

ROBERT B. ADOLPH JR.

In Kosovo, American arrogance has worn out its welcome



'The people who live there [the Balkans] should have been left to fight their own battles. Their future is their responsibility.'

The late Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright, for whom the Fulbright Scholarships are named, wrote a superb book entitled "The Arrogance of Power" in 1966.

Based on a series of lectures he presented at Johns Hopkins University, this brilliant and enduring work by the longtime chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee is perhaps more important today than ever before.

The upcoming presidential election might well determine the future of the Clinton doctrine. The late senator's wisdom resonates to us across the decades. Perhaps we would do well to listen.

"What I do question is the ability of the United States or any other Western nation ... [to] create stability where there is chaos ... democracy where there is no history of it and honest government where corruption is almost a way of life."

Fulbright was discussing Vietnam. But these words could easily apply to President Clinton's foray last year into the Balkans — the war against Yugoslavia.

The senator might agree that Clinton's mistake in committing America and NATO to the long-term security of a region where the United States has no economic or security interests is predominantly based on the arrogance of power. Fulbright saw the situation in this light.

"America is now at that historical point at which a great nation is in danger of losing its perspective on what exactly is within the realm of its power and what is beyond it."

America cannot repair the tattered fabric of the Balkans. The United States possesses neither the means nor the wisdom. The Clinton administration, followed by the NATO community, has only imposed a temporary and unsteady peace through the force of arms. Recent events in the Balkans only bear this out: There is no peace in Kosovo, and the dictator Milosevic still holds sway in Yugoslavia.

There is danger in the Clinton doctrine, which has sought to selectively right wrongs around the globe by risking American lives and spending American funds in the pursuit of ostensibly humanitarian goals in places like Kosovo. Might Al Gore continue in Clinton's footsteps?

I suspect that Clinton has attempted to put America on this path — a path that is leading to

overextension. The United States could come to grief too.

Professor Sam Sarkesian of Loyola University describes this phenomenon as the American, "messianic spirit." Essentially, this spirit reflects belief that America ought to be actively involved in reshaping the world to reflect its own image.

There is no doubt that the rest of the world would prefer to pursue their own visions of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Of course, the attainment of these goals would be based upon their various beliefs and customs, and not ours.

Much of the rest of the world still views us as it did in Fulbright's day. "American strength is a reproach to their weakness, American wealth is a mockery of their poverty, American success a reminder of their failures," he wrote.

"The great majority of the human race is demanding dignity and independence, not the honor of a supine role in an American empire." The senator's prescription for this situation is a sound one. "If America has a service to perform in the world — and I believe she has — it is in large part the service of her own example."

America need not and should not take on the mantle of protector and/or savior for the world's war weary. Regrettably, violence is sometimes necessary to achieve desired ends — the establishment of a nation-state, for example, which hopefully represents the will of its people.

The issues surrounding the various Balkan conflicts are manifold and complex, but the people who live there should have been left to fight their own battles. Their future is their responsibility.

The issues that led to last year's war in Kosovo remain unresolved. Genuine peace is nowhere at hand. Soldiers still are at risk. The arrogance of power is surely at the heart of the Clinton doctrine and our continuing ill-advised commitment to the Balkans.

The upcoming presidential elections could well determine whether or not there are to be more "Kosovos" in our future. □

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