



The Heritage Foundation
Executive Memorandum

No. 588

April 5, 1999

HELPING KOSOVO TO HELP ITSELF

JAMES H. ANDERSON, PH.D., AND JAMES PHILLIPS

The Clinton Administration has unleashed the largest military action in Europe since World War II to protect Albanian Kosovars from Yugoslavia's brutal ethnic cleansing campaign. But despite its best intentions, Operation Allied Force appears to be failing. The Administration underestimated Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's ruthlessness and overestimated the political utility of air strikes by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO air strikes alone cannot halt the door-to-door massacre of Albanian Kosovars carried out by dispersed units of Serbian police and paramilitary groups. If an intensified air campaign does not compel Milosevic to cease his bloody crackdown and withdraw his forces from Kosovo, then the United States should provide political, economic, and military aid to help the Kosovars to defend themselves.

Senators Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) soon will introduce The Kosova Self-Defense Act to provide \$25 million in arms and training to the Albanian Kosovars. This bill states: "It should be the policy of the United States to provide the interim government of Kosovo with the capability to defend and protect the civilian population of Kosovo against armed aggression." This is a step in the right direction, considering the obstinate refusal of Milosevic to end ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Giving military aid to the embattled Albanian Kosovars would allow them to defend themselves and drive up the costs to Milosevic for his actions.

Milosevic's ethnic cleansing campaign has forced approximately one-third of Kosovo's 1.8 million ethnic Albanians out of their homes since early 1998; the pace sped up significantly after NATO began to bomb on March 24. The Kosovo campaign resembles Milosevic's previous campaigns in Bosnia and Croatia, which ended only when he faced the combined impact of NATO air strikes, a Croatian ground offensive, and efforts to train and equip Bosnia's military. By itself, the air campaign will not succeed in stopping Milosevic. NATO underestimated his willingness to resist and his ability to turn virulent nationalistic sentiment in his favor.

What Next for Kosovo?

It would be unrealistic to expect Albanian Kosovars to accept Serbian rule in the aftermath of Milosevic's brutal killing campaign.

And it would be wrong for any peacekeepers to disarm the ethnic Albanians, as called for by the Rambouillet peace proposal. The United States clearly has taken sides in a civil war and committed itself to protect the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. A failure to achieve this objective would undermine U.S. credibility and cast doubt on its ability to lead the

Produced by
The Kathryn
and Shelby Cullom Davis
International Studies Center

Published by
The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C.
20002-4999
(202) 546-4400
<http://www.heritage.org>



Executive Memorandum

NATO alliance. The United States therefore must consider further courses of action if the air war fails to halt the ethnic cleansing and compel Milosevic to withdraw Serbian forces completely from Kosovo.

If intensified bombing and military aid to the Albanian Kosovars fails to stem the Serbian onslaught, the United States should not rule out the use of NATO ground troops in Kosovo. If Milosevic were to escalate or expand the war, NATO ground troops might be necessary to defeat the Yugoslav forces. Although this decision may yet come and would require weeks of preparation, immediate steps must be taken to prevent a Yugoslav victory in Kosovo.

Immediate Steps. To halt the latest round of ethnic cleansing, the United States should complement its bombing campaign with air-dropped supplies to beleaguered Albanian resistance fighters. The United States should provide Albanian Kosovars with anti-tank weapons, mortars, heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, and ammunition. These should be provided in conjunction with logistical, intelligence, and medical support. NATO should use air power to impose no-fly and no-drive zones on Serbian military forces in Kosovo. This would choke off the ability of the Serbs to sustain operations in Kosovo and could be achieved at a relatively low cost because it would involve extending the existing no-fly zone over Bosnia.

Longer-Term Assistance. To set the stage for a durable peace in Kosovo, the United States should work with Albania and Macedonia to establish staging areas to train, equip, and support the Kosovars. If Yugoslavia attacked Albania or Macedonia, the U.S. military response should be swift and severe, possibly including the use of ground troops to repel such aggression. The United States and its NATO allies should provide humanitarian relief to the tens of thousands of Kosovars now flooding out of Kosovo, as well as economic support to Albania and Macedonia, which have given sanctuary to the bulk of these refugees. The United States should provide economic, political, and diplomatic support to democratically minded leaders capable of governing Kosovo once the province is liberated from Serbian rule. Such leadership would help Kosovo to

win international recognition and support. Wherever possible, the United States should seek to enlist its NATO allies with these efforts. But when necessary, the United States should be prepared to act alone to assist the Kosovars.

Although this strategy would provide a viable long-term alternative to committing U.S. ground troops, the United States should not give the Albanian resistance movement a blank check. Instead, U.S. aid should be conditioned on guarantees from the Albanian Kosovar leadership that it will not (1) seek vengeance against the Serb civilians or religious sites and (2) pursue the goal of a Greater Albania, which would cause further destabilization.

Providing political, economic, and military assistance to Albanian Kosovars would contain its own risks. But the dangers of not pursuing this option would be greater still. If the United States does not aid the Albanian Kosovars on the ground, the Serbian onslaught will continue; calls for NATO ground intervention will increase; and, failing such a costly and protracted deployment, radical Islamic elements will step up their efforts to exploit the turmoil.

Conclusion. The United States urgently needs a comprehensive, long-term approach to complement the NATO bombing campaign over Yugoslavia. Bringing peace to Kosovo will depend on the development of a stable balance of power on the ground. As a result of its brutal ethnic cleansing campaign, the Milosevic regime has forfeited its claim of sovereignty over Kosovo. For this reason, a return to Kosovo's pre-1989 autonomous status is not realistic. The United States should develop a credible plan to help the Albanian Kosovars to gain independence and attain a self-sustaining peace. If pursued with vigor and persistence, this course of action ultimately would help the United States and its NATO allies to reduce their military commitments in the Balkans.

—James H. Anderson, Ph.D., is *Defense and National Security Analyst*, and James Phillips is *Director of Administration*, in *The Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis International Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation*.