

## **BUDGETS BURSTING IN AIR**

By William Nicoson

With explosive brilliance, President Clinton has finally figured out how to spend the budget surplus in a way the Republicans are obliged to accept: literally blowing the money away in the rockets' red glare by detonation of patriotic ordinance over Serbia, our Bosnian peace-partner.

Of course no one knows how much the Serbian adventure will cost, because no one knows how long the bombing will last and whether ground troops will be needed. Since Serbian Strongman Slobodan Milosevic is not the type to cry uncle, the military destruction may last until there are no further military targets to destroy. That may absorb, in advance, the budget surplus predicted for years to come, fortunately ending much dreary political bickering in the future.

Furthermore, budgeted funds for weapons testing and for training maneuvers may be liberated by the assault on Serbia. For the first time in our military history, a stealth aircraft is being deployed under hostile fire to drop computer-guided bombs with huge destructive power. If it works, civilian casualties will be diminished. If it doesn't, oh, well, several residential neighborhoods will likely be obliterated, but we did our best and learned a lot.

Such testing and training is certainly in our national interest, though the President hasn't mentioned those benefits. He's talked instead about falling dominoes endangering our allies, Greece and Turkey, by way of Macedonia. Greece, a NATO member, has been foolish enough to disown bombardment of Serbia. It's also true that Macedonia, where NATO now maintains 10,000 troops on the southern border of Kosovo, declared itself independent of the former Yugoslavia in 1992 without the slightest quibble from Milosevic then or since. But why wait for him to quibble? Let's get this game over before he decides if he wants more dominoes.

And talk about quibbling, some of our eye-shade lawyers are certainly muddying the water. They have the temerity to point out that Kosovo, unlike Croatia and Bosnia, has always been a Serbian province, and that Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority has sought its independence for more than a decade by creating civil disorder. Is it possible that these legal i-dotters are suggesting Milosevic may be closer to Lincoln holding the union together than to Hitler, as President Clinton has insisted, building an empire by aggression against neighbors? If Kosovo isn't a neighbor, Macedonia is. Should NATO wait to defend that domino until he reaches for it?

All of this redeems NATO, happily, from rusty obsolescence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many starry-eyed observers believed NATO, a bulwark of defense, had outlived its usefulness since the anticipated aggressor had disappeared. Now NATO, by striking the first blow against a hopelessly out-gunned enemy of its choice, has created a wholly new mission which justifies its continued survival. At last morality is being enforced from without in a civil war. Other tin-horn dictators around the world, who might be tempted to reject U.S.-drafted treaties diminishing their sovereignty, have been watching Serbian skies with apprehension.

NATO's devastating air assault on Serbia has properly been extended to adjoining Montenegro which in 1992 joined Serbia in establishing a new Republic of Yugoslavia. Montenegro complains that it has consistently refused to provide military support for Serbian repression in Kosovo. That's just another quibble: friends of oppressors are fair game for retaliation.

President Clinton deserves praise for his courage in engaging hostilities which will certainly strengthen Milosevic's hold on power against domestic critics, while risking deterioration of Clinton's own legendary support at home if our Serbian adventure promotes new repressions rather than autonomy in Kosovo while risking loss of U.S. lives to achieve this result.

*William Nicoson is a former artillery platoon commander and a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.*