
THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The war in Kosovo is going badly. The Clinton administration has compounded its initial disastrous misjudgment of Slobodan Milosevic with an inadequate military strategy driven more by fear of negative polls than by the imperative of victory. THE WEEKLY STANDARD has learned that General Wesley Clark has told senior administration officials that NATO can't win without ground troops, but the Clinton administration continues to quake at the thought of a ground war.

One bit of good news, however, has emerged from this crisis. The war has usefully illuminated the fault-lines in elite opinion about the goals of American foreign policy and the purposes of American power in the post-Cold War world.

On one side is, if we may say so, a rather motley combination of neo-isolationists who simply don't believe the United States should much concern itself with overseas matters not directly threatening the American homeland; of Clinton despisers who don't trust the administration to do any serious thing seriously (not a ridiculous position, but one that implies an utterly passive foreign policy for the next two years); and of ultra-sophisticated "realist" intellectuals who have divined that America has no interests in the Balkans and who claim that to combat Milosevic's aggression and brutality is merely to indulge in soft-headed liberal internationalism.

And just who are these self-indulgent, soft-headed liberal internationalists who, in the words of one young sage, "applaud America's intervention in a place like Kosovo . . . because they see plainly that we have no national interests there"? Well, they include, in no particular order: Jeane Kirkpatrick, Caspar Weinberger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, Richard Perle, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, John McCain, Bob Dole, Richard Lugar, Chuck Hagel, Chris Cox, George W. Bush, and Elizabeth Dole. All have called for victory in the war against Milosevic. All have insisted that ground troops may be necessary to achieve that victory. All understand what the sophisticates do not: that there are profound moral reasons for our involvement in Kosovo, yes; but that there are profound national interests at stake, as well.

Some of these interests concern the future of NATO: As Kissinger says, "NATO cannot survive if it now abandons the campaign without achieving its objective of ending the massacres." Some of these interests concern the credibility of American power against adversaries from Baghdad to Pyongyang. As Brzezinski notes, "It is no exaggeration to say that

NATO's failure to prevail would mean both the end of NATO as a credible alliance and the undermining of America's global leadership." And some of these interests concern the fundamental question of the kind of world we want to live in—where peace and civilized behavior reign, especially in strategically vital parts of the world like Europe. As the *Wall Street Journal* wrote, a victory against Milosevic will "set back the forces of irrationality that threaten the coming millennium, establishing the precedent that somewhere, sometime the world will draw a line that barbarity will not be allowed to cross."

Are these American interests that are worth pursuing or not? For most of the post-Cold War decade, this question has been avoided. Kosovo has brought it to the fore. At the beginning of the Cold War, there was a "great debate," which, happily, was won by the hard-headed internationalists. They understood that American moral and strategic interests often converge. It is too early to know who will win today's debate, but one thing is heartening: A creditable group of major political figures understands that the principles of Truman and Reagan remain the best guide in our new and increasingly perilous post-Cold War world.

—Robert Kagan and William Kristol, for the Editors