

VICTORY

Slobodan Milosevic's capitulation to U.S. and NATO demands represents a triumph for American power and principle, for the U.S.-led alliance, for President Clinton, and for the small but stalwart group of Republicans, led by John McCain, who supported the war from beginning to end. Assuming that Serbia complies with the terms of the agreement, which appears likely, this victory may prove to be the most important U.S. foreign policy achievement since the Gulf War. At the very least, it will have demonstrated, once again, that American power, even when less than artfully applied, is a potent force for international peace, stability, and human decency. The victory demonstrates as well the vitality and cohesiveness of the NATO alliance in the post-Cold War era. Perhaps most important, the victory should send a message to would-be aggressors that, even under the leadership of a relatively timid and inattentive president, the United States and its allies can summon the will and the force to do them grievous harm.

It is easy enough to criticize the errors committed in conducting the military campaign. We leveled many of those criticisms ourselves in the course of the war. It is also important to remember that numerous horrors of the past few months, and indeed the past few years, could have been avoided had President Clinton or his predecessor taken decisive action against Milosevic before he brought the Balkans to catastrophe. But it is important that we not lose sight of what has been accomplished. The credibility of the United States and its allies, once in jeopardy, has been restored. Contrary to predictions, the NATO alliance was strengthened, not weakened, by the war. Contrary to predictions, the U.S.-Russian relationship was not destroyed by NATO's actions. It has, in fact, been improved: One casualty of the war was the anti-American Yevgeny Primakov as prime minister of Russia. And finally, although many problems remain in the former Yugoslavia,

and perhaps always will remain, those who claimed that the United States could do nothing to improve the situation have been proved wrong.

Why did Milosevic surrender? Clearly, the bombing campaign, for all its flaws, took a heavy toll. It also appears that the renewed activity of the Kosovo Liberation Army, even in its weakened state, helped shift the strategic dynamic in Kosovo. When Serb forces concentrated to beat back the KLA, they left themselves vulnerable to U.S. air attack and were severely damaged. The experience must have been sobering for Milosevic and his military commanders. There can be little doubt, as well, that Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott's success in bringing the Russians around to endorse almost all of NATO's demands was critical. The Russians ultimately abandoned Milosevic in the interest of maintaining good ties with the United States and the West. This left Milosevic in a state of complete diplomatic isolation. His indictment by the International War Crimes Tribunal probably helped, too, since Milosevic had reason to fear that if NATO decided to launch a ground attack, he might well find himself in the dock at the Hague.

Finally, the threat of a ground invasion must have had a decisive impact on Milosevic. While he may have believed he could weather the air attack indefinitely, increasing talk of a ground war helped him understand that there was no light at the end of his tunnel. It is no coincidence that Milosevic caved in to NATO just as the president was meeting his top military advisers to discuss ground options. This is why it was a serious mistake when Clinton early in the war ruled out the use of ground troops. And this is why much of the credit for the eventual victory must go to Tony Blair and to McCain, both of whom played key roles in keeping the threat of a ground war alive. Over two months ago, when this war began, we acknowledged that the "air campaign may be more successful than panicky critics are now fore-

IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO LOSE SIGHT OF WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. THE CREDIBILITY OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ALLIES HAS BEEN RESTORED.

casting,” and we expressed the hope it would be. But we also insisted that “it is irresponsible to rule out the possibility of ground troops,” and so it was. Bringing the possibility of ground troops back onto the table in the last few weeks was key to victory.

Now that the war appears to be won, it is important not to lose the peace. We have argued from the beginning that the final goal of our policy in the Balkans should be the removal of Milosevic from power. Now that goal is within reach. The Clinton administration and our NATO allies must insist that Serbia not receive reconstruction aid so long as Milosevic remains in office. We should encourage the Serbs to remove their brutal leaders, who have

cost them so much misery, and we should seek to bring Milosevic before the war crimes tribunal. If this happens, we can offer a democratic Serbia the chance for full reintegration into the West, with all the economic and political benefits that brings. The overthrow of Milosevic would represent an even greater triumph than was achieved last week. It would offer the surest guarantee of a real solution to the Balkan crisis, and would rid Europe of the last vestige of this century’s tyranny and brutality. This would be the full and complete victory that the peoples of the area, NATO, and the United States deserve.

—*William Kristol and Robert Kagan, for the Editors*