

Defining victory may prove difficult

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By Robert B. Adolph Jr.

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina — At this writing the United States and NATO are beginning another week of bombing and cruise missile attacks on Yugoslavia.



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Hundreds of thousands of Muslim Albanians in Kosovo Province have either been killed or forcibly expelled from their homes.

The human tide of refugees has streamed out of Kosovo and now occupies tent cities in Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania. Yugoslav military forces have sealed and reopened the borders of Kosovo. The bombing continues unabated, but to what end?

The United States and NATO have stated no clearly defined objective in Kosovo. Perhaps this is intentional. If a clearly defined objective were stated, then the West would be expected to meet that objective. This seeming ambiguity is highlighted by the historical controversy between

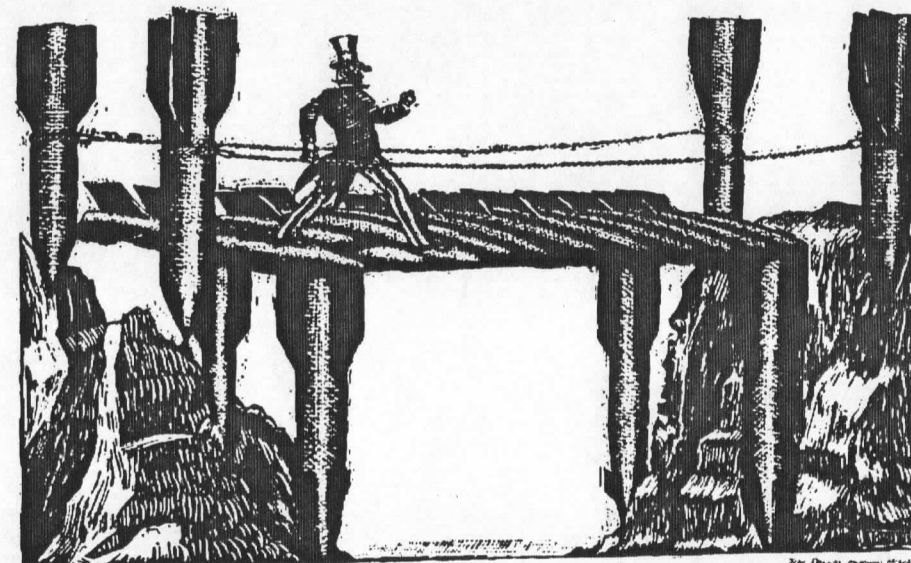
President Truman and General MacArthur over the ultimate objectives in the Korean War. MacArthur's objective was total victory over the North Koreans and their Chinese allies. Truman's objective was to prevent World War III. Only one objective could prevail. Truman fired MacArthur.

Now it is U.S. and NATO credibility on the line. The West must win. Defeat by a backward former communist country is unthinkable. So what will define victory? A ground campaign into Serbia seems unlikely. Casualties, an anathema to the Western powers, could mount rapidly. To continue to pound Yugoslavia from the air indefinitely also seems improbable. The United States is already running low on cruise missiles. Moreover, Saddam Hussein has managed to survive nine years of air assault without seriously modifying his behavior. Surely this was considered.

A hope in some Western capitals is that the Yugoslav people will finally get fed up with nightly air attacks and rid themselves of Milosevic and his most intimate associates in a kind of popular uprising culminating with a palace coup.

A similar hope was not fulfilled at the end of the Gulf War. Saddam still reigns supreme in Iraq despite a host of domestic enemies. As a former military boss once told me, "Hope is not a course of action."

The air campaign's strategy seems to be to destroy as much military and military-related infrastructure as possible in Yugoslavia proper. The strategy in Kosovo appears to be one of destroying lines of communication, supplies, fuel depots



and tanks and armored personnel carriers whenever they are found. Special emphasis is being placed on killing Serb forces on the ground — the forces most directly responsible for the conduct of mass murder and ethnic cleansing.

Unfortunately, an air campaign cannot stop such an ethnic cleansing program on the ground. If it was the hope of the United States and NATO to stop the slaughter of innocents, they have failed miserably. But, by not stating this as an objective, they can avoid collective responsibility for all of the horrors that have sub-

sequently occurred in Kosovo.

One thought is that the continuing air campaign might serve to deny logistical support to Serb units all over Kosovo. If tanks and armored personnel carriers lack fuel they might make inviting stationary targets, assuming the Serbs don't understand rudimentary camouflage techniques. Unfortunately, they do.

America once before attempted to stop supplies getting to enemy forces in the field through the vehicle of aerial bombardment. The place was Indochina. The attempt failed — even after dropping more bomb ton-

nage on a little country called Cambodia than was dropped on all of Japan during the War in the Pacific.

Another possibility rears its ugly head at this juncture. The military advice given to the heads of the U.S. and NATO governments would have anticipated much of what has occurred in the last few weeks. Politicians, practiced at keeping their options open, might simply and callously wait until the public outcry over current events in Kosovo is so great that "they" will demand action. Those same politicians, under these

"new and unexpected circumstances," might feel inclined to reconsider their earlier declarations of "no ground war," but only at the insistence of their polity.

Count on the fact that the West's political leaders will put a positive spin on whatever outcome occurs, and claim victory. The heads of governments can tolerate no other outcome.

It may be possible, to some unquantifiable degree, to isolate Serb forces in Kosovo from their military logistical base in Yugoslavia proper. It may also be possible that Serbs in Belgrade will conduct a popular uprising against Milosevic and his clique. It is remotely possible that Milosevic will suddenly see the light and wholeheartedly agree to the peace plan he rejected in France last month. It is also possible that a kindly stranger will offer to pay for my son's university education.

Since the objectives of the air campaign and victory remain perhaps intentionally undefined, the United States and NATO powers can take credit for anything that goes their way in the future, while avoiding responsibility for all else. This is a cynical analysis, but the facts seem to speak for themselves.

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