

GUEST OBSERVER

By Bruce P. Jackson and Tod Lindberg

Congress Is The Key To Winning the War

Let's not console ourselves by referring to a "crisis in Kosovo," as if this were a time of fundamental uncertainty about what to do and where to go—a period in which we give ourselves license to wring our hands while we admire the problem.

There is no uncertainty about Kosovo. We know exactly what we have to do: We must win. The question is whether we have the resolve to do it. What Congress does in the next days and weeks will determine how that question is answered.

Kosovo is the defining challenge for the newly expanded, post-Cold War NATO alliance. Why Kosovo? Well, unfortunately, we do not get to choose the test that defines us. Nobody expected a 14th-century primitive to come to power just outside the perimeter of the territory we are pledged to defend as if our national territory had been attacked. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic doesn't deserve so grand a role in history as the man who framed the question about the future of the Atlantic alliance. But he has, and we will be judged by how we deal with it.

In the days since the bombing began, all the efforts to circumscribe the challenge Milosevic poses have evaporated. The administration and NATO hoped to be talking about autonomy for Kosovo, not independence. They had hoped that air power would bring Milosevic to his senses, and that ground troops would be unnecessary. They had hoped that Rambouillet could provide the framework for a peace-keeping operation, and that the unpleasant business of making a peace would not fall to NATO.

These hopes were not unreasonable; but they didn't work out. The false comfort of all such "Red Lines" is gone now. Milosevic's next destination can't be a chateau in France. It has to be more along the lines of the dock at the war crimes tribunal in the Hague.

The good news, such as it is, of the first week of air strikes on Serbian targets is that—notwithstanding a situation on the ground unfolding in conformance with our worst fears rather than our fondest hopes—there was no impulse within the alliance to retreat. On the contrary. Opinion within NATO has been moving in the direction of: whatever it takes.

Here's where Congress must come in. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) had it right, early on, in saying: Now that we're in it, we have to win it. Others from both parties have also spoken out with the same message.

Congress may be in recess, but we will be ill-served if Senators and House Members use their absence from Washington as an opportunity to remain silent. They must step forward, sooner rather than later. Congress' responsibility now is to demonstrate that there is an unshakable, bipartisan political mandate in this country for NATO military commanders to do whatever is militarily required to win.

It can't wait until Senators and Members return to take up legislative business; it must happen now and by acclamation. They must urge that all military instruments necessary to achieve victory be put in the hands of the supreme allied commander, Europe—whose charge it will be, then, to deliver that victory.

The administration was maladroit, to put it mildly, in laying the political groundwork for this Balkan war. But Congress can and must make up for it. Without a conspicuous Congressional demonstration of a political mandate, there will be those who cite the absence of such a mandate as a reason not to persist—and therefore, as the reason for NATO's and America's failure.

Democrats and Republicans alike ought to refrain from carping, second-guessing and saying, "I told you so." There is already an unseemly

amount of that coming from anonymous Clinton administration sources seeking to blame some other part of the administration for the horrific early days. Once we have won, we'll have plenty of time for recriminating. To indulge in it now risks turning Operation Allied Force into a case study in the perversity of a preference for recrimination over resolve— as if we would be happier in defeat, so long as we get the blame apportioned correctly, than in victory.

More than the fate of the Kosovar Albanians is at stake here. More, even, than stability or peace in the Balkans. We are in a fight to the death for what we and our 18 allies believe in, the things we value in common. NATO as a military force must now show that it can effectively fight for those things to the earliest possible victory. NATO as a political community must demonstrate the determination to see the fight through, come what may.

The role of Congress in that show of determination is immense. As are the stakes.

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