I have attributed to Milosevic had achieved whatever it could achieve, and he understood it.⁸⁵ All of the principal wedges into NATO's cohesion had been tested. Further testing would prove very expensive in terms of damage to Serbia's infrastructure and economy. Costs were certain and high; gains were uncertain and ambiguous. And Serbia had achieved some political success. Russia had apparently secured a political supervisory role in Kosovo for the UN Security Council. The European members of NATO had not split from the United States; Germany, the most potent potential dissenter, had helped get the UN provision onto the table, but did not seem disposed to do anything more. European constraints on NATO's bombing were eroding quickly, and the air force facing Serbia had grown. The Serb military was still intact, and so was national morale, for the most part. Serbia could have stayed in the war for several more weeks, perhaps even several more months. But how could the mere endurance of NATO air strikes be converted into a more significant political success in a negotiated deal over Kosovo? Serbia would simply have to hang on and hope that, somehow, something would reenergize Russian support or precipitate a NATO split. On Friday, May 28, immediately following discussions with Chernomyrdin, Milosevic agreed to accept the G-8 principles. Under pressure from NATO for a more explicit statement, Milosevic followed up on June 1 with a letter to Bonn, where G-8 consultations had been coordinated from the outset of the war. Negotiations continued within the G-8, however, to develop more specific principles for the settlement.⁸⁶

The Diplomatic Endgame

The Kosovo war ended not with a straightforward surrender, but with a complex set of negotiations in which both the Serbs and the Russians tried,

85. Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Henry H. Shelton, "Joint Statement on the Kosovo after Action Review," October 14, 1999, sec. 3, <http://www.defenselink.mil>, argue that a combination of the mounting damage to Serbia, the demonstrated solidarity of the alliance, Russia's diplomatic assistance, the buildup of NATO ground forces, the military action of the KLA, and the economic isolation of Serbia "all played important roles in the settlement of the crisis."

86. These negotiations reflected continuing disagreement between Russia and NATO on the interpretation of the G-8 principles. It should be obvious that all the key actors in NATO are members of the G-8, but not all G-8 members (in particular Russia) are members of NATO. Thus the G-8 principles had been tailored as a package that both Russia and NATO could live with as a basis for negotiation with Serbia.

with some success, to ensure that the general concessions of the G-8 peace proposal were consolidated into real gains for Serbia. From June 1 until the successful conclusion of the military implementation discussions in Macedonia on June 9, NATO, Russia, and Serbia engaged in a vigorous if murky argument about one major question: how significant a role would the UN have in Kosovo? For Russia the key issue in hammering out the final draft peace accords was whether the UN or NATO would control the peacekeeping force, and what role Russian troops would play.⁸⁷ The original G-8 peace plan of May 6 called for “effective international civil and security presences, endorsed and adopted by the UN,” in contrast to NATO’s terms, which had merely called for an “international military presence.”⁸⁸ NATO still wanted to be entirely in charge, while the Serbs and Russians still hoped to reduce NATO’s presence and control.

The G-8 hammered out a consolidated text by the morning of June 2, which was taken to Belgrade the same day. The agreement included all of NATO’s critical demands for ending the war: the end of violence, the withdrawal of all Serb security forces, the deployment of a substantial and unconstrained NATO force in Kosovo, the return of refugees, and a commitment from Yugoslavia to “substantial self-government for Kosovo.” From the Russian and Serb points of view, the document included a central political role for the UN in the “interim” administration of the province, an acknowledgment that “self-government” must also take into account the “sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,” the demilitarization of the KLA, and no explicit reference to any process that could lead to de jure independence for Kosovo. Indirectly, the document also included a military role for Russia.⁸⁹ These are real, though perhaps modest, gains for Russia and for Serbia. The text was quickly accepted by Milosevic, and endorsed by the Serb parliament on June 3. Senior political officials in the NATO countries and observers of the war (including this author) were surprised by the speedy acceptance of the deal.

Russia almost surely wanted to have troops in Kosovo to enforce the point that it had been trying to make all along in this crisis: Russia is still a major

87. John-Thor Dahlburg and Richard Boudreaux, “Progress Made in Bid to End Kosovo Conflict,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1999, p. A1; Daniel Williams, “Milosevic Hears Terms for Peace,” *Washington Post*, June 3, 1999, p. A1; and Roger Cohen, “Moscow and West Making Headway on a Kosovo Deal,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1999, p. A1.

88. Dominic Casciani, “Analysis: Bridging the Diplomatic Gap,” BBC, June 2, 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid>.

89. “Full text of peace document,” BBC, June 4, 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid>.

player and must be consulted on important European security matters. At the same time, it is likely that the presence of Russian troops was compensation to the Serbs for the document's clear and nonnegotiable demand that all Serb security forces leave Kosovo.⁹⁰ The document conveyed to Milosevic on June 2 handled Russian qualms about NATO as follows: "The international security presence, with substantial NATO participation, must be deployed under unified command and control, and authorized to establish a safe environment for all people in Kosovo."⁹¹ Thus, while NATO insisted on a unified NATO command in Kosovo, its negotiators allowed ambiguity in the draft peace accords about the relationship of Russian troops to NATO. Had all ambiguity been eliminated, it seems possible that Russia would have abandoned the negotiations, which might have caused Milosevic to hang on a little longer to see if Russian anti-NATO diplomacy and concomitant European unease would reemerge to provide the possibility of a better deal.

The diplomatic action then shifted to the technical talks in Macedonia between the Serb military and NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) about the modalities of the Serb withdrawal, where the fight over the role of the UN continued. NATO leaders expected that these talks, which began on June 5, would go quickly, but both the Serbs and NATO (and arguably the Russians) continued to argue over the terms of the settlement. The original NATO draft military agreement included no reference to the UN, and thus from the Serbs' point of view represented a substantial deviation from the G-8 peace proposal they had just endorsed.⁹² The Serbs did not see this as an oversight, but as a trick of some sort.⁹³ These talks continued for five days, as did harsh fighting on the ground in Kosovo and NATO's air campaign, albeit with some limitations. The Serbs' willingness to keep fighting to lock in their understanding of the UN role suggests that this was an irreducible demand for them.

There were also intense discussions in the military-to-military negotiations on the sequence of key events that would terminate the war. The going-in Serb position is reported to have been that Serb forces would not begin to withdraw

90. Russia also negotiated vigorously on two other issues. NATO insisted that substantial Serb troop withdrawals had to precede the bombing cessation, while the Russians wanted the reverse. The Serbs still hoped to keep substantial numbers of Serb security forces in Kosovo after an agreement, while NATO insisted on complete withdrawal. The Russians essentially conceded these points.

91. "Full Text of Peace Document," BBC, June 4, 1999.

92. Elizabeth Becker, "Tricky Point for the Serbs: No Mention of U.N. Role," *New York Times*, June 7, 1999, p. A17.

93. Michael Dobbs and Daniel Williams, "Milosevic Still Angling for Last-Minute Concessions," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1999, p. A15. The Serb assistant foreign minister called this an attempt to "to inject 'political questions' into a technical military document."

unless NATO first ceased its bombing and the Security Council then passed its resolution.⁹⁴ The Serbs understood the situation very well: if they agreed to NATO's terms and began their withdrawal, they would have no bargaining leverage left with NATO to ensure that the UN resolution was passed, and passed with the key provisions that they apparently wanted.⁹⁵ The Russian military attaché to Belgrade accompanied the Serb delegation for part of the negotiations, suggesting that the deal could still fall apart if NATO did not compromise. The agreement signed after five days accommodated the Serbs on the overall UN point, though the sequence agreed upon was a limited withdrawal of Serb forces, followed by a bombing suspension, followed by the UN resolution, in rapid succession.⁹⁶

It is important to note that the G-8 foreign ministers were in Cologne negotiating the details of the UN resolution while the military conversations were under way in Macedonia. As Serbia was not present in Cologne, it seems likely that Russia was essentially negotiating on its behalf, and was in contact with both the Serbs and their attaché who participated in the negotiations in Macedonia. The Russians were apparently still negotiating hard in Cologne to try to get some recognition in the resolution that their peacekeeping troops would not be under NATO command, and that the Security Council would have some influence over NATO's KFOR. Although the specific points of contention are not known, on Monday evening, June 7, the Russians declined to approve the draft under consideration, but agreement was reached the following day.⁹⁷ The military technical talks in Macedonia continued for one more day, ending with agreement late on June 9.

94. "Peace, for Now, in Kosovo," *Economist*, June 12, 1999, pp. 43–44.

95. Gabriel Partos, "Analysis: Why Belgrade Did Not Sign," BBC, June 8, 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid>. The author speculates that the Serbs may have hoped to reopen the dispute between Russia and the West on the structure of the peacekeeping force, and to profit from such tension. It seems more likely that they were simply trying to lock in the most favorable aspects of the deal, as they understood them.

96. "The Military Agreement," *Online Newshour*, June 9, 1999, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/jan-june99/agreement>. The Serb officers also complained about four specific points: the proposed seven-day withdrawal period of ground forces was too brief; the two-day withdrawal period for their air defenses in Kosovo was also too brief; more specificity was desirable on the number of Serb security personnel ultimately allowable in Kosovo (with some accounts suggesting the Serbs were demanding more than 10,000); and the proposed 25-kilometer demilitarized zone along the Serbian and Montenegrin side of the Kosovo border was too wide. The agreement gave the Serbs eleven rather than seven days to get their ground forces out; gave them three rather than two days to get their air defense forces out; preserved the 25-kilometer demilitarized zone for Serb air defenses, but reduced it to 5 kilometers for Serb ground forces; and made no substantive change on the question of Serb security personnel.

97. Jane Perlez, "Russians Balking over NATO's Role in a Kosovo Force," *New York Times*, June 8, 1999, p. A1.

The Final Settlement

Serbia's decision to end the war over Kosovo is treated by many as a capitulation. The peace deal was however, very different from the Rambouillet draft accords, Yugoslavia's rejection of which in March had provided the occasion for NATO's attack. NATO officials do not like to acknowledge these differences. They have a natural proclivity to paint the outcome of the war as a complete victory—more than ample reward for the preceding eleven weeks of military effort and political stress. And there is little doubt that NATO achieved more of its objectives in this war than did the Serbs. But the Serbs did not come away with nothing. The peace deal leaves open the possibility of a continued Serb political struggle for Kosovo. It attenuates the very real possibility opened by the terms of the Rambouillet accords that NATO would use its new presence in Kosovo to push for further demands on Serbia. Milosevic can claim credit for these changes with his nationalist supporters; he can also claim that he did not give in without a hard fight.

In contrast to the terms of the Rambouillet accords, the Serbs achieved five gains. First, the UN rather than NATO is the overarching political authority in Kosovo. Thus Serbia now has two friendly great powers—Russia and China—with influence over Kosovo's political future. Second, the legitimate political consolidation of Kosovo's independence may prove impossible.⁹⁸ Rambouillet's three-year timetable, which specified that "an international meeting shall be convened to determine a mechanism for a final settlement for Kosovo, on the basis of the will of the people" has disappeared. This clause would surely have produced a strong tendency toward independence for Kosovo. Instead a more ambiguous process has been established, without a three-year deadline, which practically speaking may never produce a final settlement. Paragraph 19 of the Security Council resolution of June 10, 1999, declares that "the international civil and security presences are established for an initial period of 12 months, to continue thereafter until the Security Council decides otherwise." Thus, if either the Chinese or the Russians choose not to decide otherwise, insofar as both have veto power, Security Council control over Kosovo will last forever. Third, the UN resolution is slightly more respectful of the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" with reference to Kosovo than was the Rambouillet document, though this is

98. Javier Solana declared in an interview that the Albanians of Kosovo would have to give up the goal of independence. See "Dim Hope for Kosovo Independence," *New York Times*, September 24, 1999, p. A11.

a subtle and perhaps debatable point. Fourth, the presence of Russian troops in Kosovo must be counted a Serb gain. Although Russian peacekeepers may well have been deployed had Serbia accepted the Rambouillet plan, this was not assured. Once the UN became the overarching political authority in Kosovo, it would have been very difficult for NATO legitimately to block the presence of Russian troops, even though NATO was designated the military presence. Fifth, the built-in ability of the Rambouillet accords to lead to further NATO military interventions against Serbia has been eliminated. The strange clause of the Rambouillet accords (Appendix b, paragraph 8), tacked on late in the negotiations, that would have given NATO troops the freedom to operate anywhere in Yugoslavia is gone.⁹⁹ Whether NATO intended that clause to create such possibilities, Milosevic probably feared it. Serb agreement to such a clause would have essentially been an abdication of sovereignty to NATO. NATO could have exploited this unconstrained military access to pursue Serb officials accused of war crimes, and to assist other potential secessionist movements in Serbia. Obviously, these gains fall far short of what must have been Serbia's first preference—to hold onto Kosovo in fact and in law forever, without any international military or political presence.¹⁰⁰

Serbia paid significant costs for these gains. To many observers these costs seem vastly out of proportion with the original stakes of the war, as outsiders understand them. As of this writing, the lowest estimate of damage to the Yugoslav economy is roughly \$4 billion worth of plant and infrastructure, and another \$23 billion in lost production over this decade.¹⁰¹ This figure may not

99. *Rambouillet Agreement*.

100. Those who negotiated the agreement also like to point out that Serbia is worse off in one respect: Rambouillet would have permitted some Yugoslav civilian police to remain in Kosovo until a new police force had been created. Some 2,500 border troops would have been allowed to remain in Kosovo, pending the determination after three years of Kosovo's ultimate status. Limited numbers of police would have been allowed to remain in the province for one or two years. Under the current accords, an unspecified but very small number of Serb soldiers and police are to be allowed back into Kosovo to guard historic and religious sites. This difference has the merit of being countable, and thus appears significant, but it is clearly irrelevant. The police and border troops left under Rambouillet would have been too few to accomplish anything, and would have been overwhelmed by the massive NATO presence. In any case, their days would have been numbered.

101. The estimate was offered by a group of independent Serb economists. A cost of \$2.3 billion is assigned to the civilian deaths and injuries associated with the war. Eve-Ann Prentice, "Cost of Nato Damage Estimated at \$29bn," *Times* (London), July 23, 1999, <http://www.sunday-times.co.uk:80/cgi-bin/BackIssue?999>. The Serb finance minister offered a similar figure, \$30 billion, but did not break it down. "Yugoslavia Says Repair Bill Tops \$30 Billion," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, July 16, 1999, <http://www.cbc.news.cbc.ca/cg...ates/view.cgi?news/1999/07/15/yugo990715>.

include the cost of damage to the military infrastructure of the country. Serbia claims roughly 2,000 civilian dead and perhaps 600 military dead.¹⁰²

Approximately 130,000 Serbs are said to have left Kosovo since the end of the war.¹⁰³ Many Serbs might have been able to remain safely in Kosovo under the Rambouillet accords, so this exodus is a Serb loss. Some would probably have left quickly even under Rambouillet—and more would have left later rather than live as a minority in an Albanian state. It is likely that some Albanian nationalist fanatics would have tried to drive out the Serbs under any circumstances. But there can be little doubt that fear of revenge by their Albanian neighbors for the terrible tactics adopted by Serbian forces during the eleven-week war, and the acts of revenge that have occurred, have accelerated the departures. The current settlement did not force these departures, but the war strategy chosen by Milosevic to fight Rambouillet contributed to them.

Conclusions

We do not yet know whether Slobodan Milosevic and those around him had a well worked-out political-military strategy for waging the war over Kosovo. I have attempted to show, however, that the conduct of the war, the diplomacy that moved it toward a settlement, and the settlement itself are consistent with the hypothesis that Serbia had a strategy. The strategy hypothesized is consistent with the long-standing military strategy of Yugoslavia (and other armed neutral states), consistent with plausible Serb political interests and objectives, and consistent with Milosevic's own political and military experience with the West in Bosnia.

Milosevic had certain means at his disposal and certain ends in view. He tried in reasonable ways to achieve those ends. He was vastly outmatched from the point of view of economic, military, and political power. For the most part,

102. In his June 10 address, President Milosevic reported that 462 army personnel and 114 police personnel had been killed in the eleven weeks of war, but offered no estimate of Serb civilian losses. "Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's Address to the Nation," Tanjug News Service, June 10, 1999, <http://www.serbia-info.com/news/1999-06/10/12493.html>. Other Serb government sources have estimated 2,000 dead Serb civilians. See Richard Boudreaux, "The Path to Peace: For Many Serbs, No Sense of Guilt over Atrocities," *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1999, p. 1.

103. Bernard Kouchner, chief UN official for Kosovo, estimates that 130,000 Serbs have left the province, and 97,000 remain. Melissa Eddy, "Serbia Wants Kosovo Army Disbanded," *AP Online*, September 13, 1999, International News, http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/ap/19990913/w1/yugoslavia_Kosovo_1922.html.

the strategy not only made sense; it proved somewhat successful. The clear strategic mistake was the extent of Serb depredations against the Kosovar Albanian population and the huge number of refugees thus precipitated. This, however, may have been unavoidable, insofar as part of his theory of controlling Kosovo over the short term may have involved “draining the sea” in which the KLA guerrillas swam, and the refugees were the only offensive tool available that might cause any discomfort in the NATO alliance. The Serb military theory worked very well, better on the ground in Kosovo than in the air over Serbia, and remarkably well given Serbia’s weakness. And the military strategy gave strong support to the political strategy of splitting the NATO alliance. The effort to split the alliance was moderately successful; squeamishness about collateral damage worked to Serbia’s advantage, especially early in the war. Given their own weakness, the Russians were nevertheless able to provide meaningful diplomatic support to the Serbs, which in turn energized German diplomacy, which in turn helped produce essential NATO concessions.

Once we understand Serb strategy, we have a better sense of why and how a settlement was reached. Serb military strategy began to erode once the combination of cumulative damage to Serbia’s air defense system, better weather, and growing NATO air forces made it difficult to “ration” Serbia’s suffering. Of greater importance was the speedy erosion of constraints on NATO’s target selection that began in mid-May. The Serb nation was now in grave danger. If Milosevic was a genuine Serb nationalist, then he had to trade off these dangers against the value of Kosovo. If he was merely an opportunistic nationalist, then he had to ask himself whether this destruction was going to help him hold onto power.

Serbia’s political strategy had yielded certain gains, as outlined above. But the Russians had probably made clear that they had gotten as much as they could or would for Serbia. And the escalating scale of the bombing, despite collateral damage to Serbian and Albanian civilians, and embarrassing collateral damage to foreign embassies, ought to have shown Milosevic that NATO would not split over this issue. With the erosion of both the Russian and the collateral damage wedges into NATO, and the failure of the refugee wedge, Serbia was without a theory of victory.

Did Milosevic and the Serbs have any options left? One of the mysteries of this war is Serbian military restraint. The Serb air force never tried to sneak a bomber into Macedonia to attack NATO troops. Serb submarines did not try to sneak out of port to attack NATO ships. Serb intelligence operatives, who must have had networks of agents, safe houses, and weapons caches in Bosnia

and in Macedonia, made no serious effort to attack Western troops. Serb forces battled across only one border, that of Albania. These attacks focused on the KLA and were confined to the border area. NATO, of course, made threats to discourage the Serbs from such attempts, but it is difficult to see why the Serbs would have taken them seriously. NATO was already bombing liberally, especially in the second half of May. Yet the Serbs were quiescent. Serb self-restraint was partly a function of the overall political-military strategy. Milosevic may have feared that an expansion of the war beyond Serbia's borders would alienate the Russians. The Serbs probably calculated that direct attacks on NATO might improve rather than reduce NATO's cohesion. The Serb military may have judged that even though it could cause some NATO casualties, it could not do so persistently; hence the odds of causing enough pain to provoke a useful defection were just too low.

Although the final agreement falls well short of Serbia's preferred outcome, it reflects real changes from the original Rambouillet accords that Yugoslavia rejected. Depending on one's perspective, these changes either provide the Serb leadership with a better fig leaf for abandoning a cherished Serb nationalist symbol or a basis for a continued, legitimate, political, and ultimately military contest over the future political disposition of the province. These gains came at considerable cost to Serbia and the Serbian people. Since the end of the war, the Serbs have demonstrated much dissatisfaction with the rule of Slobodan Milosevic and with the loss of Kosovo. But there seems to be little regret that the country chose to fight and to pay the price it did.

One should be careful about drawing general lessons from a single case, but the war with Serbia fits into a rough pattern that the United States and the rest of the world have encountered too frequently in the last decade. In Somalia, Rwanda, post-Desert Storm Iraq, Bosnia, and now Kosovo, four factors, singly or in combination, have eroded and sometimes entirely thwarted Western aspirations: (1) political movements motivated by strong ethnic, national, or even clan identity are capable of taking considerable punishment; (2) such movements are morally capable of great violence; (3) the political and military leaders of such movements possess considerable organizational skill, which permits surprising, if often horrible, successes; and (4) military skills abroad are well developed; the local soldiery can creatively employ technically inferior weaponry to take advantage of unique local conditions, to achieve carefully conceived, albeit limited, tactical objectives. These factors may not always permit the local people to evade or overcome the sheer material advantages

that the United States or other Western powers can bring to bear. They can, however, often turn the carefully crafted peace plans, coercive diplomacy, and limited military operations of outside powers into nasty back-alley fights. Political and humanitarian goals turn out to be much more difficult to achieve than anyone expected. The opposition in these affairs is ruthless, resilient, and resourceful, and ought to be taken more seriously.