

Taking action in Kosovo

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Dealing with brutal and cunning tyrants has never been easy, but it should at least be clear now that Slobodan Milosovic is all three: brutal, cunning and tyrannical. He has allowed the country he dominates--the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia--to fall into economic and social ruin as a result of external sanctions and internal corruption. He has played the international community like a fiddle, using repeated lies and all-too-accurate calculations of its tolerance to advance his power. In Kosovo, as in Bosnia, he has employed planned savagery in his effort to create an ethnically pure Serbia.

While the political circumstances of the Kosovo conflict differ significantly from those of Bosnia, the one constant is Milosovic and his tactics of ethnic warfare. In order to subdue the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) he has employed many of the same irregular forces that fought in Bosnia. True to form, they have pursued their objective by waging a war of terror on the ethnic Albanian civilians. At present count some 200 villages have been ravaged and over 10 percent of the area's 2 million inhabitants--some 260,000 people--are now refugees. At least 50,000 of those refugees are believed to be hiding in the woods, shelterless, with the prospect of a harsh winter ahead.

The most appalling forms of genocide continue to surface. In Gornje Obrinje, a village near the regional capital of Pristina, 18 ethnic Albanian civilians were found slaughtered after a Serb offensive. The victims were largely women and children--including an 18-month-old child--and the elderly. Some were killed with a bullet to the back of the head, others had their throats cut. All signs point to Milosovic's special "police" force as the perpetrator.

So what should be done about Milosovic? First, the West should immediately hand him an ultimatum demanding a cease-fire in Kosovo. And the deadline should be a matter of days, not weeks. Any failure to observe the cease-fire should be met with military force. Milosovic must not be allowed to continue playing the game in which, in response to a threat of force, he makes promises that only serve to buy him more

time to continue his dirty work. (A measure of Milosovic's tyranny can be seen in his government's recent threat to hold hostage its own citizens who work for Western media and rights groups in the event of any NATO strikes against Serbian forces.)

Second, plans for the relief of refugees must be put into place and enacted as soon as the situation on the ground permits. Swift action will be necessary to forestall a humanitarian disaster with the onset of winter.

Third, Milosovic must be pressed to restore the status of autonomy that Kosovo held before Milosovic himself revoked it in 1989. Only with such a restored status is it remotely possible for forces of moderation within ethnic Albanian Kosovo to begin to reestablish the authority they lost to the more radical KLA.

Fourth, Western allies must recognize that Milosovic's actions in Kosovo since 1989 have created a determined enemy in the KLA--a force that could wage a protracted guerrilla war that would continue to destabilize the entire southeast European region. The West must foster negotiations and communications among neighboring countries that have interests in the Kosovo conflict. One of the few bright spots in the past weeks has been the signing of a pact by seven southeast European countries to create a force of some 3,000 peacekeeping soldiers. Some of those countries--Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Italy, Greece and Turkey--are potential combatants should the fighting in Kosovo spread beyond the borders of Yugoslavia.

Finally, the effort to bring to justice those indicted for war crimes in the Bosnia war must be intensified. The crime scenes of Bosnia are covered with Milosovic's fingerprints, and the same forensic evidence is in Kosovo. As with other 20th-century tyrants such as Pol Pot, it may never be possible to bring Milosovic to justice. But justice and peace are served by shedding as much light as possible on the deeds of this world-class gangster.