

Another march of folly? Hardly

If we assess NATO's bombing against its strategic objectives, we can readily conclude that it has been a success

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Increasingly we are being told that NATO's bombing campaign in Yugoslavia is failing miserably. Yesterday on this page Marcus Gee went so far as to compare the campaign with the historical propensity for foolish behaviour detailed so well by the historian Barbara Tuchman in her book *The March of Folly*.

If one believes that the central purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's selective bombing was to cause Slobodan Milosevic to bend to the demands of the international community that he sign the Rambouillet accords, this might not be an inappropriate conclusion.

However, there is another way to assess the bombing campaign. Begin with the assumption that the attacks on Yugoslavia that began on March 24 had a range of political purposes, the least important of which was getting Mr. Milosevic to sign an accord that no rational Serbian leader who valued his position (if not his life) could possibly sign.

In fact, the careful bombing of targets throughout Yugoslavia had two clear strategic purposes.

First, NATO used a rather old-fashioned

power-politics calculus, a Balkan version of the much-maligned domino theory: If the Serbs were permitted to "cleanse" Kosovo in order to create a Greater Serbia, they would be tempted to finish the job by turning to Montenegro, or, more ominously, to the northern Vojvodina region of Serbia to cleanse it of ethnic Hungarians, with the possibility that Hungary, recently admitted to the NATO alliance, would be drawn into the conflict.

Second, the bombing was also driven by a decidedly newfangled ideal: humanitarian interventionism, or a willingness to bend the notion of state sovereignty sufficiently to allow a policy of active political engagement in Yugoslav affairs for humanitarian purposes.

Why would NATO's leaders choose to intervene militarily in Kosovo for humanitarian reasons? Look no further than Rwanda and Srebrenica. Many of today's NATO leaders were in power in 1994, when 800,000 Rwandans were slaughtered in 100 days, and in 1995, when Serb forces under the command of Ratko Mladic forced Dutch peacekeepers in Srebrenica to surrender some 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys, who were then bused to killing fields and slaughtered.

In both cases, NATO leaders let state sovereignty shape their policies, and they worked hard to ensure that their governments did nothing to help either Rwandans or Bosnians. Perhaps their indifference in 1994 and 1995 to the vast misery that unfolded before their eyes weighed with sufficient heaviness on their consciences that when they were con-

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fronted by a comparable evil in Kosovo, they were not willing to let history repeat itself — at least, not when they could do something to prevent it.

Whether for reasons of *realpolitik* or of humanitarianism, NATO had to attain one objective: to destroy the capabilities of the Serb-dominated armed forces, their logis-

tical support structures, and the supply lines to Kosovo. The bombing was designed to do precisely that: to ensure that Serb forces would be sufficiently "degraded" (to use NATO's euphemism) that they could not prevail in Kosovo — or in Montenegro, or in Vojvodina. In other words, the dominoes were to be kept upright by destroying President Milosevic's ability to use the Yugoslav army for further ethnic cleansing.

Likewise, a bombing campaign was crucial to the overall NATO goal of separating Kosovo from Yugoslavia. That this was a NATO goal well before the bombing started — vigorous protestations to the contrary from all corners of the alliance notwithstanding — can best be seen from the Rambouillet agreement itself. For this accord, imposed on Belgrade after Serb authorities reacted with customary brutality to terrorist attacks by the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1998, was nothing less than a blueprint for separating the Serbs from the precious cradle of their nation.

If the bombing is assessed against these objectives, we can readily conclude that it has been a success. NATO bombs have dramatically reduced the long-term ability of the Yugoslav army to conduct operations. Much of Yugoslavia's defence-industrial base has been destroyed. Supply lines have been cut and logistics made difficult. The central command in Belgrade is going to have difficulty keeping the army in Kosovo supplied, thus making a NATO ground offensive there easier.

In short, we should not judge the bombing campaign as failure or folly. Rather, it has been a considerable success — so successful that NATO could now reasonably cease bombing operations against Serbia proper, and turn its attention to creating the conditions in Kosovo for the return of the Kosovar Albanians to their homes.

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