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Letter to Anna: An American Perspective on Why the US Hasn't Acted Decisively in Kosovo

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(This article--slightly edited by IBPP--was submitted by Mr. Andrew Chittim, a freelance writer and marketing specialist. The article arrived on May 25th--well before the end of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. In retrospect, however, Mr. Chittim's analysis highlights a number of Issues that are still not resolved.)

Does the NATO bombing campaign suggest that significant political objectives can indeed be achieved without the employment of ground forces? Mr. Chittim suggests not--in league with some other analysts in late May and even today. However, there is a legitimate question as to whether ground forces were used--e.g., the attacks of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the increasing talk of employing NATO ground forces as the bombing campaign continued, and the gearing up to deploy peacekeeping and humanitarian forces proximal to Yugoslavia as the bombing continued. Thus, the notion of victory without ground forces may be moot in the present case.

Does the NATO bombing campaign suggest a new 21st century penchant for military intervention based on moral as opposed to strategic interests? Mr. Chittim seems to include the moral as a strategic interest. Is this always the case, or may moral interests at times not be strategic? May economic and political interests at times not be strategic? And how does one delineate political and economic contributions to the moral or moral contributions to the political and economic?

What does the NATO bombing campaign suggest about the salience of ethnic identification as a source of conflict, competition, and cooperation? Mr. Chittim intimates that the answer is quite complex and there is ample data to back this up. At times, Russian authorities seemed to embrace an ethnic brotherhood with the Serbs. At the same time or at other times, the same authorities seemed to view the Serbs as vehicles to increase Russian power. As another example of complexity, some authorities representing many Islamic countries provided variants of support for the Kosovar Muslims--concurrent with helping or impeding operational and support activities of various combinations of NATO nation-states for these same Kosovar Muslims. Yet again, ethnic politics seemed to be calibrated in a Talmudic manner by various NATO nation-states--e.g., Greece, Turkey, and Hungary--in supporting or impeding NATO interventions at various points on the politico-military continua.

Would the absence of any NATO military intervention have led to ever increasing violence starting from Serb against Kosovar Albanian and ending with a conflagration spreading throughout a good part of Europe? Mr. Chittim largely discounts this, as do many analysts today. But in international security affairs as in other venues of predicting human behavior, substantiating the consequence of what does not happen is extremely problematic. Answers to all these questions have bearing on what comes next in the Balkans, for US foreign policy, for NATO, and for international conflict resolution.

How does one predict how a foreign policy intervention is perceived by its target and various observers as positive or negative reinforcement, omission training, or punishment? In the attempt to achieve political objectives, one may less profitably ponder some hypothetical intrinsic or inherent nature of

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force or kinds of force, diplomacy or kinds of diplomacy, sanctions or kinds of sanctions. Instead, the question may be more like how interventions are perceived by both rational and irrational actors, targets, and observers in various sorts of settings. Mr. Chittim does not directly deal with this Issue, but his writing intimates the Issue's import.

Can one even develop rules, generalizations, and explanations that reliably and validly inform foreign policy initiatives? Can one use, as opposed to abuse, history? Are there historical analogies or are all threats and opportunities unique thereby excluding thinking, solving, and resolving by analog? Are policymakers and their support personnel hopelessly blinded by ideology, careerism, and a vast horde of personal and sociocultural constraints? And, if rules, generalizations, and explanations can be developed, how robust are their reliability and validity through time? As with all analysts, Mr. Chittim must confront these and other epistemological challenges.

Finally, a bit more about the author. While working in United States (US) Army intelligence activities, Mr. Chittim earned his M.A. in international relations (with an emphasis on strategic studies) from Boston University in Frankfurt, Germany. He may be reached at bradchitt@aol.com.)

Letter to Anna.

Recently, a native Russian friend of mine asked me, "why doesn't the US act to end the misery in Kosovo?" She is a compassionate, cosmopolitan woman raised in Moscow, so the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo is particularly abhorrent to her. And while she is an American citizen, she nonetheless is a foreigner in culture and perspective. The purpose of this essay is to answer her simple question.

Since the disintegration of Tito's Yugoslavia, Serbia has gone on a rampage, starting four wars in the region with Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and now Kosovo. American foreign policy during these wars has evolved. Half-hearted action was taken in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Now, in round four of Serbia's tirade, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has taken action in the region.

There are those who have asked why the US hasn't responded more forcefully, citing the butchery of the Kosovars as ample reason to send in ground forces. And it is true that ground forces are the only salvation for Kosovo because the bombing campaign, while slowing the carnage, will not stop it. American non-commitment to a ground force solution may be tied to its strategic interests. Or more accurately, a lack of vital strategic interests at stake in the Balkans.

This is important because the US contributes the lion's share of leadership, troops, resources, and money to NATO. Therefore, American interests drive, to some extent, NATO action. This action has limits, of course, and it's not plausible that NATO would act solely on American interests devoid of any congruent European strategic interests, but I will touch on that later.

What strategic interests does the US have in the region? Well, as it turns out, very few. The US has no significant business interests in the former Yugoslavia. McDonald's does have a point of contact (see <http://www.mcdonalds.com/corporate/franchise/outside/contacts/contacts.html>) for a franchise in the Republic of Yugoslavia and in Macedonia, Slovenia, and Croatia as well. But US trade in the region is miniscule. Compared to Canada, our largest trading partner, regional trading accounts for less than 3/10 of 1% at \$364M. (According to <http://census.gov/foreign-trade/sitcl/1998>, US trade with Canada was \$154,152M, Albania \$15M (.010% of Canada (oC)), Bosnia-Herzegovina \$40M (.026% oC), Croatia \$97

(.063% oC), Macedonia \$15M (.010% oC), Slovenia \$123M (.080% oC), and Yugoslavia \$74M (.048% oC)).

Thus, conflict in the region would not result in the disruption of the national (US) economy, and, by extension, economic strategic interests for the US would not be threatened. This is in direct contrast to the projected noxious economic consequences that would have resulted from uncontested Iraqi aggression in the Persian Gulf in 1991.

Given that there are no substantive economic strategic interests in the Balkans, what other interests might have spurred recent NATO action (at the request of the US)? Military strategic interests in the region are also insignificant--to the US and, by extension, NATO. No one can make a credible argument that the Republic of Yugoslavia represents a pernicious military threat to anyone but its immediate neighbors. So, NATO is not responding to military strategic interests in the region.

Statements that conflict in the region could lead to a major war are overstated in the extreme. If Russia were to Issue an ultimatum to NATO to cease its bombing campaign or risk direct military action, then NATO would back down. To do otherwise would be incompetence in the conduct of US foreign policy. Furthermore, Russia has not Issued such as ultimatum, for while it has an interest in the region, it, too, has been averse to facing off against NATO.

What about political strategic interests? Is the Republic of Yugoslavia a major player on the world political stage? No. Is it influencing other nations whose relations with the US are considered strategically important? Arguably, Russia is being influenced by what they see as their ethnic "brothers" and fellow Slavs suffering at the hands of the NATO "aggressors." Russia has made rumblings suggesting more than political support of Serbia if NATO doesn't cease its operations, but they are only rumblings to date and, all in all, US relations with Russia have not been appreciably altered.

So what American interests are being served through NATO's actions? Some say President Clinton felt impelled to act for fear of losing face. Having repeatedly threatened military action against Serbia but not backing it up, Clinton considered his "credibility" at stake and acted out of political interests. Recall also that the first air strikes came amidst the impeachment proceedings against the President. However, it is difficult to conceive that impeachment proceedings motivated a sitting President to place America's sons and daughters in harm's way.

Political interests explain some of the motivation driving American foreign policy in the Balkans, but there is more. "Humanitarian" strategic interests spurred by moral outrage over ethnic cleansing (i.e., genocide) seems to be driving NATO. This conceptually new strategic interest--the imposition of Western standards of justice in countries that have grossly violated those standards--lends insight to NATO's actions.

And while the US leads the alliance, it requires consensus or at least complicity to activate military action. European consensus resulted from its revulsion at the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. And because European strategic interests were directly aligned with the US, NATO acted.

For the US, there is precedent for deploying troops to serve humanitarian interests. Such interests would include stemming starvation or factional warfare wrecking havoc on a foreign nation. This was the case in 1993 when US Army Rangers found themselves in Mogadishu. But sending troops in support of humanitarian interests lost momentum in the wake of the Mogadishu firefight that brought home

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American soldiers in body bags. And, of course, the pallor hanging over post-Vietnam America still lingers. And to mitigate the US commitment to humanitarian interests still further, the US has no significant ethnic or cultural ties to the people of Kosovo.

So, the US's commitment to humanitarian interests is lukewarm at best. That's not to say that American troops won't someday find themselves in Kosovo, but it will be a hard sell to the US Congress and citizenry--people who don't share the President's firm commitment to humanitarian interests at the expense of American lives. Already, (US) public support of the bombing campaign, into its third month (as of this writing), is waning.

American foreign policy in the Balkans is greatly influenced by the absence of firm, traditional strategic interests there. Subsequent NATO action in Kosovo is then based on an unstable foundation of ephemeral humanitarian interests and this explains a lack of commitment to stopping Serbian aggression through the use of ground troops--the only true and final counterstroke to genocide in Kosovo.

It's not that Europeans and Americans don't care. It's just that they have no vital economic, military, or political strategic interests at stake. Serbia, by contrast, has every conceivable strategic interest being threatened by NATO. That alone makes Serbs more firmly committed to achieving their objectives than NATO. And while commitment alone does not assure an outcome, the Serbian threshold for acceptable combat casualties is higher than NATO's. This is the Serbian trump card--in play long before the first NATO soldier sets foot on "Serbian" soil. (To address the Issues raised in this paper IBPP suggests the following references: Atwater, L.E., Camobreco, J.F., et al. (1997). Effects of rewards and punishments on leader charisma, leader effectiveness and follower reactions. *Leadership Quarterly*, 8, 133-152; Deng, F.M. (1996). Identity in Africa's internal conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40, 46-65; Le Poire, B.A., Erlandon, K.T., & Hallett, J.S. (1998). Punishing versus reinforcing strategies of drug discontinuance: Effects of persuaders' drug use. *Health Communication*, 10, 293-316; Levkovich, V.P., & Andrushchak, I.B. (1996). Ethnocentrism as a social psychological phenomenon: Findings of a study of ethnic groups in Uzbekistan. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 34, 46-67; O'Connor, S.C. (1998). Intergroup conflict: The discursive battle over Quebec independence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 777-794; Rieff, D. (1999). Moral imperatives and political realities. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 13; U.S. policy--Balancing strategic and humanitarian concerns. (March 1, 1999). *Congressional Digest*, 78(3), ISSN: 0010-5899; Wong, W-c., & Sun H-f. (1998). Modes of historical view among young citizens in Hong Kong before the changeover of sovereignty. *Psychologia: An International Journal of Psychology in the Orient*, 41, 235-246.) (Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Ethnocentrism, Moral, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Serbia, Sovereignty, Strategic, Yugoslavia.)