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Kosovo

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Just war?

Given the stories that come from people like Shpend, it might seem that if any war can be called "just," it would be NATO's campaign to end Yugoslavia's war against Albanians in Kosovo. Indeed, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, archbishop of Los Angeles, has stated that because negotiations with the Serbs failed to end their attacks against Kosovo's Albanians, the situation left NATO little choice in ending Yugoslav aggression.

"There just seems to be no other way to halt that continuing assault upon innocent people, and that does then nudge the conflict into the just war category," Cardinal Mahony said during an April 13 radio broadcast of National Public Radio's Talk of the Nation show.

President Bill Clinton and other NATO leaders have repeatedly claimed they began their air campaign in March to stop Serbian "ethnic cleansing" — forced expulsion and/or killing — of Kosovo's Albanians, which began last year, a process that greatly accelerated after NATO attacked.

The president has also stated that NATO is trying to keep the war from extending beyond Kosovo into such neighboring countries as Albania and Macedonia.

Yet, although Cardinal Mahony may support NATO's campaign, there are other Catholics who have severely criticized NATO, noting that it is the first time the alliance has attacked a sovereign nation. Additionally, such critics contend that NATO was warned before it began bombing that an attack would enrage the Serbs so much that they would accelerate their attacks on Kosovar Albanians.

"The people of Kosovo have already endured tragedy after tragedy due to the ongoing conflict," read a March statement by Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace group. "A bombing campaign can only serve to heighten the suffering and death of people throughout the region."

Even Catholics sympathetic to foreign intervention in Kosovo have qualms about it, according to Jack Cullinan, European affairs adviser to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In an interview from his Washington, D.C., office, Cullinan said that the fact that NATO is attacking not only Serb targets in Kosovo, but those in Serbia and Montenegro as well, raises concerns about what exactly is being targeted and why.

"Dropping bridges in (Yugoslavia) is not stopping the killers in ski masks," he said,



Reuters/CNS

An Easter cross sits in the foreground as a U.S. F-16 fighter takes off from Aviano air base in Italy April 4.

referring to Serb forces in Kosovo.

Other observers move beyond moral qualms about the air war to outright skepticism of NATO's intentions in Kosovo.

Enver Masud, who heads the Wisdom Fund, an Islamic Internet news service based in Arlington, Va., contended this war has more to do with preserving NATO's credibility than with saving ethnic Albanians. He added that Western leaders opposed arming the Bosnian Muslims until they were slaughtered in large numbers, and are once again showing sheepishness about arming the Muslims in the Kosovo Liberation Army.

"I think (the West) is afraid of the emergence of any nation in Europe that is largely Muslim," he alleged in a phone interview with the *Courier*.

Some commentators have stated it's hypocritical for the United States to oppose Serbian ethnic cleansing while supporting Turkey's repression of its Kurdish minority — not to mention the fact that the United States has supported such regimes as that in Guatemala, where 200,000 were killed during its decades-long civil war.

"The motives for this war have nothing to do with humanitarianism and everything to do with asserting U.S. power ... creating a (NATO) military instrument that Washington can use in Europe and beyond, free from any UN restraint," wrote Stephen R. Shalom in a recent article for *New Politics*.

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic himself wondered aloud during a recent interview with a correspondent from CNN why the United States is so interested in what he sees as essentially a Yugoslav insurrection. There are so many other ethnic conflicts taking place in the world, he said, added that Yugoslavia has been unfairly painted as an exclusively Serbian territory.

"In Serbia, there are 26 different ... national minorities," Milosevic told CNN. "We have problems only with separation movements in Kosovo."

However, Selma Mujezinovic, a Bosnian Muslim who fled her homeland after being wounded in a Serb artillery attack, welcomes NATO's air campaign. She said she can understand why U.S. citizens don't want their soldiers in a ground war, so she hoped the air campaign would succeed. Now a Rochester resident, Mujezinovic said she feels sorry for Serb civilians who have died in NATO bombing, but believes it's about time somebody tried to stop the Yugoslav military.

"After you've lived there, and experienced (Serb attacks), there's not enough you can do to counteract it," she said.

Balkans battle

Kosovo's war began early in 1998 when the Kosovo Liberation Army attacked Yugoslav military and police forces in Kosovo who had been severely repressing the province's Albanians throughout the 1990s. NATO started its own campaign against the Serbs after Yugoslavia refused earlier this year to sign a peace agreement that would have given autonomy to Kosovo and placed NATO troops in Kosovo as a peacekeeping force.

Like so many wars over territory, the current conflict in Kosovo is rooted in competing historical claims to the same piece of land.

On the one hand, Kosovar Albanians like Shpend will argue that they are the descendants of the Illyrians who inhabited the region when it was part of ancient Greece, and hence have ancestral rights to the area. Then again, Kosovo also lies at the heart of what was once Serbia's medieval empire, and to this day contains a number of Orthodox churches and monasteries.

According to numerous reports, both sides in the Kosovo conflict can list a long history of grievances against the other. Kosovar Albanians will argue that throughout much of the 20th century they were treated as second-class citizens under the Serbs. However, by the late 1960s, Kosovar Albanians were agitating for independence from Yugoslavia, and eventually it was the Kosovar Serbs who began complaining of mistreatment at the hands of the increasingly powerful majority ethnic Albanians. Tens of thousands of Serbs left Kosovo in the 1970s and '80s because of such treatment, according to several reports.

Then, beginning in 1989, Serbian President Milosevic cracked down on Albanian nationalists, and revoked the province's autonomy. He removed Albanians from the province's civil service, and banned the Albanian language from official and educational use. Meanwhile, more than 80 percent of the region's Albanian

population lost their jobs, and Serb authorities began regularly abusing the ethnic Albanian populace, according to several sources.

In response to Milosevic's moves, Kosovar's Albanians launched a nonviolent campaign of resistance, hoping to attract the interest of the West. As part of their movement, Kosovar Albanians established a private social services network financed by donations from Albanian emigrants in Europe, Canada and the United States.

However, Western indifference to the ethnic Albanians' nonviolent campaign made a violent campaign more and more alluring to some Kosovar Albanians, according to Chris Hedges, author of an article on the KLA in the May/June edition of *Foreign Affairs*.

Hedges wrote that the final straw for many radical Kosovar Albanians was the fact that, despite the requests of Kosovo's Albanian leaders, Kosovo wasn't discussed during the negotiations that led to 1995 Dayton peace accord that ended the war in Bosnia. Hedges wrote that Dayton convinced many Kosovar Albanians nonviolence was futile.

"By ignoring the plight of the Kosovar Albanians for nearly a decade, the West lost much of its credibility before NATO began bombing," Hedges wrote. He added that the KLA members he spoke with are not interested in autonomy, but independence. He also claimed that Milosevic wants to fight for Kosovo, in part, because of its mineral wealth.

Any future?

Although the war is still raging, there are those who are already looking ahead to the day it will end. One such person is Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation in New York City. Rabbi Schneier brought together Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic Kosovar leaders in Vienna last March for a meeting on the Serb-Albanian conflict.

The religious leaders released a declaration calling for a negotiated end to the Kosovo conflict, along with several provisions detailing the future shape of a multiethnic Kosovo. He added that the meeting drew the support of Pope John Paul II as well as all the major religious leaders and institutions of Serbia.

In a phone interview with the *Courier*, Rabbi Schneier said that the Balkans were represent a growing tribalism on the international scene, a tribalism that religious leaders of all faiths must seek to temper by appealing to their shared values.

"We have to instill the attitude among our believers what it means to live and let live," he said.

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