

# Victims and victors: reflections on the Kosovo War

LAWRENCE FREEDMAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Both the ‘CNN effect,’ whereby images revealing large-scale suffering push governments into humanitarian interventions, and the ‘bodybags effect’, whereby images of casualties pull them away, were evident in the Kosovo War, as was the ‘bullying effect,’ whereby the use of excessive force risks draining away public support for interventions. Although Serbs deliberately tried to present themselves as victims, however, the harsh methods used to suppress Kosovar Albanian aspirations ensured that it was they who appeared as the victims. The Serb effort was also counter-productive in that it made the KLA harder, instead of easier, to defeat.

The study of international relations has always been animated by the issue of war. The original hope, after the First World War, was that the systematic study of the international system could produce guidance for corrective action. This led to the various schemes for supernational organizations and the enforcement of international law that E.H. Carr came to describe as ‘utopian’ as he made his case for more ‘realism’ as the Second World War approached.<sup>2</sup>

Realism in this sense was a matter of temperament and not a full-blown theory. It was a commonsensical approach arguing the need to reflect on how international politics was conducted in practice rather than speculate on how it might be conducted in an ideal world. It did not display great theoretical sophistication, and those who later attempted to turn realism into a grand theory left themselves open to what have become familiar criticisms of a statecentric approach and an inability to look beyond the behaviour of great powers. The commonsensical approach that one should take the world as one finds it is obviously open to the epistemological critique that it depends what one is looking for. The integrity of realism is not damaged by accepting that reality is always constructed in some way, so that the forms of various constructions—and the interaction between them—is pertinent to any study of international affairs. Certainly any analyst who looks only for the national interest and dismisses normative issues as irrelevant is being more dogmatic than realistic.

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the E.H. Carr Lecture delivered at the University of Aberystwyth on 29 April 1999. As this lecture was delivered in the middle of the events it was seeking to describe, I have by necessity updated it. I trust those who heard the original version will agree that this process has not led to a major shift in my position.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent, sympathetic assessment of Carr see Michael Cox, ‘Will the real E.H. Carr please stand up?’, *International Affairs*, 75:3 (July 1999), pp. 643–53 and his forthcoming edited volume, *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

### Interests and values

In the current international climate, where Western governments have discretion over the wars they fight and need not be driven by fears of some rising, radical great power, the aims of any war have come increasingly to be described in normative terms. It was the extremity of the human suffering caused as a deliberate act of state policy that provided the justification for the Kosovo War. The governments involved felt under no obligation to demonstrate a close link between war aims and the national interest. In the past governments always claimed that their wars were fought for a higher purpose, but this tended to get merged into some concept of the national interest. During the two world wars it was asserted that the survival of Democracy and Freedom depended on the survival of the Nation, but for the moment democracy and freedom had to be qualified for the sake of national survival. The strategic calculus was dominated by the need to resist, and if possible defeat, a hostile power. With national survival no longer at stake, wars are now fought in the name of a better world—as vital an interest as can be imagined but also one that demands a clear framework of values. In his judicious evaluation of the Kosovo War, warning of the dangers of using it to develop grand doctrines of humanitarian intervention, Adam Roberts observes that the NATO operation ‘will contribute to a trend towards seeing certain humanitarian and legal norms inescapably bound up with conceptions of national interest’.<sup>3</sup>

War in the name of morality provides as many reasons for historical shudders as war in the name of self-interest, for at least the latter may be easier to call off when self-interest calls for compromise. A compromise between truth and error is normally harder to discern. This is why the tough old realists of the right remained highly dubious of the Kosovo War. Old leftists, who simply could not bring themselves to accept that NATO was acting on the side of the oppressed, tended to dismiss NATO claims of a humanitarian war as a smokescreen for a crude exercise in power politics, although few were ever successful in explaining the nature of the alliance’s interest in one of the poorest and inhospitable parts of Europe. In 1991 there were many knowing remarks that the United States would not have acted on behalf of Kuwait in 1991 had it grown broccoli rather than pumped oil. Kosovo, however, has no economic or strategic value to anybody beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

The cynical analysis of motive always underestimated the strategic importance of the normative dimension. Britain was only able to sustain domestic consensus and international support in 1982 over the Falkland Islands because Argentina had violated the principles of democracy and non-aggression. It was certainly not because of material self-interest. It was not for nothing the war was described as being ‘like two bald men arguing over a comb’.<sup>4</sup>

The declared purpose of the 1991 Gulf War was to uphold the principle of non-aggression, central to the most traditional concept of international order. While strategic interests in the oil reserves of Kuwait as well as Iraq’s nuclear weapons

<sup>3</sup> Adam Roberts, ‘NATO’s “Humanitarian War” over Kosovo’, *Survival*, 41:3 (Autumn 1999), p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> The argument that the Falklands was about democratic principles, in the context of the debate about democracy and belligerence, is developed in Lawrence Freedman, ‘How Did the Democratic Process Affect Britain’s Decision to Reoccupy the Falkland Islands’, in Miriam Fendius Elman (ed.), *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 235–66.

programme and hegemonic ambitions were hardly irrelevant, it was the norm of anti-aggression that allowed the US-led coalition to gain the backing of the UN Security Council. We might also note that attempts by Western governments, and in particular the United States, to engage in military operations for crude and unconvincing strategic reasons, without attending to the normative dimension, have run into trouble. Vietnam was an obvious example, but so too was the support given to anti-communist groups in Central America during the 1980s.

The Kosovo War, more than most, was framed in terms of competing moralities—intervention against atrocities versus non-interference in internal affairs—and competing immoralities—strategic bombing versus ethnic cleansing.<sup>5</sup> These moral arguments had an instrumental aspect: the principle of non-interference is one that has been judged essential to an orderly international system, while the clinching argument against strategic bombing has always been that it does not work, that it imposes terrible pain for no obvious benefit. Equally, whatever the motives that impel states into war, once they are committed the stakes soon include the impact of the war's conduct and outcome on the credibility of commitments and future power relationships.

### CNN and other effects

These arguments are important, if for no other reason than that as democratic societies have to be persuaded to go to war they can also be persuaded to get out of war. Since the Vietnam War it has almost been taken for granted that public opinion in Western countries, and in particular the United States, is fragile and easily turned. Casualties have been assumed to be the key to this fragility, and support for their impact has been found in the precipitate American withdrawals from peace-keeping missions in Beirut in 1984 and Somalia a decade later. Most research would suggest that the public does not harbour a total intolerance of casualties, but rather finds them unacceptable if suffered for no purpose. Casualties are always a source of grief and anxiety, but they begin to loom larger as a political factor when there are wider reasons to be frustrated or alarmed at the general course of a war. Because of the way that this is often expressed—'wait until the bodybags come home'—we might call this the 'bodybags effect'. This point has been expressed simply by John Mueller: when the question was put how many American lives was it worth to save hundreds of thousands of Somalis, the answer came back none.<sup>6</sup> The position is not, however, as straightforward as this. James Burk, for example, looking at the two hardest cases

<sup>5</sup> These issues were ventilated in an excellent debate between Robert Skidelsky and Michael Ignatieff, 'Is Military Intervention over Kosovo Justified?', *Prospect* (June 1999), pp. 16–21.

<sup>6</sup> John Mueller, 'Policy Principles for Unthreatened Wealth-Seekers', *Foreign Policy*, 102 (Spring 1996). See also his work on the Gulf War, which also suggests that support was dependent on keeping casualties down. John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Edward Luttwak has described casualty intolerance as a secular trend rather than a conditional response. See his 'Towards Post-Heroic Warfare' and 'A Post-Heroic Military Policy', in *Foreign Affairs*, 74:3 (May–June 1995), pp. 109–22 and 75:4 (July–August 1996), pp. 33–44.

has explained the decline in public support as much on divisions within the civilian elite responsible for the war as casualty intolerance.<sup>7</sup>

There is, in addition, another theory, of the so-called CNN effect. This postulates that public opinion can be so moved by images of suffering humanity that it demands action, even where inappropriate. As the Bush administration set in motion operation Restore Hope in Somalia in December 1992, an American columnist warned of how the television images of desperate people had overwhelmed analysis. 'How can ifs and buts compete with the image of a mother and child dying before our eyes?'<sup>8</sup> This is often assumed to be the major factor behind humanitarian intervention. In a much reported speech as the Bosnian crisis began to dominate the headlines, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd observed that the novelty lay not in 'mass rape, the shooting of civilians, in war crimes, in ethnic cleansing, in the burning of towns and villages', but 'that a selection of these tragedies is now visible within hours to people around the world. People reject and resent what is going on because they know it more visibly than before'.<sup>9</sup> Even when appalled by evidence of atrocities there are limits to what governments can do, collectively or individually, to remedy matters.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, when governments are caught off guard or unsure, the impact of striking images and a groundswell of opinion can shape the responses of policymakers. This conclusion is similar to that reached by Burk on casualties. Civilian elites cannot, of course, be indifferent to trends in public opinion, or what they anticipate might become a trend, but they can underestimate their ability to lead opinion if the government remains united and sounds convincing.

Governments, of course, worry that once action is taken the 'bodybags effect' will overtake the 'CNN effect' as available military means do not quite match up to the political task. Moreover, the CNN effect can be double-edged. Military action in the first instance, and perhaps in the last, tends to cause more suffering than it relieves, especially if it takes the form of an air campaign. While opinion in a belligerent country may be able to cope with this incongruity, it may be more problematic for spectators. Most operations these days are multinational in nature, and require the sponsorship of an international organization, preferably the United Nations. So account must be taken of the impression being made on the wider international community. These issues become even more important when there can be no guarantee that a war can be settled by a decisive battle. In these circumstances

<sup>7</sup> He notes that in neither the Lebanon nor the Somali case did sudden, unexpected casualties cause the public to withdraw support, and that in the case of Somalia support was already declining when the US Rangers got killed. James Burk, 'Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: Assessing the Casualties Hypothesis', *Political Science Quarterly*, 114:1 (1999), pp. 53–78. See also Deborah D. Avant, 'Are Reluctant Warriors Out of Control?' *Security Studies*, 6 (Winter 1996–7), pp. 51–90.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Goodman, cited in Miles Hudson, and John Stanier, *War and the Media*, revised edn. (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 256.

<sup>9</sup> *Times*, 18 August 1992, cited in Martin Bell, *In Harm's Way* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995), p. 137. It should be noted that his successor, Robin Cook, accepted that an awareness of tragedy brought with it a responsibility for a response. 'The fact that we are witnesses in our sitting-rooms to these events requires us to take responsibility for our reactions to such breaches of human rights'. *Times*, 18 July 1997, cited in Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, p. 317.

<sup>10</sup> See Nik Gowing, *Real-time Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does it Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decisions?* Working Paper (Cambridge, MA: John F Kennedy School of Government, 1994), and a shorter version in Nik Gowing, 'Real-time TV Coverage from War: Does It Make or Break Government Policy?', *Bosnia by Television*, James Gow, Richard Paterson and Alison Preston (eds.) (London: British Film Institute, 1996).

victory is more likely to come to the side with the greatest staying power, which involves resolve and political cohesion as well as material resources.

Piers Robinson has demonstrated that attempts to pin down the CNN effect have yet to provide a convincing demonstration of its existence.<sup>11</sup> This is not surprising. Governments respond to a variety of influences, of which strong surges in public sentiment are but one. The claim that the effect is likely to be most pronounced when other influences are weak or neutralize each other has a *prima facie* plausibility, and appears to be confirmed by those involved in some of the more celebrated instances of the effect at work, such as the sudden adoption of the 'safe havens' policy for Iraqi Kurds in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war.<sup>12</sup> This particular case also indicates the importance of a strong media presence and terrible events for them to witness.<sup>13</sup>

As with the 'bodybags effect', the 'CNN effect' therefore will be most pronounced when uncertainty has crept into the heart of government over the proper direction of policy. In both cases, however, the effects may have come to grow in importance through anticipation. Politicians—and the media—may believe them to be relevant even though the empirical evidence is less than clear cut. Notwithstanding the possibility that the two propositions for which these terms are shorthands—that images revealing large-scale suffering push governments into 'doing something' from which images exposing the cost of that 'something' pull them away—have been endowed with more credibility than they deserve, they may have come increasingly to shape strategy.

This appears to have been what happened with Kosovo. NATO countries had been on this particular case for some time and had been attempting since the spring of 1998 to prevent the sort of calamity that might prompt demands for drastic action. As shall be discussed later, once it became evident that the calamity was arriving then they accepted that they had to act, initially in the hope of stopping the Serb campaign against the Kosovar Albanians and then, when that failed, with the intention of forcing a Serb retreat. The influence of the 'bodybag' effect has been confirmed in all accounts of American policymaking on Kosovo. It explains the extraordinary caution when it came to risking the lives of servicemen and women in combat. The most obvious example of this came with President Clinton's reluctance to commit ground troops, but it was also evident in the avoidance of low altitude air strikes and holding back on the use of Apache helicopters.

Kosovo also revealed a third effect, which we might call 'the bullying effect.' This is a reflection of the West's superior military strength, especially in air power. Air power doctrine has come increasingly to stress both the possibility and virtues of precision military strikes, allowing for military targets to be hit while civil society

<sup>11</sup> Piers Robinson, 'The CNN Effect', *Review of International Studies*, 25:2 (April 1999), pp. 301–10. The original CNN effect, it might be noted, referred to the ubiquity of the channel (so that all sides were using the same information source) as much as to the particulars of its effects. The term itself originated during the Gulf War and was naturally promoted by CNN's owner, Ted Turner. See T. Allen, F. Berry and N. Polmar, *CNN: War in the Gulf* (Atlanta: Turner Broadcasting, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Jennings of ABC Television has observed: 'Political leadership trumps good television every time'. In Philip Seib, *Headline Diplomacy* (London: Praeger, 1997), p. 135.

<sup>13</sup> A vicious campaign had been waged against the Iraqi Kurds by Saddam Hussein in 1988, culminating in the chemical attack on the city of Halabjah. The explanation for the failure of this to elicit a response may be the absence of the Western media but also the fact that Western policy at the time involved a form of constructive engagement with Iraq.

can stay relatively unscathed. This sets a standard against which air strikes are judged. Any attacks which inflict significant civil casualties, whether or not intended, can cast doubt on the competence of those responsible, but also on whether the objectives of the war are worth the costs involved in seeking to pursue them. The concern of NATO with the 'bodybags effect' increased its dependence upon air power and thus the risks of a 'bullying effect.' Furthermore, as with the bodybags and CNN effects, the bullying effect grew in significance in the absence of countervailing factors. The primary test of the air campaign could be presented as being to coerce Belgrade to cease its campaign in Kosovo and withdraw its forces. Without much evidence that this was close to realization, the secondary objective of avoiding undue damage to civil society gained increasing attention.

Evidence of concern over the bullying effect can be seen in the advice given to NATO during the war on how to present its case to the media by the Prime Minister's Chief Press Officer, Alastair Campbell.<sup>14</sup> After the war he criticised Western reporters who had stayed in Belgrade for, in effect, presenting the Yugoslav case by showing the most negative consequences of the air campaign (in terms of both popular resistance as well as 'collateral' damage). Many reporters complained that this misrepresented their activities, in terms of the independence of their commentaries, the risks many took in attempting to get into Kosovo to report atrocities, and the fact that the civilian damage they described was real and that the public in the West had a right to know what was being done in their name.

The media, it should be stressed, is not an independent and monolithic actor, wilfully deciding the fate of governments and the great issues of war and peace on a whim. It is fragmented and diffuse. Some elements are clearly working to their own political agendas, but the overall influence on public debate is likely to stem less from overt bias than the demands of ratings and circulation. There is an incessant need for striking visual images, immediate accounts of unfolding events and 'stories' with which to engage and hold the attention of readers and viewers. This provides a singular framework with which to evaluate strategy and tactics, and requires from governments and the armed services an increasingly sophisticated sense of how to manipulate the media to ensure that they win what is now normally described as the 'propaganda war'.<sup>15</sup>

In the propaganda war, the deadlines are set by television schedules and first editions as much as enemy movements and diplomatic engagements. Surprise attack means preemption by an enemy press release, reinforced by the visits to bomb sites or captured territory by reporters allowed to stay in the enemy capital precisely for this purpose. A poor defence means getting caught by unexplained discrepancies and self-contradiction. The credibility of the commander is determined in the television studio as much as on the battlefield. It is no good being able to motivate servicemen and women to accept the hazards of combat if you cannot motivate an otherwise non-participating public to back them in opinion polls.

A situation in which every military move must first be checked with a focus group is a caricature, but not so much that it can be readily dismissed. Even when pre-

<sup>14</sup> Alastair Campbell, 'Communications Lessons for NATO, the Military and the Media', *RUSI Journal* (August 1999).

<sup>15</sup> See the insightful article by Jean Seaton, 'Serbia, "ethnic" war and the media', *Political Quarterly*, 70.3 (July–September 1999), in which she observes that the 'media and public opinion are the territory in which the battle for intervention is fought', p. 261.

paring to lead public opinion, governments must always have a sense of what the political market can sustain. For NATO there were nineteen individual markets that had to be taken into account. Precisely because the material stakes in the Kosovo War were minor, the moral stakes were of special importance. They had to be sufficient not just to win the balance of argument over whether the fault for the conflict lay with Serbs or Kosovar Albanians, but also to justify the particular strategy adopted to win the war. Here lay the moral paradox of the Kosovo War, for it was always easier to proclaim the morality of the ends pursued than of the means deployed.

In their own ways the bodybags, CNN and bullying effects turn on the presentation of the human costs of war, and in particular the nature of victimhood. A yearning for a victimless war is natural, but in its absence then all these effects suggest that the manipulation of images of victimhood can play an important part in any strategy. This article is concerned with the strategies employed by belligerents in their efforts to influence the Western political debate over whether there should be intervention in a conflict and what form it might take by considering the 'strategy of the victim' as developed in the Balkans and employed in Kosovo.

### **The strategy of the victim**

If it is not possible to win in a set-piece military confrontation there are four possible options. The first is to recognize the fact and seek to appease the stronger party. The second is to resort to irregular warfare, avoiding set-piece confrontations and seeking instead to harass the enemy, denying him effective control over the disputed territory and imposing sufficient casualties to undermine his commitment. The third is to seek ways of imposing disproportionate costs on the enemy by means of terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. Fourth, there is the strategy of the victim.

NATO was clearly assuming at the start of the war that Belgrade would seek to appease the alliance's superior strength. This turned out not to be the case. As for the second approach, Belgrade wished it to be assumed that it had a serious capacity for irregular warfare. Its credibility in this regard can be traced back to the partisan war against the Germans during the Second World War and then the doctrine devised during the Cold War years for dealing with a possible occupation by Warsaw Pact forces. Units in Kosovo made elaborate preparations to implement this strategy in the event of a land campaign by NATO. Serb capacity in this regard may have had a deterrent effect on NATO's political leaders who were clearly loath to experiment with land warfare except under the most favourable conditions.<sup>16</sup>

The threat of terror or weapons of mass destruction, which looms so large in any discussion of Iraq's strategic options, did not figure significantly in this conflict. This

<sup>16</sup> It has been argued that the war-time campaign has been mythologized, by overstating the quality of the German divisions that were held down while understating the extent to which much of the fighting was fratricidal. Certainly no great bravery was exhibited by Serb units during the Croatian and Bosnian wars, where they normally relied upon long-distant firepower to achieve their objectives against opponents who were less well-equipped, and with the aim of terrorizing people out of their homes. Their performance in the more equal battles of 1995 was not impressive.

is in itself of interest given American preoccupations with 'asymmetric threats' of this sort. It is the type of response the West appears to fear most. Yet, as Iraq has found, it is not so easy to make credible threats in practice, especially against countries that could, if they wish, trump any degree of destructiveness actually inflicted. Some prewar hints from Belgrade that it would be able to retaliate with air strikes against its neighbours, although only with conventional weaponry, did not lead to any serious actions.

This leaves the strategy of the victim. The antecedents of this strategy are essentially Gandhian. Gandhi's great achievement was to turn a core morality into a powerful political weapon. It involved posing a challenge to the authority of the state through civil disobedience rather than violence. It worked because of the self-doubt it engendered within the imperial power as people denied political rights risked all to obtain them with dignity and without hate. With the British Raj this worked, as it did later for Martin Luther King when he campaigned for civil rights in the United States. The point that has often been made about these campaigns is that they depended for their success on being able to touch a moral tradition within the target political system. Those most affected by their campaigns—in India itself or the American South—were less impressed. The key decisions were made in London and Washington. In this sense the campaign can be understood as an appeal to a higher authority to exert influence over a repressive local power structure.

This is obviously a limited view of what has been attempted and achieved using non-violent strategies,<sup>17</sup> but it does serve as a starting point for an understanding of the general role of the strategy of the victim in international politics. For small weak states, survival in a hostile local environment normally depends on getting a more powerful protector. The proposition that great powers should provide such protection as a matter of course to the weak has been the basis of schemes for collective security and international order. States unwilling to rely on a collective response to acts of local aggression have tended to be more interested in alliances or else they have just accepted their lot and opted for appeasement.

It is not only weak states who feel vulnerable and insecure. So often do individuals and minority groups. In recent years there has been a growing feeling within the Western world that gross violations of human rights and oppression of whole groups should be the business of the international community, even if this contradicts the principle of 'non-interference in internal affairs'. President Chirac of France observed of Kosovo in October 1998: 'the humanitarian situation constitutes a reason that can justify an exception to a rule, however strong and firm it might be'.<sup>18</sup> In a major speech in Chicago in April 1999, Prime Minister Tony Blair observed that the principle of non-interference should not be jettisoned too readily, but then went on to propose that it must be qualified in important respects by opposition to genocide and oppression.<sup>19</sup>

An awareness of this sentiment has been used by those suffering under authoritarian regimes attempting to create political space for themselves. They rely on

<sup>17</sup> Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 7 October 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Tony Blair, 'Doctrine of International Community', Chicago, 22 April 1999, <http://www.number-10/public/info/index.html>

getting the attention of the international media, which is why the universal language of protest is increasingly English.<sup>20</sup>

In the summer of 1991 Croatia declared independence, against international advice, and faced immediate attack from the Yugoslav Army. If the army had acted as the instrument of the integrity of the state, stressing multinationalism as against the ethnonationalism of the Croats, then the international community would have been hard put to object. The Croat leadership had adopted many of the symbols of the wartime, pro-Nazi Ustasha and had discriminated against Serbs in its constitution. However the Army acted as the instrument of the Serbs, and this both appalled the outside world and provided justification for the Croatian drive for independence.

In August 1991 the siege began of the Croatian town of Vukovar, with 45,000 inhabitants. The siege lasted three months, eventually took the lives of more than 2,000 people and reduced the city to rubble. While this was underway, Serb forces took a third of the country, though demographically they represented just over 12 per cent. By November almost a quarter of a million people had become refugees from Serb-held territory and the ancient city of Dubrovnik was shelled.

Croatia sought international intervention. To do this it depended greatly on its victim status. In this it was helped by the presence of the international media, who soon picked up on the images of distressed people being shelled out of their homes. In these circumstances, 'media manipulation became not so much a complement for military engagement as a substitute for it'.<sup>21</sup> Of particular importance to the Croat case was the siege of Vukovar. The government in Zagreb made no attempt to defend it, sending minimal material support—much to the irritation of the city's defenders. In the end the strategy worked. The indignation that built up, not least in Germany, meant that recognition was granted even though Croatia did not then fulfil the European Community's own human rights criteria. It had to accept within its border a 'Republic of Serb Krajina', its status apparently guaranteed by UN peacekeeping forces. So much had the Serbian community managed to cast itself in a negative light, however, that it received precious little international sympathy when, almost four years later, the Croats retook Krajina, thereby creating almost 200,000 Serb refugees.

A lesson might have been drawn from this, that international support for the currently persecuted and recently dispossessed is not unconditional but is related to their own past behaviour. The case of the Croatian Serbs was not helped by the fact that they were caught up in 1995 with the denouement of the third war of Yugoslavia's dissolution, in Bosnia. The government in Sarajevo was more genuinely multinational, its strategy up to the Serb offensive of early 1992 had been non-provocative, and its forces did resist where they could, against hopeless odds. When it obtained independence it had not unreasonably hoped for international protection, given the circumstances, and this was not forthcoming. One of the Bosnian

<sup>20</sup> Again we should not exaggerate the novelty. Associated Press photographer Malcolm Browne's photograph of a Buddhist monk's self-immolation in Saigon in May 1963, a carefully staged event, helped to convince the Kennedy Administration of President Diem's political ineptitude, and sent in motion the political struggle that concluded with a coup and assassination. See Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> James Gow and James Tilsey, 'The Strategic Imperative for Media Management', *Bosnia by Television*, James Gow, Richard Paterson and Alison Preston (eds.) (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 107.

government's complaints was that an arms embargo prevented it from escaping from victim status.<sup>22</sup>

As the conflict, along with the human tragedy it engendered, deepened, Sarajevo worked to shame the international community into sorting out the mess, or at least giving the Bosnian government the wherewithal to do it themselves. In this process the Bosnians also sought to use the media. It has been alleged that in a number of instances they fired on themselves in order to stimulate Western interest in their plight. Even in those cases where, after investigation, the Serbs were held responsible, such as the notorious market square massacre in Sarajevo in February 1994, the Bosnians added to the impact by including among the casualties people with old wounds, hoping (in this case successfully) to persuade NATO to start threatening air strikes against the Serbs.<sup>23</sup> For those in charge of the international organizations operating on the ground, including UNPROFOR, this eroded sympathy for people who, they felt, were constantly playing with the truth in order to influence world opinion. It encouraged the perception that 'they are all as bad as each other', and mutual irritation as local UN commanders were obliged to challenge the accounts of their local interlocutors.<sup>24</sup>

In military engagements deception is often an act of tactical good sense, and few involved in desperate struggles have any compunction about extending that principle to media engagements. This is part of the propaganda war. Belligerents can still get it badly wrong, by conveying inappropriate messages, or betraying attitudes that others find offensive, or contradicting themselves or being found out in a big lie. Much depends on the vigilance of individual journalists, and their ability, at times, to resist the simple temptation to identify with the victim. It also requires editorial judgement. The tendency to present conflicts as simple matters of innocent victims and vicious bullies risks ignoring complexities. When Bosnian Croats also cynically moved against Muslims, destroying the city of Mostar in the process, this became too much for some news editors, who had presented the war as a straightforward case of Serb aggression and so simply failed to mention the Croat role.<sup>25</sup>

While the CNN effect may not always be evident in an immediate response by governments to evidence of great human tragedies, the cumulative effect of reports from areas of conflict become part of the mental framework within which a developing conflict is comprehended and assessed by policymakers. The net effect of the Croatian and Bosnian wars was to leave the Serbs stigmatized. This was not wholly unfair given the history of Yugoslavia's dissolution and their superior military strength, as the bullies and instigators of the practices of 'ethnic cleansing' (a chilling term introduced in Croatia).<sup>26</sup> It also left the international community, and

<sup>22</sup> See Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of 'Ethnic Cleansing'* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), ch. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Gow and Tilsey, 'Strategic Imperative', pp. 109–110. For an analysis of the same episode, as part of a general critique on the loss of journalistic objectivity during the conflict, see John Burns, 'The Media as Impartial Observers or Protagonists', in *Bosnia by Television*, pp. 96–7.

<sup>24</sup> This is reflected in the memoir of General Sir Michael Rose, *Fighting for Peace: Bosnia 1994* (London: The Harvill Press, 1998). For a critique see Michael Williams, 'Perceptions of the War in Bosnia', *International Affairs*, 75:2 (April 1999), pp. 377–82.

<sup>25</sup> The classic example of this was the *Christian Science Monitor* picture of January 1994 showing Mostar bridge destroyed and with the caption blaming Bosnian Serbs rather than Croats. Burns, 'Media as Impartial Observer', p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, 'A Short History of Ethnic Cleansing', *Foreign Affairs*, 72:3 (1992), who gives it a context in Balkans history.

particular NATO countries, dissatisfied with their own role. They had managed to contain the Bosnian conflict and bring it to a sort of conclusion, but only after being witness to terrible suffering—and Dayton hardly constituted a ‘lasting settlement’. This legacy has to be borne in mind in considering the development of the Kosovo War.

### Civil war in Kosovo

The basis for NATO action against Yugoslavia was that Serb forces engaged in a campaign of such brutality and ruthlessness, in order to depopulate an unruly province, that conscience dictated action. Yugoslavia had the norm of non-interference in internal affairs on its side. As with Slovenia and Croatia, it could claim that it was acting to hold together a sovereign entity against a secessionist movement. It was the methods employed that worked against Belgrade. Its actions deliberately aggravated the fractures within civil society, thereby reinforcing the claims of the secessionists.

Kosovo was a classic illustration of the dilemmas connected with the principle of self-determination. Within the province, supposedly the cradle of the Serb nation, the Serbs were a minority, feeling threatened by the rapid growth of the ethnic Albanian population and the decline of their own.<sup>27</sup> Within Serbia the Albanians were a minority. Within the former Yugoslavia both were a minority.<sup>28</sup> If the constitution of 1974 had met its objectives, a form of coexistence should have been possible. In the event Kosovo’s designation under this constitution as an autonomous region had the effect of leaving the Albanians dissatisfied while the Serbs felt it went too far.

This was wholly in line with the effect of that constitution in terms of heightening rather than dampening nationalist sentiment and sense of difference. It was in Kosovo in the late 1980s that the former Yugoslavia began to unravel, where the Kosovar Serbs’ grievance that they were being swamped in an Albanian culture provided Slobodan Milosovic with his opportunity for a power play, in the process losing whatever hope there was for holding the federation together.<sup>29</sup>

If Kosovo had been a republic of the former Yugoslavia it would probably now be independent, another product of the federation’s dissolution along with Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia.<sup>30</sup> In most respects it had exactly the same constitutional rights as the other component parts of Yugoslavia, including an equal voice in the collective Presidency. Although the smallest by territory, at two

<sup>27</sup> From 1961 to 1998 it shrank—from over a quarter to under ten per cent. This was where the Serbian orthodox church originated and where the famous battle of Kosovo of 1389, where it is claimed that the Ottoman empire defeated the mediaeval Serbs, was fought. Recent historiography throws doubt on the mythology surrounding this battle.

<sup>28</sup> The Serbs 36.2 per cent and the Albanians 9.1 per cent (1991 census, *Statistical Bulletin, no. 1934*, Federal Institute of Belgrade, 1992), cited in International Commission on the Balkans, *Unfinished Peace* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996), p. 176. The Albanian Kosovar birth-rate was 3 per cent, one of the highest in Europe.

<sup>29</sup> Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, revised edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> In 1981 there had been large demonstrations in Kosovo demanding Republic status.

million people its population was on a par with Macedonia and Slovenia and substantially larger than Montenegro.<sup>31</sup> Yet its misfortune was to be an autonomous region of Serbia rather than a republic.

This made it easier for Serbia to abolish Kosovo's constitutional rights in 1989 which set in motion the process of dissolution.<sup>32</sup> When the European Community began to orchestrate the dissolution in late 1991 it accepted that Kosovo's special status precluded it from independence. While the EC acknowledged the smouldering problem, its determination to produce an agreed settlement with President Milosovic led it to abandon attempts to get Kosovo's rights restored.

Through the traumas of first Croatia in 1991 and then Bosnia for 1992–5, Kosovo avoided war. In the desperate attempts to resolve these crises it was neglected. A conflict boiling over into violence can capture international attention: one merely simmering can be put off for another day. In the modern world, with images of conflict and mayhem competing for media attention, the largest peaceful demonstration or campaign of non-cooperation with an oppressive regime makes little impact. It was on this basis that one of the most substantial tests in recent times of a non-violent, Gandhian strategy failed. The power of moral example that worked for Gandhi and Martin Luther King failed to work for Dr Ibrahim Rugova, the Kosovar Albanian leader.

As the rights of his people were steadily eroded—over property, employment, education and the exercise of basic freedoms—Rugova developed a parallel government, economy and welfare state. In September 1991 he organized a referendum, with a claimed 90 per cent turnout, demanding an Independent Republic. There were prudent reasons to avoid physical force. Rugova was anxious to avoid provoking the Serb authorities into the retaliation of which he knew they were capable. The non-violent route meant that he was dependent upon impressing the international community with the dignity and integrity of his people in the face of oppression.

The international community was indeed impressed, but remain unpersuaded on the case for independence. If anything Milosovic was grateful, because it made it easier to police the province. He showed his gratitude by not actually arresting Rugova, but he never gave him any positive concessions in return for restraint. The Yugoslav President dealt with the issue at Dayton in November 1995 by making promises about relaxing his grip on the province which he then failed to honour. For the allies the priority was not Kosovo but getting Milosovic to do a deal on Bosnia.<sup>33</sup> For the Albanians the spectacle of the Republika Sperska being allowed a political status within Bosnia that they were denied within Yugoslavia demonstrated the unfairness of it all. The conditions of life for ordinary Kosovars continued to

<sup>31</sup> It was also about the same size as the other autonomous province of Vojvodina. This has a significant Hungarian minority but Serbs are a safe majority. A more relevant area is Sandjak, a region of up to 250,000 people, two-thirds of whom are Muslim, which straddles Serbia and Montenegro, potentially links Kosovo and Bosnia, and is a strategic passage to the Adriatic. It has demanded greater autonomy (although not independence).

<sup>32</sup> Richard Caplan, 'International Diplomacy and the Crisis in Kosovo', *International Affairs*, 74:4 (October 1998), pp. 745–61, p. 748. In 1943 the architects of the Yugoslav federation had distinguished between nations having their principle homeland within Yugoslavia and those from without—i.e. Albanians. On the history of Kosovo and its rule by Serbia see Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998).

deteriorate and independence remained elusive. Rugova's authority began to dwindle. The International Commission on the Balkans noted presciently in 1996 that 'the combination of pacifist strategy and maximalist demands could solidify a stalemate, which in turn might breed terrible violence'.<sup>34</sup> Judah points to Dayton as the point when the Kosovo Albanians realized that 'passive resistance had failed as a strategy'. They felt themselves 'penalized for eschewing violence'.<sup>35</sup>

The young and the militant looked for a different sort of champion, one that would play the game as the Balkans appeared to demand, with the gun. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)<sup>36</sup> appeared to fulfil the need. It was founded in 1991 and made its first appearance in 1993 but gained serious attention after 1996, and in particular after the 1997 chaos in Albania gave it the opportunity to acquire substantial numbers of weapons. In early 1998 it attacked Serb police stations and army bases.<sup>37</sup> By the middle of the year it appeared to have done well, taking over around a third of Kosovo territory, although not in areas where they might have faced serious resistance. Their arrival was not welcomed by the West, with its eye still on Bosnia where Milosovic was viewed as the guarantor of peace. If anything the Yugoslav President was beginning to enjoy something of a rehabilitation. So initially the KLA was condemned as a terrorist organization by the United States, a determination that was also adopted by Belgrade as justification for taking measures to deal with this group.<sup>38</sup>

The Milosovic approach to counter-insurgency is not, however, subtle as was shown on 28 February 1998 when the Yugoslav Army attacked villages with alleged KLA connections. As the KLA staked its claim to more territory during the first half of that year, so the Yugoslav forces perpetrated their own form of mayhem. By the summer 400 Albanians were dead and many had fled their homes.

The response of the international community to this campaign was unusually swift.<sup>39</sup> On 9 March the contact group moved to threaten new sanctions against Yugoslavia unless the special forces were withdrawn and a political dialogue was opened with the Kosovar leadership. Over the next months Milosovic toyed with the contact group, with a timely concession normally working to defuse any further pressure. By October there was a readiness to contemplate air strikes, in itself considered a bold step for Clinton given the proximity of Congressional elections,

<sup>34</sup> International Commission on the Balkans, p. 116.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Judah, 'Kosovo's Road to War', *Survival*, 41:2 (Summer 1999), pp. 5–18, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> More accurately Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës (UCK).

<sup>37</sup> Chris Hedges, 'Kosovo's Next Masters', *Foreign Affairs*, 78:3 (1999), for a detailed description of the development and unruly character of the KLA. The immediate cause of the differences within the Kosovar community was the accord Rugova signed with Milosovic in the summer of 1996 (which Milosovic failed to implement), opposed by Adem Demaci's Albanian Parliamentary Party (PKK). Sophie Clément, 'Conflict Prevention in the Balkans: Case Studies of Kosovo and the FYR of Macedonia' (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union, 1997), pp. 34–5.

<sup>38</sup> Caplan, 'International Diplomacy', pp. 753–4.

<sup>39</sup> In December 1992, during the dying days of his administration, President Bush had written to Milosovic threatening military action if Serb forces caused conflict in Kosovo: '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 Serbia proper'. This position was reaffirmed almost immediately by President Clinton but by 1998 it was presumed to have lapsed.

although the introduction of ground forces was considered to be politically a non-starter.<sup>40</sup>

By using the six-nation contact group that had come into being to coordinate Bosnian policy, it was possible to draw Russia into the diplomacy as the country with the best relations with Yugoslavia. The group was inhibited from pushing forward not so much because of the reluctance to use force to back up their demands but because they were conscious of the sovereignty of Serbia. The intervention in Bosnia could be justified as coming to the aid of a recognized government. Whatever the moral and political basis for any action on behalf of the Kosovars, the legal basis appeared to come under the heading of a dangerous precedent.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, it became difficult to intervene without appearing to give support to the KLA, a group whose ambitions extended beyond Kosovo itself, into Albania and Macedonia, and were generally rejected by the international community. The more the KLA proclaimed its strength the less reason there was for outsiders to intervene. Perhaps, as with the *intifada* in Israel's occupied territories, the way to get Milosovic to reappraise his oppressive policy towards Kosovo was an internal uprising and the prospect of an indefinite civil war.

The KLA did not enjoy a good press. It contained a mixture of ideologies and had a shadowy leadership, divided between Marxists and Islamists. There were rumours of connections with the heroin trade and organized crime. Given the chaotic and lawless situation in neighbouring Albania this would hardly be surprising. This does not mean, however, that it did not enjoy widespread support as representing the aspirations of the Kosovar people. Events conspired to add to its legitimacy.

### **The international response**

From early 1998 the Western alliance was torn between a concern for the victims of this war and an unease about getting dragged further into the Balkan mire. The first anti-KLA campaign of the spring of 1998 prompted strong international condemnation and led to a vigorous internal debate in the West about whether force should be threatened or applied to prevent yet another Balkans tragedy.<sup>42</sup> A UN resolution of October 1998, while not actually authorizing the use of force, put Kosovo under Chapter VII of the charter, and therefore a threat to international peace and security, and set down strong demands for Belgrade.<sup>43</sup> The pressure

<sup>40</sup> Secretary of Defense William Cohen later explained to the Senate Armed Services Committee why he had not asked for troops in the fall of 1998: 'At that time you may recall there was great discontent up here on Capitol Hill. If I had come to you at that time and requested authorization to put a ground force in—US, unilaterally, acting alone—I can imagine the nature of the questions I would have received. You'd say, "Well, no. 1, where are our allies? And no. 2, who's going to appropriate the money? No. 3, how long do you intend to be there? How many? How long? How much? And what's the exit strategy?"'. Elaine Sciolino and Ethan Bronner, 'The Road to War: A Special Report', *New York Times*, 18 April 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Caplan, 'International Diplomacy', pp. 754–5.

<sup>42</sup> In the United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright believed that it was vital to prepare to use force while National Security Advisor Sandy Berger was opposed.

<sup>43</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1199 (23 September 1998).

seemed to work. After nine days of negotiating with Richard Holbrooke, acting on behalf of the contact group, Milosovic made some apparently substantial but inevitably ambiguous concessions. He agreed to withdraw the bulk of his forces from Kosovo and allow 1,800 unarmed international inspectors into Kosovo, with over-flying aircraft, to monitor the deal. In return he wanted the NATO order authorizing air strikes lifted. NATO agreed only to suspend it.<sup>44</sup>

Within days, it was apparent that Milosovic was going to interpret the agreement as he chose. Soon he was infiltrating reinforcements and equipment into Kosovo in violation of the deal. The KLA, having taken a beating in 1998, were also starting to rearm and regroup. There must be some suspicion that part of its strategy was to provoke the Serbs into an atrocity. The Serbs allowed themselves to be provoked. On 16 January the bodies of 45 peasant farmers and their children were found at the village of Racak. Most had been shot at close range in the head or neck with a single bullet. Some were mutilated. William Walker, heading the OSCE observer group, accused the Serbs of an 'unspeakable atrocity' and a 'crime against humanity'.<sup>45</sup>

If this sort of thing was able to happen with the OSCE monitors in place it was hard to see how anything less than NATO would suffice to provide security for the Kosovars. The memory of Srebrenica in July 1995, when thousands were murdered under the noses of a hapless UN peacekeeping force, was also in mind.<sup>46</sup> The crisis began to come to a head as the Clinton Administration raised the level of demands on Belgrade, although still relying solely on air power.<sup>47</sup> On 19 January General Wesley Clark, SACEUR, and General Klaus Naumann, Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, met with Milosovic with documentary evidence of the Racak massacre. The Yugoslav President was uncompromising, arguing that the victims were terrorists and had staged the incident.<sup>48</sup> When Clark told him that NATO was 'going to start telling me to move aircraft', he replied 'You are a war criminal to be threatening Serbia'.

Still reluctant to take things further, the allies arranged a peace conference along Dayton lines and chose Rambouillet, a former royal hunting lodge near Paris. Milosovic did not even attend, perhaps because of fear of arrest for war crimes. The

<sup>44</sup> Sciolino and Bronner, 'The Road to War'. In public Clinton claimed that Milosovic had agreed to what the Kosovars had been demanding since stripped of their autonomy a decade earlier—'internationally supervised democratic elections in Kosovo, substantial self-government and a local police'. The Application instruction (ACTORD) was effective from 13 October 1998, with simultaneous approval and preparatory exercises. The decision by NATO of 27 October 1998 was to maintain the ACTORD with execution dependent on a further NATO council decision.

<sup>45</sup> As a result of this he was declared *persona non grata*, accused by the Yugoslav Foreign Minister of 'insulting the dignity and usurping the authority of the competent State organs of the FRY'. On the incident see OSCE, 'Walker: "KVM is Making a Difference"', *OSCE Newsletter*, January 1999, pp. 1–3. Walker asked for Judge Louise Arbour, head of the Hague Tribunal, to investigate but she was turned back at the border when she tried to enter from Macedonia.

<sup>46</sup> Jan Willem Honig and Norbert Booth, *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime* (London: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> At this point Clinton discussed with Prime Minister Tony Blair the options of either bombing in reprisal for further atrocities or else to try a further diplomatic approach in order to get agreement from Milosovic to allow in NATO ground forces as peacekeepers. One report of a conversation between Blair and Clinton has the Prime Minister observing that ground troops could not be used to fight a war, but only be employed as part of a political strategy. The President said 'I completely agree with you on that. If we sent in a ground force without some sort of agreement beforehand, sooner or later they're sitting ducks for either side who is willing to provoke something'. Sciolino and Bronner, 'The Road to War'.

<sup>48</sup> Later he changed his story. Now it was that there had been a firefight with terrorists who had later rearranged the bodies.

Kosovars were wary of NATO attempts to get them to accept a three-year autonomy deal without a guarantee of independence.<sup>49</sup> This almost ended the process. NATO would have no rationale for a bombing campaign, as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright explained to the KLA.

On 18 March, at a follow-up conference three weeks after Rambouillet in Paris, Albanian delegates signed the peace plan. The Serbs did not, and attempted to renegotiate aspects of the agreement to which they had previously agreed, apparently playing for time. Having made threats to get Milosovic to the negotiating table, NATO was now faced with the unpleasant prospect of actually implementing them. In desperation Holbrooke was despatched to Belgrade. The situation on the ground by this time was already starting to get hopeless. Milosovic told the contact group's envoy that the only problem was a few terrorists to be rooted out. On their last meeting, on 22 March, Holbrooke reports:

I said to him, 'Look are you absolutely clear in your own mind what will happen when I get up and walk out of this palace that we're now sitting in?'

And he said, 'You're going to bomb us'.

And I said, 'That's right'.<sup>50</sup>

The first NATO air raids began on the night of 24 March.

### **The Serb campaign**

According to Mao's famous dictum the guerrilla should be to the masses like fish to the sea, relying on the people for recruits, places to hide and basic sustenance. The art of counter-insurgency is to isolate the enemy by separating them from the general population. This requires rooting out the insurgents, through intelligence operations and aggressive patrolling, while getting the broad mass of the population on side and persuading them to betray the guerrillas or at least keep their distance through political measures—in Vietnam parlance, 'search and destroy' and 'hearts and minds'. Milosovic had simply no way of winning the hearts and minds of the Kosovars. In his eyes, anything he did to restore their constitutional rights would in effect mean abandoning the province. Without this option any attempt to separate the KLA from the people was always likely to depend on terror. Yet strategically this method was also defective, for the natural consequence of such campaigns is recruitment for the enemy. Moreover, it might be possible to intimidate a small minority, but not a 90 per cent majority already frustrated by years of hostile rule. If the sea

<sup>49</sup> The 82 page document had provisions for a constitution, an ethnically representative legislature and an independent police force. As this allowed for autonomy but not independence the Serbs said they would sign up. The sticking point was the insistence on a multinational NATO-led military force that would disarm the KLA and oversee the withdrawal of all but 1,500 Serbian border police from the province within a year. After three years an international meeting would be convened to discuss a final settlement taking into account 'the will of the people' and the 'opinions of relevant authorities'. It is regularly but incorrectly asserted that Rambouillet allowed for a referendum which would have given Kosovo independence after three years. For a recent egregious example see Michael Mandelbaum, 'A Perfect Failure', *Foreign Affairs*, 78:5 (September/October 1999), p. 4. For a full account see Marc Weller, 'The Rambouillet Conference', *International Affairs*, 75:2 (April 1999), pp. 211–51.

<sup>50</sup> Sciolino and Bronner, 'The Road to War'.

could not be prevented from sustaining the fish, then the only option was to remove the sea.

The origins of 'ethnic cleansing' in Kosovo are to be found not so much in a simple grab for territory, as in Croatia and Bosnia, but in a determination that the only way to deal with the KLA was to deny them any potential local sources of support. Initially this may have begun with an effort to secure internal lines of communication and eliminate KLA bases, in the hope that if the campaign of the KLA could be crushed then further resistance would be ineffectual and immaterial and the Albanians would learn to accept their fate.

Although it was suggested during the war that the Serb objective was partition, this seems unlikely. It was never proposed in any of the negotiations. It was not supported by the distribution of Serbs throughout Kosovo, let alone the relative size of the populations. Even if the Serbs had been permitted to hold on to the key economic and political centres, and the main communication routes,<sup>51</sup> requiring well over half the country, the development of a Kosovo Albanian state next door would have left them vulnerable to an indefinite guerrilla campaign. The border with Albania was more defensible. The Serbs sought to control all the province. To do this they had to contain the KLA.

The tactical success of the Serb campaign in 1998 had obscured a strategic failure. The campaign added to the KLA's strength. According to this awful logic, the more fish kept on appearing the more the sea had to be drained. It was this that led to the drawing up of what has been described as the Potkova 'horseshoe' strategy, executed during the first months of 1999. According to this Serb forces were to move around the borders of Kosovo, and then move towards the centre so that the population would be funnelled out into Albania.<sup>52</sup>

The Serb's 1998 campaign left almost 200,000 people displaced in Kosovo. Many had not got back to their homes before the 1999 one began. The evidence from international workers on the ground is that the fighting never really stopped.<sup>53</sup> By and large the incidents at this time were in the southern part of the country, close to the Albanian border, indicating that the priority was to flush out KLA units. NATO figures showed the combined Yugoslav army and para-military units in Kosovo at just over 22,000 in November. By late February, after Rambouillet, they had risen to over 25,000. At this time Milosovic may have decided that he would not accept NATO troops and began to organize his forces and propaganda for a showdown. By mid-March force levels had reached 29,000.<sup>54</sup> The Serb focus appeared to be on clearing a north-south railway line, running through to Macedonia, which would be needed to move heavy military equipment deeper into the country. The first tanks

<sup>51</sup> From Nazi, 'KLA Fights to Block Partition', Institute of War & Peace Reporting, 17 April 1999. Available: <http://www.iwpr.net/balkans/news/>.

<sup>52</sup> According to Hibbert, the idea of driving out the entire Albanian population has been around since 1912-13. On encouraging Albanians to leave, Reginald Hibbert, 'Raising the Stakes', *World Today*, 55:5 (1999), pp. 6-7. The horseshoe strategy is described on <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/docs99/op-horseshoe.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Fernando del Mundo, 'Kosovo Diary', *Refugees Magazine*, 114 (1999); del Mundo worked for UNHCR in Kosovo. One difficulty is that it took time to get OSCE monitors in position. By the start of December there were only 500 in place, though this had doubled by the end of January. The delays were put down to practical difficulties including accommodation.

<sup>54</sup> Ground Dispositions of VJ and MUP strength in Kosovo, maps used in Jamie Shea and General Wesley Clark, Press Conference (Brussels: NATO HQ, 13 April 1999).

which appeared were noted arriving by the OSCE on 16 March. Villages in the northwest of Kosovo began to be cleared and the fighting moved closer to the capital Pristina.<sup>55</sup> In the first weeks of March some 80,000 ethnic Albanians fled their homes.<sup>56</sup> This was before the OSCE monitors withdrew to safety on 20 March. According to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, over the following two days another 25,000 fled their homes, bringing to 235,000 the number of displaced civilians within Kosovo.<sup>57</sup> As Richard Holbrooke made his last-ditch effort to persuade Milosovic to move, the Yugoslav Army shifted an armoured force of up to 5,000 troops towards Pristina from Montenegro while a similar force was moving south from Serbia.

The evidence then is reasonably conclusive. It is not the case that NATO air strikes prompted the campaign against the Kosovar Albanians. There is, however, no doubt that on 24 March it moved immediately to a new and unprecedented scale of ferocity. Aspects of this have been explained as a frenzied retaliation to a NATO provocation, but those responsible were not under NATO attack at the time, and it would be surprising to have had simultaneous, identical spontaneous responses from all Serb units within the province on 24 March.<sup>58</sup> The amount of pre-planning already uncovered suggests that the onset of NATO bombing had been chosen as a trigger to escalate the campaign. The Serb high command might well have calculated that there would be inevitable calls for a cease-fire and that the time available to implement its strategy was relatively short. This logic argued for creating the maximum mayhem to force out the maximum number of Albanians as fast as possible. An additional advantage would be that NATO peacekeeping forces on standby in Macedonia would be swamped by a refugee crisis and therefore have no time to mount any operations within Kosovo.

The objective of this was to create a manageable Kosovo. It was reported that Belgrade envisaged that it could cope easily with around 600,000 Albanians in post-war Kosovo, about a third of the pre-war number.<sup>59</sup> Whether or not there was a numerical target for 'ethnic cleansing', there does appear to have been some belief that the processes of depopulation would leave the KLA demoralized and exposed. In this context a key test for Belgrade of the success of its campaign was the degradation of the KLA's ability to sustain an armed presence in Kosovo. On a

<sup>55</sup> Peter Finn, 'Serbs Seen Preparing Big Military Push', *International Herald Tribune*, 18 March 1999.

<sup>56</sup> 'On the Edge of the Knife', *The Economist*, 20 March 1999.

<sup>57</sup> United Nations, 'Secretary-General Gravely Concerned at Escalation of Violence in Kosovo', Press Release SG/SM/6936, 22 March 1999.

<sup>58</sup> For a thorough, grim depiction of the campaign against the Kosovo Albanians, also noting some NATO bombing incidents, see Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Kosovo, advance unedited report, Geneva, 7 September 1999. Out of 273 refugees interviewed, only one reportedly left his village out of fear of NATO bombs, while all the others described how they were compelled, either by direct violence or by intimidation, to leave their homes. Mrs Robinson's succinct, weekly briefings about what was known about the situation in Kosovo based on the testimony of refugees gave the lie to those who alleged that the atrocity stories were NATO propaganda concoctions and that the refugees only left because of the bombings. Mrs Robinson was by no means uncritical of the NATO bombing campaign.

<sup>59</sup> Steven Erlanger, 'Serbs Set Ceiling for Kosovo Albanian Population', *International Herald Tribune*, 26 April 1999. Serb officials indicated that they would accept back refugees who could prove that they were Yugoslav citizens. However the Serbs had taken all identity papers from fleeing Albanians.

number of occasions the defeat of the KLA was proclaimed,<sup>60</sup> yet during the course of May it became apparent that far from being defeated, the KLA was gaining recruits and was enjoying increasing success in infiltrating them back into Kosovo.

### The NATO response

In the middle of March it dawned on NATO leaders that not only would they have to follow through on their threats of air strikes, but that also these would be implemented in the face of a rapidly deteriorating situation. NATO had configured its forces for a limited, coercive purpose and the implementation of a diplomatic settlement. It was hoped that a few short, sharp days of limited air strikes would be sufficient to get negotiations back on course. Their strategic expectations had been shaped by Operation Deliberate Force of September 1995, when air strikes had appeared to help bring Milosovic to the Dayton peace conference.<sup>61</sup> This was only partly true: of far greater significance had been the worsening position of Serb forces on the ground in the face of Moslem and Croat offensives. In addition it was widely supposed that the tenuous agreement of October 1998 had only been possible because of the credibility of NATO threats at that time. The initial hope was that faced with a similar threat Milosovic could be persuaded to accept a proper peacekeeping force in Kosovo to stabilize the situation. When Operation Allied Force began on the 24 March the claim was that they might stop the processes of ethnic cleansing. Soon this had to shift again to reversing ethnic cleansing.

Coincident with the first air strikes was the sudden appearance at the borders of Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro of tens of thousands of distraught people clamouring to escape. Four weeks into the air campaign the UN was reporting that almost 600,000 people had reached the border countries, with another 800,000 displaced people inside the country—that is, at least three-quarters of the population were away from their homes. The reports from the refugees soon had a distressing familiarity—of people forced from their homes by shelling and arson, of men taken away and murdered and women raped.<sup>62</sup>

The Yugoslav decisions the NATO operation were designed to influence had already been taken: the plans they were supposed to frustrate were well advanced. Instead of Milosovic being shocked by finding himself in confrontation with the world's strongest military grouping, it was NATO that was shocked by the intensity of the Serb assault on Kosovar civilians. Having advertised their campaign as the best way of bringing a lasting and just peace to Kosovo, NATO leaders instead had to explain that they had not actually provoked the very acts they were supposed to deter. This resulted in an uncomfortable and uninspired NATO campaign, sys-

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Yugoslav Army Command Releases Statement on Troop Withdrawal, 0015 GMT, 990511: 'Since actions in Kosovo and Metohija against the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army have been completed, the Supreme Command has ordered return from Kosovo and Metohija of part of the army and police units'.

<sup>61</sup> On Deliberate Force see Tim Ripley, *Operation Deliberate Force: The UN and the NATO Campaign in Bosnia, 1995* (Lancaster University: Centre for Defence and International Security Studies, 1999); Col. Robert C. Owen, 'The Balkans Air Campaign Study: Part 2', *Airpower Journal* (Fall 1997).

<sup>62</sup> Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Situation of Human Rights in Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, OHCHR/99/04/22/A, 22 April 1999.

tematic but also ponderous, constantly behind the game, attempting to find a 'goldilocks' sort of war so that the violence was neither too hot nor too cold.<sup>63</sup>

The most critical events were taking place on the ground in Kosovo yet NATO lacked a ground strategy. The previous year the United States had vetoed the idea of troops entering Kosovo in anything other than a 'permissive' environment (that is, permitted by Belgrade). Leaving aside the 'bodybags' effect there were very practical reasons why a land invasion appeared as an unattractive option. The logistical problems of getting forces to the front were substantial while the points of entry for armoured forces into Kosovo were few and defensible. Even if the events of late March had occasioned an immediate change of heart amongst NATO leaders, the mobilization of sufficient forces would take weeks, even months, before the forces would be ready to move. The experience of the modest deployment of Apache attack-helicopters to Albania illustrated the logistical problems faced.<sup>64</sup>

As the air campaign failed to produce early results, pressure built up, notably from Britain, for a reappraisal. The issue came to a head, but without resolution, just before the NATO summit of 24 April. All that was agreed then was that SACEUR would look again at the planning for such an eventuality. The issue was then revived later in May in the context of an appreciation of the increased demands that would now face a peacekeeping force, even with a permissive environment, compared with those envisaged at the start of the year.<sup>65</sup> This led to talk of the NATO force in the neighbourhood being built up from 13,500 to some 50,000, a level at which a number of options for a non- or semi-permissive environment might have been created.<sup>66</sup> The issue, however, had got no further by the time the war concluded.

This meant that NATO was extremely dependent upon the quality of its air campaign. This began as a relatively modest affair, with the customary opening salvos directed against air defences. It lost only a couple of aircraft, and no pilots, to air defences, while the Yugoslav Air Force suffered severe attrition from air attack. The overall impact of the Allied Force was hampered initially by bad weather, but the basic problem was that it was not tough enough to have an impact on Milosovic's domestic base nor subtle enough to be able to affect the campaign in Kosovo. This was often conducted by small, mobile groups using civilian trucks and buses.

In preference to widening the war to include ground forces and more high-risk, low-altitude operations, the choice was to intensify the core campaign by attacking a

<sup>63</sup> This idea was in *International Herald Tribune*, 24 March 1999, referring to the West's strategy of 'halting the Kosovo war with neither side victorious' as the 'war-making equivalent of the "Goldilocks" economy'.

<sup>64</sup> Claims that the Apaches were withheld purely out of a concern with casualties have been challenged by the US Army who point to operational limitations, and few obvious advantages over the A10 'Warthogs' which arrived in mid-May. However it is clear that there were severe disagreements over the levels of acceptable risk. Dana Priest, 'Risk and Restraint: Why the Apaches Never Flew in Kosovo', *Washington Post*, 29 December 1999.

<sup>65</sup> US officials spoke of an 'anti-Powell doctrine', stressing differences with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, who argued (as he had done in the Gulf) the limits of air power to win wars by itself. *New York Times*, 23 May 1999.

<sup>66</sup> Estimates of the numbers required went up to 150,000 troops, but that was for a full-scale invasion, including Serbia proper.

wider range of large fixed targets.<sup>67</sup> Most were described as being military in nature, and they were certainly chosen—and advertised in advance—to avoid excessive casualties, but their impact was also civilian. The most serious impact of the NATO campaign lay less in the degradation of the Yugoslav armed forces than in the damage to its infrastructure, fuel supplies and industry. The conditions of life for ordinary people in Belgrade and other Serb cities deteriorated.

The evidence left as the Serb forces did eventually retreat from Kosovo in June was that they had not been greatly troubled by the air campaign, and that a considerable amount of ordnance had been used against decoys, although NATO insisted later that this had been something of a show.<sup>68</sup> The main problem was that the military equipment that could be hit was also irrelevant to the Serb campaign against the Kosovar Albanians, although of great potential relevance in the event of a NATO ground invasion. Nonetheless, the bombing took a toll and towards the end of May the position of the Serb forces was becoming more difficult. The growing success of the KLA in re-establishing themselves in Kosovo, with numbers put at up to 10,000 by the war's close, underlined the long-term hopelessness of the Serb position. Moreover, the more they moved to take on the KLA the more they became exposed to NATO aircraft.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> The air campaign had been planned in three phases. Phase One, which began on 24 March 1999, involved limited air operations against designated militarily significant targets, including the integrated air-defence system in the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Almost immediately, on 27 March, authorization was given to move to Phase Two, extending attacks to the security forces infrastructure and military in Kosovo and reinforcement forces (e.g. headquarters, telecommunication installations, material and ammunition depots, systems for production and storage of fuel, barracks). Phase Three, never authorized, would have extended the air operations against a broad range of particularly important targets of military importance north of the 44th parallel in the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

<sup>68</sup> In their report on the damage to Serb forces, NATO commanders claimed that there had been an extensive Serb effort to minimize losses, including the removal of damaged equipment from the battlefield. Decoys were used—some nine mock tanks had been hit. One source suggested expensive PGMs had been used up on 500 decoys. David A. Fulghum, 'Pentagon Dissecting Kosovo Combat Data', *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 26 July 1999, p. 68. There were a number of indications that NATO operations had been compromised by insecure communications and espionage. Compared with media allegations that barely 13 tanks had been hit, NATO claimed a final tally of 110 tanks, 210 armoured fighting vehicles or APCs, and about 449 artillery and mortars. This was compared with starting estimates of 350 tanks, 430–450 armoured personnel carriers, and about 750 artillery, mortar, and anti-aircraft artillery, suggesting that two-thirds of Yugoslav forces in Kosovo survived intact. It was also claimed that the necessity to stay in hiding at times of NATO air strikes impeded Serb operations—at least on those days when the weather was clear enough to allow NATO aircraft to operate. General Wesley K. Clark, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe and Brigadier General John Corley, Chief, Kosovo Mission Effectiveness Assessment Team, *Press Conference on the Kosovo Strike Assessment* (NATO HQ: Brussels, 16 September 1999). There was still scepticism that these figures were too high and Clark himself later reduced numbers of confirmed kills to those eventually contained in the Pentagon's official report of 93 tanks, 153 armoured fighting vehicles or APCs, and about 389 artillery and mortars. Report to Congress, *Kosovo/Operation Allied Force: After-Action Report* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 31 January 2000). On the implications of the saga see Timothy L. Thomas, 'Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority', *Parameters* (Spring 2000), pp. 13–29. In Serbia NATO damaged or destroyed 24 bridges, 12 railway stations, 36 factories, seven airports, 16 fuel plants and storage depots, 17 television transmitters and several electrical facilities, according to a Yugoslav government report. Dana Priest, 'The Battle Inside Headquarters: Tension Grew With Divide Over Strategy', *Washington Post*, 21 September 1999. For an analysis of the relationship between the air and ground wars see IISS, 'Air-power over Kosovo: A historic victory?' *Strategic Comments*, 5:7 (September 1999).

<sup>69</sup> In particular an attack on 7 June using cluster bombs against Serb forces near Mount Pastirik was reported to have caused up to 800 casualties. It now seems that those numbers were exaggerated. Time Ripley, 'Kosovo: A Bomb Damage Assessment', *Jane's Intelligence Review* (September 1999).

### Comparative victimology

On 3 June, President Milosovic accepted peace terms presented by EU envoy President Martti Ahtisaari and Russian envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin. Explanations of why Milosovic suddenly decided to accept the five demands set out by NATO at the start of the war are numerous.<sup>70</sup> A number of factors combined to point to defeat: the progressive damage to the country's economic infrastructure; the surge of KLA activity in Kosovo; the apparent movement towards a NATO ground campaign; the indictment against Milosovic and other prominent Serb figures set down by the War Crimes Tribunal; the inability of Russia to move beyond rhetorical support, and its apparent endorsement of the NATO demands. Just as Belgrade's anti-KLA strategy had failed, so in the end had its anti-NATO strategy.

Given Yugoslavia's limited air defence capabilities, and that Milosevic was aware that NATO air strikes were coming, what was the basis for his strategy? He may well have assumed that strikes would be limited, as had been promised in 1998.<sup>71</sup> He might have also taken hope from December 1998 when, in Operation Desert Fox, American and British strikes against Iraq, called because of non-compliance with UN inspections, lasted only a few days, had a modest impact and attracted criticisms at home and abroad.<sup>72</sup> Once it became apparent that NATO was prepared to continue and step up the air campaign, the most obvious target was the presumed lack of cohesion of NATO. As the 'bodybags effect' was already in place the best hope appeared to lie in the 'bullying effect.'

Belgrade worked hard to demonstrate the iniquities of NATO targeting. Having at first decided to expel foreign journalists they then realised their value as witnesses to the human costs of NATO's campaign. Perhaps the most striking feature of this early campaign was the 'target' logo paraded in demonstrations, printed on tee-shirts and used by Belgrade's supporters abroad. This apparently was an adaptation of an American manufacturer's logo worked out by American Serbs and transmitted back to the homeland via the internet.<sup>73</sup> Ordinary people were encouraged to stand on bridges almost to dare NATO to bomb them and create numerous martyrs. Belgrade presented attacks against a TV station calculated to gain sympathy amongst the world media.<sup>74</sup> On 10 May Yugoslavia began proceedings before the UN

<sup>70</sup> The five demands were: (1) Ensure a verifiable stop to all military action and the immediate ending of violence and repression in Kosovo; (2) Withdrawal from Kosovo of Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces; (3) Agreement to the stationing in Kosovo of an international military presence; (4) Agreement to the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons, and unhindered access to them by humanitarian aid organizations; and (5) Provide credible assurance of Serbian willingness to work on the basis of the Rambouillet Accords in the establishment of a political framework agreement for Kosovo in conformity with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

<sup>71</sup> Then Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon spoke of NATO having planned 'a graduated series of possible air strikes which could, at the very high end, involve a very considerable number of airplanes. The goal of the options is to reduce or degrade the Serbian military's ability to continue striking the Kosovar Albanians', *International Herald Tribune*, 3-4 October 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Duncan Lennox, "'Fox': The Results', in *Janes Defence Weekly*, 13 January 1999.

<sup>73</sup> This was the first internet war, with masses of material posted every day on numerous sites.

<sup>74</sup> Sixteen people died when Radio Television Serbia was hit during a NATO raid on 23 April. The case is an important one because these were main casualties in Belgrade itself, where few civilians were killed during the air campaign. None of those killed were journalists, although this is how they were immediately described. There is evidence that the RTS employees were told to stay at their posts, despite NATO's prior warnings that TV stations could be hit, and that warning sirens had been sounded. Employees in other TV facilities abandoned their offices before they were hit. Vlado Mares, 'Sacrificed For Serbia?', *IWPR'S Balkan Crisis Report*, no. 88, 29 October 1999.

International Court of Justice in the Hague, accusing NATO of genocide. The country was presented as a martyr to some vindictive, illegal but vague American grand strategy. The hope was that their anger—and each successive NATO mis-hit<sup>75</sup>—would cause the West to reconsider its stand, or at least sufficient elements within it to cause an outbreak of disarray.

Yet in the curious game of comparative victimology the Serbs were sure losers. There were many signs of unease in the NATO camp, but the alliance stuck resolutely to its task. The readiness of Western political figures to blame NATO for the unfolding tragedy could be taken as a symptom that the alliance could simply not hold together for a prolonged campaign. A number of commentators and politicians were ready to blame NATO for the unfolding tragedy. Almost from Day One of the campaign voices were to be heard—notably in Greece and Italy—insisting that it was time to start talking again. It then seemed unlikely that the alliance could hold together for a prolonged campaign. Yet while there was no doubt that the people of Serbia were also victims, they were not nearly so much as those of Kosovo, and this propaganda war was lost from the start. Smart commentators may have seen NATO strategy mocked by the tide of refugees but smart politicians knew that they would now have no difficulty in explaining the necessity for the NATO campaign. The Yugoslav government was judged culpable of such crimes against humanity in Kosovo that its victory could not be contemplated.<sup>76</sup> The NATO campaign did not so much sputter and die as take on an added intensity of its own.

<sup>75</sup> Civilians were killed by aberrant strikes from mid-April on, including in passenger trains and buses caught on bridges. The worst single day in this regard was 7 May when a marketplace and hospital in Nis was struck, killing at least 15 people, and then later the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit, killing three Chinese citizens and injuring more than 20 others. Although at the time this was claimed as a tragic accident and attributed to old CIA maps, there have been allegations that the embassy was deliberately targeted because it was serving as a communications centre for the Yugoslav Army. There are no reliable figures on Yugoslav casualties, but it is likely that as many civilians as military personnel were killed. NATO tends to doubt Yugoslav figures of 600 soldiers and special police killed. Independent sources in Yugoslavia put civilian casualties at between 500 to 1,000. Dana Priest, 'The Battle Inside Headquarters: France Balked at NATO Targets', *Washington Post*, 20 September 1999. In a substantial report, Human Rights Watch put the civilian death toll at 500, questioning nine incidents in particular as directed against illegitimate, non-military targets (in which it includes Radio and TV stations as well as a number of bridges and Belgrade's heating plant) as well as the use of cluster bombs. It accepted evidence that on occasions (such as the Kosovo village of Korisa on 13 May where 87 died), Yugoslav forces used internally displaced civilians as human shields. In another incident, after 19 prisoners were killed by NATO bombs at Dubrava prison in Kosovo, at least 76 further prisoners were summarily executed by guards and their deaths blamed on NATO by Belgrade. In Serbia itself it put the civilian death toll at around 200. [www.hrw.org/hrw/reports/2000/nato](http://www.hrw.org/hrw/reports/2000/nato).

<sup>76</sup> The US State Department published the 30-page report *Erasing History: Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo* in May 1999 to demonstrate the extent of the humanitarian crime and the fact that it had been picking up pace prior to NATO bombing. In November a number of anti-war groups and journalists seized on apparent evidence that NATO had exaggerated dramatically the Albanian numbers killed for propaganda purposes. On 17 October Stratfor, an American research group ([www.stratfor.com](http://www.stratfor.com)) published a report that was widely circulated on the net claiming that contrary to NATO claims of 10,000 ethnic Albanians dead, 'four months into an international investigation, bodies numbering only in the hundreds have been exhumed'. However, in a speech to the UN Security Council, the prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY), Carla del Ponte, stated that investigators had reports of 11,334 dead from eyewitnesses and had identified 529 grave sites. Of these they had investigated only 195 of the sites, from which they had exhumed 2,108 bodies—half the 4,256 their information had led them to expect there. This was presented as confirmation that 'only' 2,000 were killed, yet in addition to the sites not yet investigated del Ponte also reported extensive evidence of tampering with grave sites and the burning of bodies. Ian Williams, 'The Kosovo Numbers Game', *IWPR'S Balkan Crisis Report*, no. 92, 12 November 1999. Philip Shenon, 'State Dept. Now Estimates Serbian Drive Killed 10,000', *New York Times*, 10 December 1999.

When faced with a choice between putting Serbs at risk or their own troops, alliance members opted for the former. This may even have surprised many ordinary Serb citizens who may also have assumed during the first days of the war that NATO would not dare to take risks with their lives. NATO regretted the fuel dumps blown up, bridges destroyed, and civilians killed, but the fault, it insisted, lay with Milosovic. If anything the Western public got more bored with the war, as it acquired a routine quality, than indignant. When bombs went astray they saw it as evidence of ineptitude but not malevolence.

So rule number one for would-be practitioners of a victim strategy: bullies do not make for convincing victims. Rule number two: take care not to overestimate the difficulty that Western governments face when inflicting pain on others. It might seem that the victim strategy worked perfectly for the Kosovo Albanians. NATO intervened, the war was won and the province will be, to all extents and purposes, independent. Yet the price was extraordinary high. The KLA was probably as taken aback as was NATO by the ferocity of the Serb campaign, and its many sacrifices could have been in vain. Furthermore, as crucial a strategic consequence as the purpose Serb behaviour gave to NATO was the support it engendered for the KLA among the Kosovar people, enabling them to deny Yugoslav Army units a quick victory.

NATO forces ended up trying to protect the latest victims—Kosovo Serbs—from retribution by the previous victims.<sup>77</sup> There are dangers in letting depictions of weakness and persecution govern Western responses to other peoples' quarrels. It would be unfortunate if an international dependency culture developed whereby it came to be assumed, probably wrongly, that evidence of dire circumstances would by itself prompt Western military intervention. Intervention should be based on a clear political understanding of why particular conflicts take the form they do and the dangers they could represent if left unchecked. Milosovic needed to be opposed because he represented an ethno-nationalist ideology that had already proved itself as a truly malign influence in European politics. It may be true that public opinion in the West can only understand the need to act when confronted with images of suffering humanity, but Western governments need to do a better job of identifying the political forces at work likely to generate such suffering before they do so. In Kosovo they were right to act on behalf of the victims—but wrong not to act before the victims were created.

<sup>77</sup> As of 14 August, 280 murders had been confirmed by KFOR in Kosovo since 15 June. Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Kosovo, Geneva: advance unedited report (7 September 1999).