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NATO’s Credibility in the Kosovo War

Sead Osmani

Introduction

Before the conflict started in Kosovo, leaders from the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) explained why they intended to intervene in Kosovo. They most strongly emphasized the reason as humanitarian intervention. With research and comparison, I argue that sustaining NATO’s credibility was the most important reason. After the Cold War, Europe autonomously initiated security projects. The main foreign policy interests of the U.S. and the EU started to diverge. The differing interests eventually evoked discussions regarding the future of NATO, with NATO officials offering various reasons for their participation in the Kosovo War, such as ending violence and repression, and the withdrawal of the military, police, and paramilitary forces from Kosovo (NATO 2010). Were these goals NATO’s strongest motivation? Because the principal player in the Kosovo War was the U.S., and because NATO is the instrument through which the U.S. perpetuates its hegemonic role in Europe, I will use the official U.S. Department of State document regarding the Kosovo War to demonstrate that preserving NATO’s credibility was actually the most important reason for the U.S. and NATO to participate in the Kosovo war. The Department of State official statement on the war in Kosovo outlines three objectives for U.S. and NATO participation in Kosovo. The first objective is “Averting a humanitarian catastrophe.” I analyze whether Kosovo was the most pressing humanitarian crisis in which NATO could have intervened and the level of success it achieved in this effort. NATO did not accomplish this proclaimed goal, because the goal was actually an excuse to intervene in Kosovo. The second Department of State objective is “Preserving stability in a key part of Europe.” With statements from the
interested country leaders involved in this objective, I will demonstrate stability was not truly at risk. The last section will offer my proposed explanation that the U.S. and NATO intervened in Kosovo to preserve NATO's credibility.

Literature Review

The intervention by NATO has been the subject of a great deal of academic commentary. NATO did not seek UN Security Council authorization for the attack on Yugoslavia, and the peculiar nature of the Kosovo conflict has led many scholars to be divided in their opinions. They can be grouped into two categories: those who write about NATO's illegitimacy in attacking (Hehir 2009 and Menon 2001) and those who try to find legitimacy for this attack (Greenwood 2000, Roberts 1999, and Glennon 1999). Scholars of the first category argue U.S./NATO did not seek UN Security Council authorization to attack; therefore, the intervention was illegal. These scholars fail to explain the reason U.S./NATO intervened without authorization. The second category of scholars argue that while the U.S./NATO did not have explicit authorization, through the resolutions written for Yugoslavia, NATO had implicit authorization from the UN Secretary General. Therefore, it was not necessary to request further authorization. This plausible explanation essentially justifies a controversial move. However, the UN Charter explains clearly that it is necessary to obtain authorization for such moves. Explanations of how NATO avoided getting explicit authorization for its actions unavoidably hint that NATO had underlying motives for doing so. Those motivations have yet to be fully explored.

Many justify NATO's intervention citing humanitarian and moral duties, despite the lack of legitimacy in attacking (Randy 2001, D'Amato 2001 and Simma 1999). However, these claims can be questioned because NATO's use of force against Serbs ultimately resulted in as many deaths as had already occurred (Herscher 2010). Others try to explain that NATO's attack was biased and was driven by other motivations such as economic interests or on distracting attention from the Lewinski sex scandal (Cohn 2002 and Bulent 2002). The U.S./NATO attack in Yugoslavia was illegal. In international law, there is no such thing as a "humanitarian" attack. The U.S. wanted no international security in Yugoslavia other than NATO, wherein their power is vested. The most powerful motivation for NATO's intervention in Kosovo was the Department of State's third stated objective: to preserve NATO's credibility (Ong 2003, Cooper 1999, and Dempsey 1999).

U.S. and NATO Objectives in Kosovo

On 26 March 1999, the Department of State released an official statement entitled "U.S. and NATO objectives and interests in Kosovo." It declares: "The U.S. and NATO objectives in Kosovo are to stop the killing and achieve a durable peace that prevents further repression and provides for democratic self-government for the Kosovar people." After this statement, it is listed that the U.S. had three strong interests at stake
(U.S. Department of State 1999): 1) Averting a humanitarian catastrophe; 2) Preserving stability in a key part of Europe; and 3) Maintaining the credibility of NATO.

Two days prior to the U.S. Department of State release, President Clinton appeared on national television and set down similar objectives, adding, “Our mission is clear: to demonstrate the seriousness of NATO’s purpose so that the Serbian leaders understand the imperative of reversing course” (U.S. Department of State 1999).

Although the first two interests listed in the Department of State statement might be reasonable justification for entering the Kosovo war, they were not achieved and were rhetorical rather than authentic. In other words, they look like “pretexts for U.S. and NATO policy, not motives behind the policy” (Layne 1999). The strongest motivation was evidently to maintain NATO’s credibility at all costs, but the other reasons were needed to support that objective.

**Averting a Humanitarian Catastrophe**

Averting a humanitarian catastrophe was the first objective highlighted by the U.S. Department of State and President Clinton. Rather than achieving the objectives, the air campaign instead launched the crisis into colossal proportions. According to James Bovard, a policy advisor to the Future of Freedom Foundation, “The CIA had warned the Clinton administration that if bombing was initiated, the Serbian army would greatly accelerate its efforts to expel ethnic Albanians. The White House disregarded this warning and feigned surprise when mass expulsions began” (Bovard 2001). Arnold Kanter, former under secretary of state for Political Affairs, said the U.S. has to “be highly selective and restrictive in our decisions about using military force in humanitarian interventions, confining ourselves to the most serious or egregious cases” (Frye 2000). According to Kanter, the U.S. should set a high bar for its humanitarian intervention before participating in it. If the participation should be confined to the most serious or egregious cases, then the question naturally arises: Was Kosovo among the most serious or egregious cases? No atrocity in the world should be underestimated, and each one needs clear and accurate attention. It is not my intention to underestimate the Kosovo atrocities induced by Slobodan Milošević; I am the first one to condemn them. Nevertheless, it is important to put the Kosovo War in perspective with other atrocities to understand whether intervention in Kosovo was truly a humanitarian intervention.

**Was Kosovo among the Most “Serious or Egregious Cases”?**

Kosovo was not among the most exigent of egregious cases during the 1990s. Several cases were (and continue to be) worse. The Kurds’ situation in Turkey was far more serious than the Kosovo case. According to a 1994 Human Rights Watch report, thirty-nine thousand people died in the Kurdish southeast Turkey conflict, with over half the losses occurring in the previous year. “Two million Kurds had been displaced during ten years of conflict; 108 villages were depopulated only between 9 May and
10 July 1994, and in the autumn of 1994 some 137 were demolished" (Human Rights Watch 1994). In 2009, the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), which had twenty-one members in parliament, was closed down by the Constitutional Court. Turks strove to erase Kurdish culture by using threats of violence to ban Kurdish TV, radio, and language (Human Rights Watch 2009). Kurds could integrate into Turkish society only if they renounced any Kurdish identity.

Even though this apparent ethnic cleansing of the Kurds has been going on since 1984 and continues today, the U.S. and NATO have not intervened to prevent humanitarian catastrophe. If the U.S. and NATO were truly seeking to simply avert a humanitarian catastrophe, Turkey may have been a better destination than Kosovo.

Table 1: Comparison of Kurdish Crisis to Kosovar Albanian Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of deaths</th>
<th>Number of villages, hamlets, or settlements partly or completely destroyed</th>
<th>Number of people displaced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kurds in Turkey</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>7,932</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanians in Kosovo (as of 1998)</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanians in Kosovo (during NATO action)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1,400,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data adapted from Taft (1998), Bozerslan (2001) and Murphy (2004).

Though the U.S. apparently strove to deter a humanitarian crisis, their intervention only aggravated the expulsion of Albanians. The estimated number of Kosovar Albanians driven from their homes by Serb security forces prior to the October 1998 cease-fire is 250,000 (Taft 1998). The UN Refugee Agency estimated 100,000 refugees from a potential conflict in Kosovo, prior to war (UNHCR 2000). The total number of Kosovar Albanians driven from their homes prior to NATO's intervention was 350,000. On the other hand, the number of Kosovar Albanians expelled from Kosovo by Serbs (March to June 1999 NATO's air campaign) was 863,000. As the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe shows in its report "Kosovo/Kosova As seen, As told" the number of refugees continued to increase through all seventy-eight days of NATO's air attack. (OSCE 2010).

Most alarmingly, this consequence was not unforeseen. On 27 March, 1999, U.S./NATO Commanding General Wesley Clark said it was "entirely predictable" that Serb terror and violence would intensify after the NATO bombing," but on the same day State Department spokesperson James Rubin said, "The U.S. is extremely alarmed by reports of an escalating pattern of Serbian attacks on Kosovo Albanian civilian" (Clines and Myers 1999). General Clark was apparently aware of possible violence against Kosovar Albanian, but still wanted to attack Yugoslavia. It was estimated the
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NATO attack killed as many people as the Serbian attack did prior to the air strike (Herscher 2010). This fact alone shows that preventing humanitarian catastrophe was not the primary motivation.

Avoiding Humanitarian Catastrophe without Diplomacy while conceding to Deal with Terrorist.

The UN Charter states that a member of the UN “shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice” (UN 1945). The U.S. did not do what the Charter prescribes in order to avoid humanitarian catastrophe.

If the U.S. was purely motivated by preventing humanitarian catastrophe it would have also tried to stop the KLA, which functioned on the Albanian side. Before the Rambouillet Peace Accords, Ambassador Holbrooke, at that time assistant secretary for European and Canadian Affairs, was sent by President Clinton in October 1998 to seek a cease-fire in Kosovo and allow an international mission to supervise the troop pullback (Crawford 2002). Many Western officials would later accuse Milosević of undermining the agreement, but these accusations were not accurate (Solana 1999). General Naumann, former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia said, “The Yugoslav authorities honored the [Holbrooke] agreement” (ICTY 2002) recognizing only the Serbian side. Because of this agreement, the KLA used the Serbian restraint as an opportunity to launch a new offensive. However, the KLA rejected the agreement and it met no demands at all, and as General Naumann witnessed, “the majority of violations [of the Holbrooke agreement] was caused by the KLA” (ICTY 2002).

Ignoring KLA caused more problems. George Robertson, former Secretary of Defense in the Blair government, said in the Examination Witness of the UK Parliament, “Up until Racak earlier this year [1999] the KLA were responsible for more deaths in Kosovo than the Yugoslav authorities had been” (UK Parliament 1999). The U.S. and NATO did not intervene. They asked Albanis for a ceasefire but nothing else. If they had intervened, the war in Kosovo would have taken another path, perhaps a diplomatic one without NATO’s attack.

Barton Gellman reported in the Washington Post: “U.S. intelligence reported almost immediately that the KLA intended to draw NATO into its fight for independence by provoking Serb forces into further atrocities” (Gellman 1999). KLA leader, Hasim Thaci, knew every time they provoked Serbs there would be a counterattack against civilians, but he and other KLA leaders were willing to let many Kosovar Albanians die (Little 2010). NATO would have been more eager to stop the KLA if they were truly motivated by humanitarian motives.
The KLA offensive increased and goaded the Serb forces to react to the offensive. With that reaction, Western officials did not have trust in Serb officials, but on the other hand, they did not do anything to stop the KLA offensive; instead they helped the KLA. The London Sunday Times reported: "American intelligence agents [associated with the OSCE mission] have admitted they helped to train the Kosovo Liberation Army before NATO's numbing of Yugoslavia" (Walker and Aidan 2000). The U.S. was indeed sympathizing with the KLA. Alan Little, a BBC journalist, asked Madeleine Albright, "[If] there was no clear mechanism to punish [the KLA] if they failed to behave in what you call a reasonable way?" Albright answered, "Well, I think the punishment was that they would lose completely the backing of the U.S. and the Contact Group" (Little 2010). This statement suggests the U.S. was actually supporting the KLA. In fact, the KLA received American intelligence support prior to NATO's air strike (Walker and Aidan 2000). This assistance seems especially duplicitous when KLA was recognized as a terrorist group by the U.S. itself (Bissett 2001). BBC News reported on 28 June 1998 that Robert Gelbard, U.S. Special envoy for Kosovo, condemned KLA by saying, "I know a terrorist when I see one and these men are terrorists" (BBC 1998). This statement was made prior to the Holbrooke agreement, which was made in October 1998. Not only U.S. officials recognized KLA as a terrorist group, but other members of NATO also did, such as Lord Ashdown, Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the UK and later High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In early 1998, the U.S. Department of State listed the Kosovo Liberation Army as a terrorist group, but then in 1999 the U.S. and the Contact Group dealt with the organization (Bissett 2001). It is clear the U.S. changed its position toward KLA and its activities in order to attack Milošević. Their willingness to deal with terrorists shows their desperation to attack Milošević and also to have the opportunity to use NATO's power in order to preserve NATO's credibility, and also shows their lack of a desire to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.

Rambouillet Peace Accord without Real Diplomacy

Diplomatic approaches were lacking during the Rambouillet Peace Accords for Kosovo, which can be called the "do what we tell you to do" accords. On that occasion, the U.S. wanted only to command, to dictate the solution without compromising. Their attitude and their firmness strongly implied the real issue was not to try and avoid humanitarian catastrophe but something else. Even though the Clinton administration was firmly convinced it was possible to solve the Kosovo problem with an open and unconditional dialogue, the Rambouillet Peace Accord showed the dialogue was unilateral, closed, and conditional. Albright arrived at Rambouillet unwilling to have diplomacy without threat of force against Yugoslavia (Little 2010). On this occasion U.S. diplomats showed no skill and no desire to solve the problem with peaceful diplomacy.
According to Albright and James Rubin, it was necessary on that occasion to have a clear-cut U.S. and NATO position. There was no real desire to seek an agreement, because U.S. officials did not believe it was possible to find one with Serbs (Little 2010). In the "Kosovo Report" the Independent International Commission on Kosovo writes, "Albright and others had been so firm about the supremacy of NATO over any other institutional actor in this context, and so many aspects of the Rambouillet process had been presented as explicitly non-negotiable, that there was little reason for Serbia to have expected flexibility from NATO. If a deal were possible, it would have had to have been initiated by NATO powers" (Oxford 2000). Albright’s determination that NATO was the only solution for Kosovo shows the problem was not avoiding humanitarian catastrophe but establishing the supremacy and credibility of NATO. The events in Kosovo happened at the right time and the right place.

The lack of diplomacy and the pretenses to use NATO were clear in Annex B of the Rambouillet Peace Accord. Toward the end of the meetings, the Serbian delegation accepted the political aspects of the accord. Christopher Hill, former ambassador to Macedonia, said Milošević was open to the political deal offered in Rambouillet (Oxford 2000). The biggest problem the Yugoslavian delegation found was in Annex B: Status of Multi-National Military Implementation force. In this annex, it is stated that a NATO peacekeeping force would occupy Kosovo, as well as Yugoslavia if necessary. It is obvious the Serbian delegation would not accept this part of the agreement, because it violated the principle of sovereignty. Henry Kissinger said, "The Rambouillet text, which called on Serbia to admit NATO troops throughout Yugoslavia, was a provocation, an excuse to start bombing. Rambouillet is not a document that an angelic Serb could have accepted. It was a terrible diplomatic document that should never have been presented in that form" (Kissinger 1999). Before a definitive "no" from the Serbs, there were signs they might accept international peacekeepers, like OSCE or UN, but not under NATO (Rendell 1999). U.S. diplomats refused that idea. In a CNN interview, Albright said, "There is no question that the basis of the deal is a NATO-led force" (Albright 1999). Since the U.S. did not want other international peacekeepers, it did not sincerely intend to find a peaceful solution. In fact, a U.S. official told the press the U.S. intentionally set the bar high in order for the Serbs to comply. Lord John Gilbert, UK Minister of State for Defense Procurement, in an "examination of witness" declared "I think the terms put to Milošević at Rambouillet were absolutely intolerable; how could he possibly accept them; it was quite deliberate" (UK Parliament 2000).

Even though the Rambouillet agreement did not introduce a referendum for an independent Kosovo—which the KLA leaders wanted and is the reason they did not at first accept the agreement—at the end, the Albanian delegation did sign the peace accord, leaving Serbs alone. Signing was a simple tactic the KLA used because it was
easier for them to let NATO have a war with Serbia than for the KLA to have a war with Serbia. This tactic was, in some ways, suggested by Albright. Veton Surroi, Kosovo Albanian Political Leader said that Albright was very clear with Hashim Thaci, KLA leader. He reported: “She was saying you sign, the Serbs don’t sign, we bomb. You sign, the Serbs sign, you have NATO in. So it’s up to you to say. You don’t sign, the Serbs don’t sign, we forget about the subject” (Little 2010). It was intentionally calculated by U.S. diplomats to put NATO in Yugoslavia. Diplomacy was not present in Rambouillet, because the two interested parties were never together to discuss the issues, but discussion happened separately and through letters (Auerswald and Auerswald 2000).

In brief, the humanitarian catastrophe was not avoided and as the British committee on Foreign Affairs said: “We accept the view of expert witnesses that the North Atlantic Treaty gives NATO no authority to act for humanitarian purposes, and we recommend that the government examine whether any new legal instrument is necessary to allow NATO to take action in future in the same manner as it did in Kosovo” (Select Committee on Foreign Affairs 2000). NATO did not have any authority to act because there is no “right” of humanitarian intervention that could be found in the UN Charter or in the international law. Even the U.S. rejected supporting the doctrine of humanitarian intervention (Chesterman 2001). The only convincing purpose for the intervention is for NATO’s own credibility.

Preserving Stability in a Key Part of Europe

The second objective President Clinton, his administration, and NATO suggested was preserving stability in a key part of Europe. According to them, the ethnic cleansing would cause many Kosovar Albanians to leave their country. Neighboring countries did not want refugees, because they would create tensions and ultimately destabilization in Europe. This objective might be important, and it is not possible to say with firmness the Kosovo War could not destabilize that part of Europe; nevertheless, it is possible to say it was not likely to happen because Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro accepted all the Kosovo refugees. The only concern these countries had was receiving enough international aid for the refugees. The coming of those refugees was relatively organized and under control (CNN 1999).

In his address to the American people, President Clinton said, “Let a fire burn here in this area, and the flames will spread. Eventually, key U.S. allies could be drawn into the conflict.” According to the Congressional Research Service, the allies President Clinton was referring to are Greece and Turkey (Migdalovitz 1999).

Greece and Turkey’s Reactions

The Greek prime minister was at first opposed to NATO’s intervention in Kosovo without the UN mandate but later passively accepted NATO, even though Greece did not participate in military operations (Migdalovitz 1999). In response to President
Clinton’s statement regarding a possible conflict in the region, the prime minister “disagreed... that this development could lead to conflict with Turkey,” and said, “Greece... is a stabilizing force in the area. There is no reason for anyone to fear that there will be implications with Turkey” (Migdalovitz 1999, 4). It is clear the Greek political leaders did not agree with President Clinton’s statement. Greece did not recognize any possible destabilization of the region.

Turkish political leaders also differed with President Clinton’s statement. The Turkish foreign minister said, “A state of war between Turkey and Greece due to the Kosovo crisis is possible only if Greece supports Serbia by leaving NATO and fights NATO. And I don’t expect that such a situation will happen.” The Turkish leaders equally refused to believe that the Kosovo War would have implications with Turkey and the Kurds in the southeast Turkish region (Migdalovitz 1999, 5).

In brief, President Clinton’s statement regarding the destabilization of a certain part of Europe does not rely on any great support. Turkish and Greek political leaders assured the destabilization in that part of Europe was almost impossible; therefore, destabilization was not a valid concern, even if it was possible. History agreed with Turkey and Greece.

Proposed Explanation: NATO’s Credibility

My proposed explanation for U.S./NATO participation in the Kosovo war is that NATO’s credibility was at stake. In order to explain why this proposed explanation is the most credible, it is necessary to give a short background of NATO and EU history.

NATO History in Context

During the Cold War era, Europe’s predominant defense force was NATO, which was mostly the U.S. with its powerful nuclear capabilities. Europe needed the U.S., and this need made the U.S. a dominant power in Europe. As Theodore Draper points out, NATO was an arrangement, not an alliance: “It was, in effect, a unilateral U.S. guarantee of European security, because only the U.S. was able to defend itself and any of the members” (Draper 1983). But with the end of the Cold War, NATO became a very strange institution without any obvious purpose.

Throughout the 1990s, U.S. policymakers wrestled with the problem of reinventing NATO, particularly the redefinition of both its purpose and its membership. In the meantime, Europe started to think about its own defense and security projects, which made the U.S. uncomfortable. In April 1990, President Bush wrote to France’s President Mitterrand: “NATO is the only plausible justification in my country for the American military presence in Europe. If NATO is allowed to wither because it has no meaningful political place in the new Europe, the basis for a long-term U.S. military commitment can die with it” (Sarotte 2010). As President Bush said, NATO’s living purpose is being present in Europe to defend Western Europe, but Europe started to see NATO’s purpose as no longer necessary in the new Europe. U.S. political leaders
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understood NATO was entering a crisis. In November 1991, NATO held a summit in Rome, after the London meeting of 1990, to find a better reason for NATO’s existence, and to “transform the Atlantic Alliance to reflect the new, more promising era in Europe” (NATO 1991). NATO would have a different function from its role in the Cold War.

EU History in Context

On 7 February 1992, twelve European countries signed the treaty on the EU, also known as “The Maastricht Treaty,” in which these countries undertook to implement a “common foreign and security policy, including the eventual framing of a common defense policy, which might in time lead to a common defense, thereby reinforcing the European identity and its independence in order to promote peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world” (EU 2010). This event is significant because it was the first time an official document talks about a common European defense.

Fearing a possible failure of their organization, NATO leadership organized a meeting in Berlin with the foreign ministers and representatives of the member countries of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. In this meeting, it was decided the Western EU would oversee the creation of a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) within NATO structures (North Atlantic Council 1996). This creation was necessary to avoid a possible independent European defense that would “destroy” NATO. Nevertheless, on 2 October 1997 the European Community signed the Treaty of Amsterdam. Through this treaty, they created the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and they initiated the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), now known as Common Security and Defense Policy (Treaty of Amsterdam 1997). The next year at the 1998 Saint-Malo summit, there was a joint declaration between France and the UK on European defense. An important passage of the declaration stated: “The Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.” (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1998). This statement declared the ESDP road map clearly does not include NATO but instead a separate and autonomous defense force.

The Clinton Administration started to become nervous about Europe’s steps on defense. In fact, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott said, “We would not want to see an ESDI that comes into being first within NATO, but then grows out of NATO and finally grows away from NATO, since that would lead to an ESDI that initially duplicates NATO but that could eventually compete with NATO” (Howerth and Keeler 2003). Clearly, the U.S. did not want any competition for NATO. Even though EU members did not explicitly want to weaken NATO, none could really foretell what the future would hold or what would be the eventual nature of the Atlantic Alliance. The U.S. did not want, and still does not want,
to accept this outcome, because NATO's presence in Europe means the U.S. will continue to have a strong influence in Europe, and it will continue to exercise its military hegemony there. The U.S. has done everything to preserve its power by demonstrating NATO's necessity and credibility. NATO's credibility was at stake as it approached its fiftieth birthday.

Kosovo War

The Kosovo conflict was a perfect opportunity for the U.S. and NATO to display their power and influence. After the war in Bosnia, and prior to NATO's fiftieth anniversary, it was necessary to show NATO needed to exist and Europe could do without the Atlantic Alliance. Milošević's ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was the perfect opportunity to exercise NATO's power and to strengthen the U.S.' hegemony in Europe. Kosovo was to be a new sort of war, one fought in the name of universal values and principles, rather than for narrow interests. In all the Yugoslavia conflict, but especially in Kosovo, the Europeans wanted to take the lead with diplomatic means, but the U.S. acceded, because if the Europeans had to work through diplomacy, it would mean NATO had to be sidetracked; and if NATO led, it would provide a central role for the U.S. and NATO (Hyland 1999).

The U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was the biggest NATO supporter. Albright started to talk about bombing Yugoslavia from the beginning. This bombing had to be under NATO (Albright 2003). In order to have a NATO attack, the alliance had to have a legal right to intervene unilaterally in Kosovo. Unfortunately, the alliance did not have that legal right, because it would violate the UN Charter. The British Foreign Minister Robin Cook wanted UN Security Council authorization, but Albright stopped him, saying in a phone conversation with him, "If a UN resolution passed, we would have set a precedent that NATO required Security Council authorization before it could act" (O'Connell 2000, 384). It was not possible to ask for UN approval, because the U.S. did not want to validate the principle that the Security Council held an effective veto over NATO decisions, a position Congress would never accept. Therefore, the motive was used of avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo: a justification for NATO's action.

Right before the air attack, the Clinton Administration and NATO officers campaigned strongly for NATO's intervention. Albright, together with Holbrooke, argued with the members of the Alliance that an agreement for peace was achievable only if NATO authorized the use of force (Albright 2003), otherwise there would be no other occasion where NATO could show its power and, therefore, its necessity in Europe. The former secretary alone said the Kosovo situation was a "key test of American leadership and of the relevance and effectiveness of NATO" (Albright 2003, 391). Milošević's ethnic cleansing came at the right moment for the U.S., and they used it to show NATO's credibility.
If Milošević was the only problem, and if it was necessary to remove him from office, the U.S. could have done it. Michael Dobbs, *Washington Post* foreign service journalist, wrote an article explaining that American pollster Doug Schoen helped Milošević's opposition overthrow him. Dobbs wrote: "The lead role was taken by the state department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, the government's foreign assistance agency, which channeled the funds through commercial contractors and nonprofit groups such as NDI and its Republican counterpart, the International Republican Institute (IRI)" (Dobbs 2000). U.S. officers often met Milošević opposition in Hungary for various seminars and helped it financially. In this way, Milošević was overthrown. Now the question naturally arises: Could the U.S. not do the same thing in the elections prior to the NATO attack? The answer is, yes. The demonstrations in 1996–97 showed Serbians were tired of Milošević. Unfortunately, the U.S. had another plan in mind, which involved NATO's credibility.

Many scholars have discussed NATO's possible failure: "If NATO cannot meet this challenge and defeat it, why does the alliance still exist?" "NATO will be sunk if it loses." Any retreat "would be a deadly blow to NATO" (Bandow 1999, 81). The fear of failing and losing credibility was high.

NATO's credibility prevailed over avoiding humanitarian catastrophe and destabilization of a part of Europe. The British House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs wrote in its report on Kosovo that: "Carl Bildt [former High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina] is reported as having been told by White House staff ten days before the bombing started that NATO needed to launch air strikes in order to save its credibility" (House of Commons 1999). This is further evidence of the real objective the U.S. and NATO had in mind.

After eleven weeks of continual bombing, Milošević agreed to a peace plan. In that agreement, the sovereignty of Yugoslavia was recognized, the presence of the UN was confirmed, and NATO and UN presence was finalized just on Kosovo territory. This is the agreement Yugoslavia's government almost accepted in Rambouillet (Bilder 1999). If U.S./NATO accepted the agreement after the air strike, they could have accepted it before the air strike, unless this tactic was planned in order to win against Milošević and to show NATO's credibility and power.

After the retreat of Serbs from Kosovo, the KLA started its own revenge against Serbs. Many atrocities during that year happened when NATO-led KFOR was responsible for security in Kosovo (King and Mason 2006, 53). All told, almost a quarter of a million people fled Kosovo during the period after the war ended (BBC 2003). Nevertheless, the media and the international community did not emphasize the problem in the same way they emphasized the Serbs' attack against Kosovar Albanians.

NATO's intervention was seen as a triumph. It had to be that way to show NATO's credibility and necessity even more. The U.S. reaffirmed U.S. hegemony and set a precedent that NATO could go to war virtually whenever it wished, without
the authorization of the UN Security Council. The U.S.’ dominance over Europe was preserved. The main benefit of the Kosovo War for the U.S. was the reestablishment of the key institution of U.S. hegemony in Europe: NATO.

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