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Trends. Milosevic on Force Withdrawal: Can the Wrong be Right?

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It appears that with the completion of talks between Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, the momentum for multilateral military intervention sponsored by the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to punish Serbia has lessened. Even if Milosevic's promises ("concessions" in diplomatic jargon) to improve access for relief groups and international monitors, allow refugees to return home, and re-initiate political talks with ethnic Albanian leaders from Kosovo are insincere, these promises will buy time. And time--as other real and potential targets of Western sanctions and military force have well learned--is an ally that too often saps the memory and motivation of the sanctioners; that also creates an opportunity for unforeseen events to render sanctions or force moot or suddenly unimportant.

However, irrespective of the sincerity of the above promises, some representatives of the Contact Group that monitors political events in the Balkan region are still attacking Milosevic for not agreeing to withdraw Serbian military and police forces from Kosovo or at least keeping these forces confined to bases and barracks. They have rejected his position that there should be a linkage between ethnic Albanian political violence ("terrorism" in Milosevic's jargon) and the reduction of Serbian forces.

Do these representatives of the Contact Group mean that Milosevic's forces should cease any activities that are genocidal, war crimes, or violations of international law--e.g., ethnic cleansing, the willful killing of noncombatants? Then they should say so. Apart from this, Milosevic's position has merit. Kosovo is legally part of Serbia, and Serbia of Yugoslavia. There are several secessionist movements in Kosovo. Military forces of these movements have engaged in political violence. A strong case can be made that for Milosevic to unilaterally withdraw his forces from Kosovo would be analogous to Contact Group members doing the same when confronted with a violent secessionist movement. And how often have these members ever done such a thing or would--when faced with multilateral sanctions, violence, or their threat? (Moreover, Milosevic might justly demand an end to the flow of money, materiel, and personnel from outside Serbia that is supporting the political violence.)

The "do-like-I-say-not-like-I-do" approach of some members of the Contact Group bespeaks a psychology of arrogance, pride, and hubris that will not be effective in mitigating the ethnic Albanian tragedy. (See d'Estree, T.P., & Babbitt, E.F. (1998). Women and the art of peacemaking: Data from Israeli-Palestinian interactive problem-solving workshops. *Political Psychology*, 19, 185-209; Erlanger, S. (June 17, 1998). Yugoslav promises are just first step, U.S. says. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Gordon, M.R. (June 17, 1998). Yugoslav leader makes concessions on Kosovo. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Montiel, C.J. (1997). Citizen-based peacemaking in a protracted war: Two Philippine cases. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 3, 155-134; Ross, M.H. (1995). Psychocultural interpretation theory and peacemaking in ethnic conflicts. *Political Psychology*, 16, 523-544.) (Keywords: Boris Yeltsin, Contact Group, Kosovo, Sanctions, Security, Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, Yugoslavia.)