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NATO's New Role

By The Editors

Our cover story in this issue of *The New Democrat* is devoted to Europe's growing embrace of the Third Way, the American-bred governing philosophy for a global Information Age. In late April, the leaders of Britain, Germany, Holland, and Italy joined President Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council in Washington for an extraordinary [public conversation](#) about the Third Way movement's meaning and direction on both sides of the Atlantic.

The four European leaders who attended the DLC forum were in Washington on other business critical to the shaping of a secure and prosperous 21st century. They and the other national leaders here for events commemorating the 50th anniversary of NATO had little opportunity to celebrate the most successful military alliance in modern history or its expansion to include former Warsaw Pact nations. Instead, NATO's 19 heads of government were forced to spend their time together shaping the alliance's post-Cold War mission as its forces engaged in a hot war in the former Yugoslavia.

The decisions taken at the NATO summit have implications that go far beyond the alliance's intervention in Kosovo. All NATO members, large and small, explicitly accepted a new role for the alliance in using force to uphold civilized norms of behavior in Europe. Whatever the outcome in Kosovo, the United States and its European allies have modernized NATO's purpose to meet a new common threat.

Atavistic ethnic grievances, human rights violations, and imperialist fantasies of the type now on display in Serbia are the most pressing post-Cold War challenge to U.S. strategic interests. At a time when American and European leaders are actively discussing a role for NATO in dealing with destabilizing violence outside Europe, the alliance can hardly stand by as destabilizing violence breaks out in Europe itself.

Republicans who question whether the Kosovo mission is in our national interest must have forgotten why we created NATO in the first place. The transatlantic alliance that won the Cold War remains America's greatest strategic asset, one that amplifies our power, extends our reach, and reinforces the moral authority of U.S. global leadership. Its legacy is a large and growing zone of stability, prosperity, and democracy in Europe, one that is opening its doors to yesterday's enemies. That legacy is threatened now by the chronic disorder and ethnic violence that Slobodan Milosevic has unleashed in Southern Europe. If it is not NATO's business to confront new threats to U.S. interests, values, and

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friends in Europe, then we may reasonably wonder what purpose the alliance serves today. To argue that maintaining NATO's unity and credibility is not a vital American interest is essentially to argue against the whole rationale of collective defense that brought NATO into being.

It's increasingly clear that maintaining NATO's unity was a large factor in the gamble by President Clinton and European leaders that air strikes alone would bring Milosevic quickly to the peace table. The gamble did not initially work, but the desire to keep the alliance in synch was sound. In Washington, NATO leaders showed a renewed resolve to reverse Milosevic's thuggish actions in Kosovo, and to give military officials new leeway to match their means to the mission.

It remains for President Clinton and other NATO leaders to make it clear to the American and European people that we are involved in a war, not a peacekeeping or refugee-relief mission. War is not a video game; it means risking and accepting casualties. And while NATO's technological superiority does mean we can mete out vast punishment from the skies on male-factors while minimizing our own casualties, it does not rule out casualties.

If this mission is to succeed, NATO must quickly eliminate any hope in Belgrade that our intervention will stop the moment our televisions display the names of casualties or film of POWs being paraded past jeering Serb crowds. We are confident that U.S. troops, and the people whose interests they are fighting for, will accept sacrifices to stop aggression and ethnic cleansing in Europe, just as they have done in far graver circumstances before.

That's worth remembering as NATO marks the beginning of a second half-century with a new purpose. Americans have fought two hot and one cold war in Europe in this century to oppose aggression, oppression, and the slaughter of innocents. At the end of this century, it's no time to give up the fight. The NATO conference and the DLC's Third Way event showcased a new generation of center-left leaders who have abandoned the left's traditional reluctance to use force and are determined to meet the challenges of economic globalization and regional turmoil. Now, more than ever, the Atlantic Alliance is America's most important asset in shaping the world of our future.

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