



What Winning Means

In Kosovo to stay?

BY TOM DONNELLY AND GARY SCHMITT

It's called Camp Bondsteel. The home of the U.S. Army in Kosovo, Bondsteel suddenly appears on the horizon as one drives south from Pristina, hovering enormous and alien over the raw countryside, bristling with antennae and satellite dishes and buzzing with bug-eyed Apache attack helicopters. The Army has been building Bondsteel for fourteen months, and construction will continue for years. America has come to Kosovo to stay.

To be sure, commanders at Bondsteel insist that they could pack up and be gone tomorrow, but the ten-foot earthen berm and fence ringing the eight-hundred-acre camp belies the briefings: There is no real "exit strategy." This is what victory in a Balkans war looks like. Camp Bondsteel and the dozens of other American, British, German, Italian, and NATO encampments in Kosovo were the prizes won in Operation Allied Force, that very peculiar war fought in the spring of 1999. In seventy-eight days of bombing, the United States and its principal European allies won the responsibility of running part of "the former Yugoslavia." These seventy-eight days mean years of constabulary deployment, involving tens of thousands of soldiers.

This is winning? Yes, it is, as Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon take pains to remind us in their new book, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*. Daalder and O'Hanlon make a strong case that Allied Force ended in a victory for NATO: The Serbian presi-

dent Slobodan Milosevic "unquestionably lost the war, and his defeat was overwhelming." He had to relinquish control over Kosovo and withdraw Serb forces. He failed in his efforts at ethnic cleansing, and the future political status of the province is no longer a matter in which Belgrade has much say. Indeed, Kosovo is in effect an international protectorate, under the formal administration of the U.N. and with an occupation

force of more than forty thousand NATO troops.

Yet NATO's war to save Kosovo was waged so fecklessly, and victory was won so narrowly, that politicians have

been in a rush to forget Allied Force. Despite victory, the war underlined the Clinton administration's inattention to foreign policy and lack of credibility. (Al Gore makes more of his vote in favor of the Persian Gulf War a decade ago than any role he may have had in Kosovo.) And, despite his initial commitment to fighting the war, George W. Bush continues to echo the complaints of congressional Republicans that the Balkans are a sinkhole for American military power. His likely national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, drew her most enthusiastic response from delegates at the Philadelphia convention when she asserted that "the U.S. military cannot be a global police force" or "the world's 9-1-1."

These complaints are especially ironic, for, as Daalder and O'Hanlon recall, it was President George Bush who, late in 1992, warned Milosevic in a letter that "in the event of conflict in Kosovo caused by Serbian action, the United States will be prepared to employ military force against the Serbs in Kosovo and in Serbia proper." Indeed, perhaps

the most helpful aspect of *Winning Ugly* is its scholarly memory and clarity. As befits two Brookings Institution members (Daalder also did a turn on Clinton's National Security Council as director of European affairs during the height of the Bosnia crisis), the authors are adept at pointing out the contradictions between military realities and politicians' rationalizations. They are also reasonably impartial in their judgments, subjecting the postwar rationales of the likes of national security adviser Sandy Berger and defense secretary William Cohen to penetrating analyses.

Daalder and O'Hanlon are at their best when they remind us how close we came to losing the Kosovo war. In March and April of last year, it appeared that Milosevic might prevail. As the book makes clear, there were in fact two wars for Kosovo: Milosevic's war and NATO's war. "NATO was clearly losing the first; in fact it was barely a participant in the struggle between Serb forces and the Kosovar Albanian people. It was doing better in the second, in the sense of turning up the pain and pressure on Slobodan Milosevic, but it was hardly winning that conflict either."

Ultimately, Milosevic was stopped. As *Winning Ugly* makes clear, the Serb strongman failed in his attempts to make the conflict a dispute among the great powers when the Russians abandoned him (though weakness in the West allowed Russia to posture in ways that prolonged the war, frustrated NATO's actions, and gave Milosevic reason to believe he could win). Even the mistaken bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade has proved little more than a hiccup in relations between China and the United States.

But even more decisive in Milosevic's defeat was the increasing prospect of a NATO ground invasion. In the period following NATO's fiftieth anniversary meeting in Washington in April 1999, the alliance began making serious plans to commit ground troops. The Clinton administration finally realized that it might lose the war, which, if nothing else, would have had disastrous political consequences. It might also have spelled the death of NATO.

Winning Ugly
NATO's War to Save Kosovo
by Ivo Daalder
and Michael O'Hanlon
Brookings, 360 pp., \$26.95

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Winning Ugly rightly underscores a lesson about modern warfare: Punitive airstrikes remain insufficient to compel a determined enemy to admit defeat. To achieve important political ends—and for Milosevic, the loss of Kosovo was a serious political matter—ground forces are needed to pose a threat to a rogue regime's hold on power.

Yet, for all its strengths, Daalder and O'Hanlon's book is not the final word. The full story of the war remains to be told—and, as a tantalizing series of articles on NATO by Dana Priest in the *Washington Post* last fall suggested, it will be a complex and fascinating tale. The war for Kosovo was led by largely liberal governments that came to office promising to transcend politics by forging a new, post-Cold War peace and establishing the rule of international law. For months, the alliance could not bring itself to consider Allied Force other than an exercise in coercive diplomacy. At the center of the story stands President Clinton, embroiled in a sex scandal and impeachment, indifferent to international affairs and lacking credibility in employing military force.

Moreover, *Winning Ugly* is largely silent about the region's future. As the growth of Camp Bondsteel demonstrates, Operation Allied Force didn't really win the war; it was the opening battle in a long campaign for the Balkans and all of southeastern Europe. Daalder and O'Hanlon do not connect their analysis to the larger pattern of European security or to any enduring American security interests; they are sympathetic to the Clinton administration's view that the war for Kosovo was fought largely for humanitarian purposes. In wars like Allied Force, "the immediate objective must be to create and then maintain a secure environment so that the killing will not resume. In many cases, that will be accomplishment enough." But merely stopping the killing in the Balkans has not proved enough—and as long as those who viciously exploit Serb nationalism remain in power, it will not be enough. Nor will the killing stop for long.

Moral factors and the suffering of Bosnians and Kosovar Albanians did have much to do with motivating politi-

cal leaders. But the Balkans are not Somalia. America and its allies cannot afford to walk away from the region without suffering a serious geopolitical defeat. The threat from Serbia pales in comparison to the Soviet threat, but, with Western Europe secure and much of Central Europe now in NATO, it is the sole immediate challenge to the creation of a "Europe whole and free."

This is a challenge that will not go away. In Montenegro, Milosevic continues to provoke a confrontation by offering the Montenegrins a suicidal choice between accepting changes to the Yugoslav constitution (which will lose the Montenegrins any voice in the Yugoslav federation and risk the kind of repression that the Kosovars, Bosnians, Croats, and Slovenians have suffered) and rejecting those changes (which will give Milosevic an excuse for military action against the struggling democracy). Faced with this challenge, NATO is repeating the mistakes made in Kosovo and Bosnia. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has urged Montenegrin president Milo Djukanovic to "hold his nose and agree to take part" in the federation. NATO is advertising its weakness at every opportunity: Alliance leaders admit that they have made no contingency plans to defend Montenegro, while NATO Secretary General George Robertson has been forced to beg Russian President Vladimir Putin to restrain Milosevic. The American administration's concern appears to be keeping Montenegro out of the headlines until after the November election.

America and its allies have yet to face up to the commitments they have undertaken in the Balkans. Though the burdens are relatively light (the U.S. force in the Balkans is just 5 percent of the force stationed in Europe to defend against a Soviet invasion), the failure to tie them to a serious security interest means that the American mission in the Balkans will remain tenuous and contingent, forever in search of an elusive "exit strategy." The truth is that an American exit from the Balkans would likely lead to an American exit from a position of leadership in Europe, and that would be a truly ugly defeat. ♦