



Center for Strategic & International Studies  
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[Macedonia and US Troops in the Balkans](#)

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Mr. Chairman, Senators, it is an honor to appear before this distinguished Committee to discuss the critical situation in southeastern Europe [the Balkans] today. In recent years, members of this committee have shown great sensitivity to US policy toward Europe, NATO, and our continuing commitments in this volatile part of Europe [the Balkans]. Senator Biden, in particular, has for over a decade been seriously engaged in efforts to understand the region, prevent or end its conflicts, and provide sensible proposals to policymakers of several administrations and both parties. And let me say how grateful I have been personally for the strong support of so many members of this committee as our policies have developed from our initial negotiations at Dayton to end the war in Bosnia, through the many issues associated with NATO enlargement, our successful NATO military action to end Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, and finally to our continuing commitment of US forces as part of KFOR.

However, the work in the Balkans is not done, nor has the need for US participation and, indeed, US leadership diminished. In fact, we are once again at a critical juncture in the further evolution of events there, as we witness the tragic escalation of fighting in Macedonia. And, once again, as the international community attempts to resolve an emerging conflict with limited diplomatic missions and exhortations to restraint, the lessons of recent history run square against the pressures of contemporary politics. NATO has resisted an additional military mission in the Balkans, but all the pleas and counsel of EU and NATO political leaders have not and cannot end the fighting there. And as the fighting continues, the familiar pattern of excessive use of force and needless harm to innocent civilians has reappeared, promising that the continuation of conflict will make any political solution increasingly difficult between increasingly alienated and hostile ethnic groups.

For most of a decade the United States has worked to protect and strengthen Macedonia's democracy. Beginning in 1993 we deployed US troops along the border with Serbia as part of UNPREDEP, the UN Preventive Deployment Force. It was a mission held up as an example of a new US and international strategy, Preventive Defense. In conjunction with the United Nations, we successfully used a small military mission, only some 500 US troops and an equal number of Scandinavians, to signal to Milosevic our determination that conflict would not spread to Macedonia, and to reassure the fledgling democratic forces there that they could work together peacefully in promoting a new system of government in an historically troubled region.

During the anxious moments of NATO's military actions against Serb ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, NATO and the US reassured the Macedonian government that we would stand with them. I recall President Gligorov, with whom I met many times, reflecting that 50 years hence, Serbia would still be a neighbor, and asking if NATO would also still be there to help his country if need be. But despite our reassurances, the Macedonians were troubled, and they were right to be. During the

fighting, Milosevic targeted Macedonia, inciting pro-Serb elements to raid the US, German and several other NATO members' embassies in Skopje. Three US soldiers were kidnapped in northern Macedonia by the Serbs in an action that has never been satisfactorily explained but has all the ear-marks of a special forces kidnapping. And finally, Milosevic used the "refugee bomb" against Macedonia, deporting hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians to Macedonia in an effort to destabilize the government there.

With help from NATO, the UN, and a number of NGO humanitarian assistance organizations, Macedonia coped successfully with the refugees. And throughout the long ordeal of the NATO campaign Macedonia provided us the use of their airspace for our operations, their airport for reconnaissance flights, their road network, and many facilities for staging the NATO force which was to enter Kosovo when the fighting stopped. That force, staging in preparation of peace, also helped convey the threat of ground invasion and was critical in convincing Milosevic to give in to NATO's demands. Macedonia also hosted the base areas for many KLA elements, and served as a logistics base linked to quiet infiltration routes, even though they feared that eventually the radical Albanian elements would turn against them someday. Without the continued and active support of the Macedonian government the NATO action in Kosovo would likely have failed. The US and its NATO allies truly are in debt to the courage and skill of the people and government of Macedonia. We owe them more than we have thus far repaid.

Now, as the democracy we fostered and upheld rapidly disintegrates in ethnic fighting, the US faces another critical juncture in its Balkan journey: to take responsibility, with cooperation from the Allies, in preventing renewed conflict and preserving Macedonia's territorial integrity through a military and expanded diplomatic mission, or to continue to try to just scrape by, hoping against reality and the experience of the past ten years that the fighting will die out as a result of EU-led mediation, skillful Macedonian government diplomacy and military pressure exerted by Macedonian troops in their own country. I cite this as a United States decision, for surely it cannot be implemented successfully without US encouragement and participation, if not US leadership.

Why should the burden of leadership fall on the United States once again? Because I am convinced that, absent America's moral and political commitment to broker a settlement, spreading ethnic violence will lead to Macedonia's collapse, releasing passions that will focus on partitions and redrawing of borders that will prove destabilizing for the region and require an international military presence to police it indefinitely. If Europe matters to the United States, the administration and Congress will need to act on the premise that the most urgent and challenging problems for the transatlantic community begins with southeastern Europe: preventing the revival of ethnic cleansing, ensuring democratic development that will generate self-sustaining regional stability, and sustaining the continued vitality and viability of NATO.

At this point it seems clear that the situation on the ground is going to continue to deteriorate unless NATO actively intervenes. The troops of the Macedonian Army lack the equipment, skills, and leadership to meet the challenge posed by the Albanian fighters. Their continuing efforts to resist rebel incursions appear to have done little more than destroy civilian property and convince thousands to flee their homes and villages. About 10,000 refugees streamed into Kosovo over the weekend alone as the insurgents moved into the suburbs of Skopje, adding to the over 20,000 that UNHCR reported had previously fled into Kosovo and the nearly 20,000 internally displaced within Macedonia. UNHCR has announced that it is planning for 150,000 Macedonian refugees in Kosovo this year. Every strike against Albanian civilians further radicalizes the Albanian population and generates more recruits for the Albanian fighters. It is not realistic to expect KFOR to control the border from inside Kosovo. The difficult terrain and numerous trails and villages will combine to frustrate efforts at total control with anything like the number of KFOR troops currently available. And even if we could "seal" that border (which we cannot), other support and assistance would still reach the fighters through Albania, Bulgaria, or from within Macedonia itself.

It is not too late however, for NATO to act in conjunction with a U.S.-led peace initiative with the ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. This plan would involve sending a senior Bush administration official with the clout and personality to broker an agreement among the Macedonians and

engage Washington and the EU in its implementation. It would balance preservation of the Macedonian state--the key aim of ethnic Macedonians--with a political and economic agenda for overcoming deep-seated discrimination against the ethnic Albanians--the aim of the moderate Albanian political leaders and declared objective of the insurgents. The EU would be asked to commit and disburse one hundred million dollars in economic assistance immediately for the next six months to buy time for the reforms to take hold. Crucially, it would also require a NATO monitoring force, including a U.S. contingent, to supervise the security components of the agreement, creating confidence among both ethnic groups and allowing passions to begin to subside.

NATO should move immediately to reinforce its forces along the Kosovo-Macedonian border, and should extend its operations into Macedonian territory itself, in an effort to displace the Slavic Macedonian troops who are now attempting to fight against the Albanian guerillas. In conjunction with the Macedonian effort the purpose of the NATO action would be to provide joint patrols and help the government of Macedonia establish a presence in the northern areas of its own country. This will entail some risk to NATO troops, but if accompanied by the right rules of engagement and political efforts, the risk can be minimized. Simultaneously, the US must create some ad hoc organization to develop a multifunctional team which can help the government of Macedonia meet the needs of its own citizens. This would include surveying Albanian and Macedonian areas, helping to provide local security, augmenting the Macedonian courts, educational system and public health measures while assisting in the development of new rights and guarantees to remove the actual and perceived ethnic injustices which lie at the root of this quarrel.

The urgency of action in Macedonia is accompanied by the need to continue active measures to promote peace and democratic standards elsewhere in the region. In Bosnia, US and NATO troops remain vital elements in continuing implementation of the Dayton agreement. But the international community must also muster increased determination through the Peace Implementation Committee to insist that the provisions of Dayton be implemented and that those who obstruct implementation be removed from positions of authority, whether elected or not. This is a matter of the increased and effective use of the various authorities the High Representative has been granted, but is frequently reluctant to use. Without courageous civil implementation actions, the mission in Bosnia will not be successful. But courageous civil implementation also requires strong NATO presence. Continuing troop cuts at this time run the risk of further undercutting the mission in Bosnia.

In Kosovo, US forces are an essential part of KFOR and must continue to remain active. International delays in undertaking the process leading to final status determination in Kosovo have contributed to instability and renewed fighting in the region. Hopefully the elections now scheduled for November will help channel Kosovar energies into constructive channels, but the international community must also recognize and prepare for the reality that after a decade of repression and a vicious ethnic cleansing campaign, most Albanians will not feel secure until they are independent. In the meantime, hard work remains building an effective system of laws, police and courts which can assure Western standards are met during and after the transition. The recently proposed return of Serb refugees is a necessary but difficult step along the way to final status. Unless accompanied by reciprocal measures of justice and compensation by the Serb government in Belgrade to redress the wrongs of the Milosevic era, and especially the detained or still unexplained missing persons, much trouble can be anticipated. This trouble may well be focused on the area around Kosovska Mitrovica, an ethnically mixed, but effectively partitioned town inside the French sector. France has maintained a stubborn refusal to countenance multi-ethnicity in the town and its institutions; in the short run, this avoided violence and Serb flight, but in the longer term it has created a tinderbox of resentments which can only be dealt with by adding some American units to the KFOR mix to dampen Albanian assertiveness and to assure even treatment of the ethnic groups.

And this brings us to the all-important problem of Belgrade. Here, our European allies have been less than helpful, too quickly willing to grant concessionary treatment to the Serb government and

slow to insist that it fully meet its international obligations in dealing with the International Criminal Tribunal, the many missing or detained Albanians and the continuing undemocratic practices and standards of its security forces. In fact, at the current pace, there will be years of work before Serbia can meet Western standards. Delivering Mr. Milosevic and the other indicted war criminals to The Hague is a necessary first step, and should be required before the United States agrees to participate in the late-June donors conference on assistance to Yugoslavia. But a decade of crime and corruption will require a thoroughgoing effort directed at most public institutions in Yugoslavia. International assistance should be organized and provided. And in the process there should be no consideration that somehow the future of Bosnia is connected to the final status of Kosovo. Bosnia-Herzegovina must remain a whole and unified country. On this point the international community must be unrelenting: no change of boundaries by force.

In facing these current challenges, however, the international community must accurately see the progress that has been made. Yugoslavia was always an uneasy federation, welded together under iron rule by Tito, and broken apart as an unscrupulous Milosevic pursued Serb domination and his own personal political power. A vicious war in Croatia and Bosnia is over. The legal basis for a unified Bosnian state is largely present in the yet-to-be-fully-implemented Dayton Agreement. A cold-hearted campaign of ethnic cleansing was halted in Kosovo. A civil war was deterred in Montenegro, though the international community exceeded its bounds in telling the Montenegrin people that they should vote against independence from Yugoslavia. The failure of the United States to prevent the violent collapse of Macedonia, however, would threaten to undo some of these accomplishments. Western intervention has generally been late, consistently undermining moderates and foreclosing more democratic and stabilizing options. Many in the region have suffered and died while we debated...but eventually we have acted and have generally been effective. Much has been accomplished; our investment in European stability needs to be safeguarded.

Southeastern Europe is not a quagmire; our efforts here are no "Vietnam." Milosevic would still be in office today had we not stopped him finally in Bosnia and Kosovo. However, as President Bush begins his first trip to Europe since taking office, he finds new war clouds gathering over Macedonia. It is now time for NATO to act, again--this time to halt the fighting in Macedonia--and this will again require American leadership. We must also persevere and not leave behind friends such as Montenegro, whose support for us was severely tested by Belgrade's pressures. Surely, all of this is not asking too much of the world's remaining superpower.