

Reflections on Lessons Learned:  
Canada's Experience in Kosovo

An Address Delivered to the Conference  
"Twisting Arms and Flexing Muscles: Perspectives on Military Force, Humanitarian  
Intervention and Peacebuilding"

by

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Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Zaire, Sierra Leone, Kosovo,  
East Timor - the list of humanitarian intervention is long  
and getting longer.

The need to twist arms and flex muscles, to paraphrase the  
theme of this conference, shows little sign of letting up.

In my remarks tonight, I will focus on Kosovo and some of  
the lessons to be learned from that conflict.

I will make some cross-references to the aborted MNF  
operation in East Zaire, and to the East Timor issue as well .

Un de mes successeurs se présentera devant la Centre dans le futur et racontera aux vos successeurs comment la paix est survenue.

Aujourd'hui, j'aimerais parler:

- de ce qui est arrivé et de ce nous avons fait à ce sujet;
- des raisons pour lesquelles nous l'avons fait;
- de la façon don't nous avons procédé;
- et des quelques leçons que nous devrions en tirer à cette étape-ci.

## WHAT HAPPENED...

What happened and Canada's response are probably still clear enough in peoples' minds, but I will present a quick summary review of what it looked like from a practitioner's perspective to set the rest of my remarks in context.

From a practical diplomacy point of view, the Kosovo conflict did not begin in 1389 with the battle of Kosovo Polje, nor in 1912-13 with the Balkan wars, nor in 1945 with the creation of the first, post-war Yugoslav constitution, nor in 1980 with the death of Tito.

The Kosovo conflict began in 1987 when Slobodan Milosevic became leader of the Communist Party and launched his nationalistic campaign for a greater Serbia.

Kosovo autonomy was the first casualty; Yugoslav integrity was next.

Slovenia rebelled.

Then Croatia.

Then Bosnia.

Then Kosovo itself.

To show they meant business,/the Group imposed sanctions on Serbia.

In March, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1160, under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, condemning the excessive use of force by the FRY authorities,/urging a political settlement, including autonomy for Kosovo, imposing an arms embargo and calling on the FRY to cooperate with the International Tribunal.

But the violence continued.

As a consequence, at their meeting, in London in July, the G-8, effectively the members of the Contact Group plus Japan and Canada, called for further economic sanctions against Serbia.

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, the U.N. Security Council, in Resolution 1203, effectively endorsed the agreements.

The next day, Milosevic reached a further agreement with NATO promising, inter alia to reduce his forces in Kosovo.

Efforts to broker an agreement between Belgrade and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) continued through the Fall/ but, by the time of the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in December, the consensus view was that Belgrade was carrying on with ethnic cleansing, but keeping the pace below NATO's threshold for responding.

This is not to say either that the KLA were innocent or that the Serbs were not justified in responding to terrorist activities.

What the international community could not accept, however, was the Serb security forces' wholly disproportionate and often indiscriminate use of force in doing so -- and the recourse to paramilitary gangs.

The Racak tragedy defined the issue.

In a KLA ambush, 3 Serb policemen were killed; in the consequent Serb security force reaction, forty-five Kosovar villagers were slain.

The Serb authorities refused Mrs. Justice Arbour access to Racak to investigate.

The Rambouillet negotiations process, conducted by the Contact Group, was the last diplomatic chance; it failed in March.

Milosevic miscalculated the determination of the international community, ~~and lost the chance, provided by the Rambouillet Accord, to secure the FRY's presence in Kosovo.~~

By the end of Rambouillet, there were 40,000 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) troops and police in Kosovo - /  
- under the Holbrooke-Milosevic agreement there should have been approximately 15,000.

No one doubted Milosevic's capacity for brutality - we had watched him for a decade but most expected that his forces would be directed against the KLA and its supporters.

Few guessed he would unleash crimes against humanity on the scale he did.

Those who argue that the brutality somehow was a reaction to the NATO bombing should remember that by March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the day before the bombing began, the UNHCR already had about 400,000 internally-displaced persons and 90,000 refugees on its rolls, according to the report of the High Commissioner for Refugees Secretary General Ogata to the U.N.

Once NATO acted,/the previously planned "Operation Horseshoe" was launched and the murder, rape and expulsions did accelerate.

NATO's objective of getting Milosevic to end repression in Kosovo all too quickly had to be changed to giving the refugees the opportunity to return home again in safety and security.

## WHY WE DID WHAT WE DID

The war against Serbia was a war of values, a war for Human Security.

Despite some strained efforts in some NATO capitals to marshal classic arguments of national interest to justify action, the fact is that little strategic purpose was served in intervening in Kosovo.

There was no oil, no geographic commanding height nor maritime sea lane, no rare precious resources, no scientific secret, no Hitler-in-the-making to dominate Europe, no potential global conflagration to be nipped in the bud.

What there was, was the abuse of an ethnic minority by an atavistic government, in a location where the NATO countries had the capacity to act and at a time when they had the will to do so.

As Vaclav Havel said in his extraordinary House of Commons address earlier this year, it was the first war for values, not interests.

A basic lesson is that it was precisely those shared values that constituted the glue that held the Alliance together throughout the war and holds it together, now.

In Havel's words: "decent people cannot sit back and watch systematic, state-directed massacres of other people."

The answer is simple.

Because we do not have the means to intervene in every conflict,/ does not mean we should not intervene in any conflict.

There is a street fight analogy that is not perfect - no analogies are - but still helpful in understanding this point.

You park in a downtown parking lot and/ in leaving your car,/ you come across someone being badly beaten.

You are not a policeman and you do not have any kind of legal mandate authorizing you to intervene.

Moreover, you know that it is likely that there are equally  
vicious beatings taking place at the same time in Vancouver  
and in Halifax.

What do you do?

Pass on by the parking lot fight because you cannot also  
stop the fights in Vancouver and Halifax and above all,  
you want to remain consistent?

To ask this question is to answer it.

Here the lesson is that a massive campaign of terror and political or ethnic cleansing cannot only be stopped, but actually reversed.

However, a corollary lesson is that maintaining order afterwards can be every bit as difficult as imposing it was in the first place.

Violence remains endemic in Kosovo, particularly against Serb and Roma communities, many of whom have fled.

Even 50,000 KFOR and U.N. personnel cannot stop all revenge attacks.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM OUR EXPERIENCE?

A further lesson is that, once started, wars fought for values must be won or the values themselves are placed at risk.

Once committed, the stakes for NATO and Canada were far from trivial; in fact, they were staggering.

If this humanitarian intervention had failed, in such strategically favourable circumstances (the conflict happened in a small land-locked country on the margins of Europe and literally on the border of NATO, the most powerful military Alliance in history) there might well not have been another.

NATO would have been discredited, with unfathomable consequences for German security and all that signifies to its neighbours.

Perceived fecklessness on the part of NATO and its de facto leader would have encouraged mini-Milosevics around the world.

The USA would likely have retreated further into isolation.

The U.N.'s peace and security mandate would certainly have been made correspondingly less relevant.