

Thinking Strategically: Shall We Give Peace a Chance? (Published as “**NATO faced with two options**”) by Osvaldo Croci and Brian K. MacLean, Laurentian University

Any war, including the NATO war against Yugoslavia, is a dangerous game. In the dangerous game of war, the question of strategy is paramount. There are two major strategic choices at this stage of the NATO war: a "fight to the death" strategy or a "live and let live" strategy.

The "fight to the death" strategy is being advocated, for example, by those who argue that NATO must achieve total victory to prevent losing its credibility. But, in the first place, NATO's credibility as a military organization capable of fulfilling its mandate is not at stake. NATO's mandate is the self-defence of its member states. Nobody doubts NATO's ability to fulfill that mandate.

That aside, think of where the "fight to the death" strategy could lead. It is not likely to lead to total victory. You do not have to be a military expert to realize that bombing is unlikely to be sufficient to control what happens on the ground in Yugoslavia.

"Fight to the death" strategists generally concur with this, and are itching to send in ground troops. But the logistics of sending in ground troops of sufficient number to control the territory are mind-boggling. The least politically sensitive entry is through Albania, but Albania's decrepit transportation infrastructure leaves much to be desired from the standpoint of moving tanks and flying in supplies. Moreover, the Serb population has become so united that even if NATO were able to occupy Serbia, the Serbs would probably revert to guerrilla warfare against NATO forces, even if their current leaders can be made to capitulate. For these reasons, it seems very unlikely that NATO can seek total and unconditional surrender on the part of Serbia as the Allies did with Germany or Japan in World War II.

The ground troops strategy also has two other shortcomings. First, once the fighting started, and we began losing some of "our boys," the public in the NATO countries would likely lose the impression of helping refugees and "smacking Milosevic" (to use a Tony Blair expression), and develop a deeper appreciation for the dead and wounded. Some countries would then lose their stomach for war, and pressures would build to abandon the "fight to the death" strategy.

Second, there is the possibility that the ground troops strategy would so provoke the Russians they would come to the rescue of the Serbs. Indeed, for the benefit of readers who may be so sensitive to imagined small risks that they drink bottled water for their health, we should mention a genuine low-probability risk: the Kosovo crisis escalating into a third World War pitting the West, the Orthodox Slavic world and various parts of the Muslim against one another. Like World War I, it would have been triggered by an obscure nationalist movement in the Balkans.

An alternative to a "fight to the death" strategy is a "live and let live" strategy. It is a more rational, coolheaded but moral strategy. It means cutting our losses, ignoring sunk

costs, letting bygones be bygones. It means a compromise must be found. One scenario is as follows.

The first move is obviously a cease-fire agreement as a prelude to subsequent negotiations concerning the future of Kosovo. Once Serbia agrees to withdraw its forces from Kosovo, the concessions NATO must make are: first, to accept that the international force that will inevitably have to be deployed in Kosovo will not be a NATO one, and, second to leave the future of Kosovo an open question to be discussed by representatives of Serbs and the Albanian Kosovars.

To make these concessions, however, would be tantamount to admitting that the bombing has been a serious mistake. These concessions, in fact, if made at Rambouillet talks in February, would have led to Serbian acceptance of the proposal. A compromise along these lines, therefore, would probably require that the concessions be phrased so that NATO could claim at least a symbolic victory.

If a face-saving cease-fire agreement can be reached, the whole question could then be handed over to the UN Security Council. The Security Council could issue a resolution that provided for some NATO forces to participate in the contingent that would be deployed in Kosovo to assure the safe return of the refugees, and oversee some kind of peaceful coexistence between the Albanian majority and the Serbian minority.

NATO countries are well aware that the safe return of refugees to their home in Kosovo is the first order of business. They are not prepared to accept hundreds of thousands of refugees. The refugees cannot stay in Albania, the poorest country in Europe, nor in Macedonia, where they risk destabilizing the precarious ethnic and political equilibrium in that country. Most important, they have the right to return to their homes.

Then there is the question of the future of Kosovo. This is something to be decided by the Kosovars and Serbians, not something that can be imposed from outside. The only thing that is certain is that a UN peacekeeping force will have to be deployed in Kosovo and stay there for some time to come. Centuries of mistrust and hate will not have disappeared by miracle or have been anything but intensified as a result of the bombing.

The scenario we have sketched is one example of a "live and let live" strategy. The "live and let live" strategy has been endorsed by leaders from most of the major religious organizations in Canada (as well, we might add, by a growing number of trade unions). We, the authors, are not religious persons ourselves. We believe, however, that our political leaders should tune out the voices of the self-righteous zealots pushing the "fight to the death" strategy and heed the wisdom of these broad-based, long-established organizations. Our political leaders should abandon the conceit that they are the anointed ones.