

Capitol Hill forum exposes bankruptcy of NATO's Balkans policy

by Carl Osgood

NATO's 78-day air war against Yugoslavia last year was a fiasco from beginning to end, that has left the Balkan region on the verge of a new war, has transformed NATO into an aggressive intervention force, while, at the same time, demonstrating that NATO is not capable of fighting a real war against a formidable enemy.

These were some of the most damning conclusions drawn from a Capitol Hill forum on March 3, sponsored by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio).

Kucinich was opposed to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, and participated in a lawsuit, filed last year against the Clinton administration, in an effort to stop it. The wide-ranging discussion during the forum exposed the bankruptcy of NATO's policy in the Balkans, with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright coming in for a great deal of criticism. While the discussion covered a broad range of issues, the underlying theme was the folly of "coercive diplomacy," that is, the selective use of military action to achieve diplomatic objectives.

Kucinich moderated a panel of expert analysts from across the political spectrum. Panelists included Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president for Defense and Foreign Policy Studies at the neo-conservative Cato Institute; Robert Hayden, the director of Russian and Eastern European Studies at the University of Pittsburgh; Charles Spinney, operational research analyst in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Program Analysis and Evaluation (Spinney specified that he was expressing his own views, not those of the Pentagon); Stojan Cerovic, a Serbian journalist and Senior Fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace; and Pierre Sprey, a former special assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis. Explaining the legal technicalities involved was Michael Ratner, vice president and international lawyer at the Center for Constitutional Rights. Kucinich and Ratner collaborated closely on the lawsuit against the Clinton administration. (The suit was recently dismissed in Federal court on the grounds that it was a political issue, and members of Congress don't have legal standing to sue in such a situation.)

In his opening remarks, Kucinich said that the recent vio-

lent ethnic clashes, such as in Mitrovica, Kosovo, show that the war continues, even though NATO's bombs are no longer falling. With NATO calling for more troops and the Clinton administration blaming Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic for the violence, "it seems we're back to where we were one year ago," he said. Kucinich then began the discussion by raising the issue of Albright's conduct at the Rambouillet negotiations in France prior to last spring's NATO bombing campaign. He quoted Albright saying, "We're asking the Serbs to accept an international force to keep Kosovo in Serbia."

Hayden called Albright's idea "silly." He said that the political proposal at Rambouillet was for an Albanian civil authority, backed up by NATO, with no Serb authority allowed in the province. "The secession of Kosovo was what was being proposed," he said. He then mentioned the infamous "Annex B," the proposal that NATO troops would be able to operate with impunity anywhere in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Hayden hastened to say that he was not by any means endorsing the Milosevic regime, but, "It's difficult to imagine any government accepting these conditions."

Carpenter said that Rambouillet was symptomatic of NATO's view that Milosevic "is the source of all the troubles" in the Balkans. He pointed out that "there's a great variety of intense nationalism," and, in fact, the Greater Albania operation "has greater disruptive potential" than what the Serbs are doing. Spinney added that the Jan. 30 authorization of air strikes by the North Atlantic Council set the tone of coercive diplomacy even before the negotiations began. Ratner and Hayden noted that the final agreement that ended the bombing excluded Annex B, so that, essentially, "what came out was different from what we went to war for."

NATO military incompetence

Kucinich then shifted the discussion to NATO's military operation. He noted that many new precision-guided munitions (PGMs) were used in the war, which also saw the wide-scale use of stealth technology, including the first operational missions of the U.S. Air Force's B-2 bomber. He wanted

to know how effective these technologies had been.

Sprey said that these technologies were actually irrelevant. “What we saw,” he said, “were variants on older technologies. These are the wave of the future only because of the propaganda for them.” The only effect of stealth technology, he said, is to make planes more expensive and less effective. As for PGMs, these have a peculiar relevance, but not as a military weapon, because they had no effect on the mobility of Serb military forces. Nor did they have any effect on Serb lines of communications. “The Serb Army is in great shape,” he said, since hardly any Serb armor or other military vehicles were destroyed. However, “we proved we can cause considerable damage to civilians.” He claimed that the two primary weapons guidance systems used by NATO, laser and the Global Positioning System, are easily countered—laser by smoke and the GPS by jamming.

Spinney said that the crucial issue here is how these technologies affect our strategy. He said that what NATO did was to marry PGMs to coercive diplomacy, which “blew up in our faces in Kosovo.” While it was not mentioned as part of the discussion, the Serbs did succeed in detouring NATO bombs numerous times with papier-mâché decoys of tanks and planes, showing that NATO’s sensors and guidance systems could be easily deceived. Sprey claimed that coercive diplomacy was developed by interested parties in the Pentagon and elsewhere during the 1980s to justify the manufacture and employment of PGMs. In reality, the strategy is an extension of British “cabinet warfare” doctrine, which Sprey and others ignore.

During the question and answer period, a U.S. Army officer asked Spinney what the war, in particular the deployment of Apache helicopters to Albania, revealed about the condition of the U.S. military. Spinney replied, “It showed we can’t deploy,” and that the Army is in “panic city” because of this. He said the argument that the deployment was to create the threat of a ground invasion was ludicrous, because if the decision to invade had been made, “the Army would still be deploying.”

Kucinich then raised the question of what NATO has become. He described it as now being an “air-oriented force,” with the ability to conduct offensive actions, and asked Carpenter to describe how the scope of NATO’s mission has changed. Carpenter called it a “stealth transformation,” with the Kosovo intervention completing the shift of NATO from a collective, defensive alliance, to a pro-active offensive alliance for vague purposes. He ridiculed the argument which NATO used to reassure Russia—that NATO is still a defensive alliance—when, after the Yugoslav war, it has become clear that that is not true. He noted that the reason NATO suffered so few casualties, was that the bombing was carried out from 15,000 feet. “Sooner or later,” he warned, “there’ll be a mission that can only be executed on the ground. When that happens, it’ll show the bankruptcy of the

‘new NATO.’ ”

Hayden warned that the Alliance’s strategy of attacking civilian populations sets a bad example for the rest of the world. He said that this was picked up by the Russians in the Chechnya war, and also by Israel in its latest attacks in Lebanon, in which Israeli aircraft bombed Lebanese electricity infrastructure.

Was it legal?

Kucinich then moved the discussion to whether U.S. involvement in the operation was legal. He noted that on April 28, 1999, more than a month after the bombing campaign began, the House voted on four pieces of legislation related to the war. Two of these were resolutions sponsored by Rep. Tom Campbell (R-Calif.), whose intent was to force a debate on the war in the House. One was a declaration of war against Yugoslavia, and the other called for the removal of all U.S. troops from Yugoslavia within 30 days. The other two were a Senate-passed resolution supporting the air campaign, and a bill, sponsored by Reps. Bill Goodling (R-Pa.) and Tillie Fowler (R-Fla.), prohibiting the introduction into combat of U.S. ground troops without Congressional approval. Only the Goodling-Fowler bill passed.

Ratner took up this issue, saying, “I never had a situation where Congress voted not to authorize war.” He said that this was the first time that Congress took a stand since the passage of the War Powers Act in 1974. However, on the negative side, the Congressional vote was completely ignored by President Clinton, and the President went beyond the 62-day clock of the War Powers Act, which, Ratner said, is “now a dead letter.” This takes us back to pre-Vietnam-War days and “stands the Constitution on its head,” because “it lets the President do what he wants.”

Spinney added that neither the U.S. Congress nor the parliaments of other NATO member-countries knew about Annex B before the war started. Kucinich added, “We did get it, after the war.”

Kucinich then shifted the discussion to the war’s impact on the democratic opposition inside Serbia. Stojan Cerovic said that prior to NATO’s bombing campaign, the democratic opposition was making progress inside Serbia. It had won almost all of the local elections. However, after the war began, “I was supposed to be happy because Milosevic is such a bad character.” In reality, “none of us” in the opposition “were happy,” because “it was clear that you couldn’t get a change of government from air strikes.” The fact that NATO did not succeed in driving Milosevic from power, combined with the indictment of Milosevic issued by the International War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague, means that “he’s sentenced to be President as long as possible.”

Cerovic was somewhat defensive about general Serb attitudes toward Milosevic’s policies in Kosovo, but he ad-

mitted that the situation was serious before NATO's bombing campaign. He noted that the Kosovo Liberation Army was "not negligible," and that a low-level war had been going on for a year before NATO's war. However, the opposition is in a far more difficult situation now than before the war. "Milosevic can't afford honest elections. He will do anything to stay in power," he said.

Nowhere to go but downhill

The most blood-curdling remarks, however, came from Spinney. Kucinich asked him to comment on the continuing violence since the cessation of NATO's bombing campaign. "It would seem," Kucinich said, "that NATO's mission has not worked." Spinney said that because of the intensity of the hatred between Albanians and Serbs, the conditions for democracy simply do not exist, and therefore, democracy is not an option. He suggested that one possibility is a *de jure* partition of Kosovo province, but said that that could end up in a situation similar to the Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza and Lebanon. An alternative is what he called "ex-purgation," a population exchange, and to describe how this would work, he invoked images of the mass population exchanges that took place between India and Pakistan in 1947. He also warned of a situation like that of Somalia

after the United States pulled out in 1993, a possibility given that NATO is starting to become exhausted, and some NATO member-states are refusing to send additional troops to Kosovo. "If NATO pulls out," he said, "someone will finish the job." In other words, either the Albanians will kill off the Serbs remaining in the province (estimated to be anywhere from 17,000 to 70,000), or an undefeated Serb Army will come in and do the same to the Albanians.

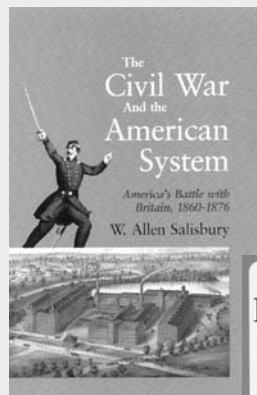
Before opening the floor for questions, Kucinich noted that the Rambouillet process "seemed designed to give an ultimatum that could only be refused." Spinney drew a parallel between Rambouillet, and the diktat issued to Serbia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in 1914—except that Annex B was a far greater intervention than that contemplated by the Austro-Hungarians. Carpenter added that it is correct that the United States and its allies—and here he singled out the Clinton administration and Britain's Tony Blair government—wanted a bombing demonstration with Serbia as the target. These governments see Milosevic as a "dangerous trend," and wanted to make an example of him. Ratner's closing comment was probably the most telling: "We have an obligation to exhaust all peaceful means before bombing. We didn't do that in this case."

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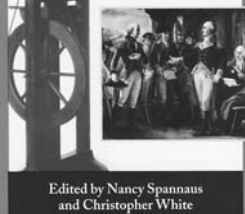


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