

Kosovo 1999: Clinton, Coercive Diplomacy, and the Use of Analogies in Decision Making

by Sébastien Barthe & Charles-Philippe David

The purpose of this article is to investigate and assess the role of analogical thinking, and the “Bosnia analogy” in particular, in steering the Clinton administration toward a strategy of coercive diplomacy during the crisis in Kosovo in 1998. It is our thesis that, throughout the decision-making process, key administration figures used a variety of analogies to frame the Kosovo crisis, which prompted advocacy of conflicting policy options. Specifically, activists like Madeleine Albright and Wesley Clark pushed for a full military option to complement diplomatic efforts, evoking the lessons of Bosnia as justification. On the other hand, minimalists like William Cohen and Sandy Berger invoked images of Vietnam and Somalia to keep US involvement to a minimum. Ultimately, it would appear that the Bosnia analogy prevailed, leading the Clinton administration to launch a military campaign limited to high-altitude strategic bombing, as seen in 1995.

Building on previous studies of American decision making and military actions in the Kosovo war of 1999, we will expand on the idea that the administration’s determination not to commit US ground troops to combat operations was partially responsible for the unforeseen duration of the war.¹ However, our own analysis will suggest that this stance stemmed more from a lag in the decision-making process, caused by an over-reliance on images from Bosnia prior to the military campaign, than from fears of seeing a Vietnam or Somalia repeated in the Balkans.

In order to assess the importance of analogies in the decision-making process, both prior to and during NATO’s aerial campaign against Yugoslavia, we will use an analytic model developed by Yuen Foong Khong in his 1992 book, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decision of 1965*.² Khong labels his model of analogical reasoning the “AE framework.” In our opinion it goes a long way towards explaining how analogies operate cognitively and clarify the consequences for decision making.

In the first part of this article, we will revisit the AE framework, describe its basic tenets, and describe how analogies typically influence decision making and

Sébastien Barthe is a PhD Candidate in Political Science at the University of Québec at Montréal and a research fellow at the Center.

Charles-Philippe David is Raoul Dandurand Professor of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies and Director of the Center for United States Studies at the University of Québec at Montréal. The authors wish to thank Professor Yael Aronoff from Hamilton College, and all the staff at the Raoul Dandurand Chair, for their helpful comments on previous versions of this text.

foreign policy choices. In the second part, we will use the AE framework to discuss how conflicting analogies informed the debates inside the White House between 1998 and early 1999 about what to do in Kosovo. Finally, the third section of this article will argue that the Bosnia analogy empirically “collapsed” when air strikes proved insufficient to stop Milosevic in April and May of 1999. Consequently, the Principals Committee³ had to debate at length the use of ground forces; an option few had ever favored up to that point. In the end, we assert that this reopening of the discussion played a major role in prolonging the war; and it came to an end when Milosevic understood that the Americans and NATO had effectively decided to expand their offensive on the ground.

THE AE FRAMEWORK REVISITED

The use of analogies by decision makers to either frame the parameters of a particular situation or produce a discourse to justify decisions has been discussed at some length in international relations and foreign policy analysis literature. Concentrating on what Kenneth Waltz identifies in *Man, the State, and War* as the “first image” of international politics,⁴ foreign policy scholars actually began delving into the psychological dimensions of decision making as early as the 1940s. Authors like Harold Lasswell, Richard Snyder, H.W. Bruck, Burton Sapin, Harold Sprout, Margaret Sprout, and Herbert Simon are often considered pioneers in this field.⁵ Later works of “classical” standing in the field now include Robert Jervis’ *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*,⁶ Ole Holsti’s “The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study,”⁷ Irving Janis’ *Victims of Groupthink*,⁸ and Alexander George’s *Presidential Decision Making in Foreign Policy*.⁹

While there may be fewer studies devoted entirely to analogies, and their use by policymakers, this research agenda has proven quite fruitful since the mid-1970s. Works of importance include Richard Neustadt and Ernest May’s *Thinking in Time*,¹⁰ Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing’s *Conflicts among Nations*,¹¹ G. Matthew Bonham and Michael Shapiro’s collection entitled *Thought and Action in Foreign Policy*,¹² Yaacov Vertzberger’s *The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decision Making*,¹³ and Jeffrey Record’s *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo*.¹⁴

Khong notes that much of the research in this field has concentrated on the consequences of analogies:

*The unifying theme of previous works on the relationship between the lessons of history and policy has been that statesmen frequently turn to analogies for guidance when confronted with novel foreign policy problems, that they usually pick inappropriate analogies, and as a result, make bad policies.*¹⁵

In *Analogies at War*, Khong’s thesis goes beyond this agenda. Khong tries first to demonstrate that analogizing is a normal cognitive process by which humans try to make sense of situations with unknown variables. This argument has far-reaching implications: if the use of analogies is embedded in the way humans think, then

solely normative research that attempts to discredit the policy choices of decision makers on the grounds that analogies were used in the policymaking process is misguided.¹⁶ Khong prefers a more moderate approach, one that is more interested in what exactly analogies do and how their influence on decision outcomes can be demonstrated. This is the main objective of his framework, which

...suggests that analogies are cognitive devices that “help” policymakers perform six diagnostic tasks central to political decision making. Analogies (1) help define the nature of the situation confronting the policymaker, (2) help assess the stakes, and (3) provide prescriptions. They help evaluate alternative options by (4) predicting their chances of success, (5) evaluating their moral rightness, and (6) warning about dangers associated with the options.¹⁷

Khong’s AE framework relies heavily on terms and concepts borrowed from cognitive psychology, in which analogies have been amply studied since the 1950s.¹⁸ The basic idea is that human beings try to make sense of situations they encounter by matching them with past situations they have stored in memory.¹⁹ This is necessary because, as controlled experiments have demonstrated, human beings have limited computational capacities. According to Khong, this may well explain the widespread use of analogies in policymaking. However, there may also be “identifiable and systematic biases associated with the process.”²⁰ In this connection, he notes two key findings made by cognitive psychologists. First, “people tend to access analogies on the basis of surface similarities”²¹ and, beyond the superficial similarities, an analogy is more likely to be used if it is easily “recallable.”²² The second key finding from cognitive psychology is that, once accessed, analogies “(1) allow...the perceiver to go beyond the information given, (2) process information “top-down,” and (3)...lead to the phenomenon of perseverance.”²³ This means that once humans are engaged in analogical thinking, they will tend to focus on information that confirms their preferred line of reasoning, bypassing information that is at odds with that schema. The analogy can therefore persist as the main tool of cognition even in the face of contrary evidence.²⁴

Knowing how analogies operate, and the biases associated with their use, we can develop a general model for the typical use of analogies in decision-making processes. In the first step, an analogy is invoked based on the availability heuristic—that is to say, because it is easily recalled *and* involves a past situation that appears similar to current circumstances. From that point on, the perceiver will tend to minimize the importance of any discrepant information. In debates on policy options, the analogy helps the perceiver to build a framework for action. The perceiver uses the analogy to define the nature of the situation at hand and determine what course of action may or may not work in response to the problem.

The risks associated with analogical thinking, according to the literature, apply here: if the novel situation differs in any meaningful way from the past one, as defined by the analogy, decisions leading to inappropriate policies may be taken. Furthermore, the perseverance phenomenon may induce decision makers to “stay

the course” even in the face of impending policy disaster. Furthermore, when an analogy becomes “triumphant” within a policymaking group, it can spawn groupthink.²⁵

TESTING THE FRAMEWORK: CONFLICTING ANALOGIES BEARING ON “WHAT TO DO” IN KOSOVO

a. The Bosnia Analogy

When Kosovo was identified by the White House as a problem in early 1998, many of the key foreign policy players in the Clinton administration were veterans of the policy debates that culminated in the American-led NATO intervention in Bosnia in 1995.²⁶ Madeleine Albright, Sandy Berger, Richard Holbrooke, Leon Fuerth, Sandy Vershbow, Bill Clinton, and Al Gore had all experienced first-hand the painful process through which the United States finally decided on a strategy of coercive diplomacy²⁷ to end the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Given this roster, it may not be surprising that many of them seemed to have readily identified the worsening situation in Kosovo in the spring and summer of 1998 with the events that took place in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995.

Furthermore, early on it seemed that at no point did a major player within the presidential decision-making circle consider that the Serbian leadership would not let go as easily of Kosovo as it did of Bosnia in 1995. Whether it was due to a lack of historical inclinations, which would have easily reminded the decision makers that Kosovo was intricately linked to Serbian national identity since the Middle Ages, or through an appreciation of how Russia could play the Balkans game differently in 1999 than as it had in 1995, the fact remains that there was readily available information, which could have preempted what would become an over-reliance on the Bosnia image. Already, we can observe that for those that saw Kosovo as a “second Bosnia,” the image was strong enough to act as a filter against discrepant information. This seems to summarily confirm the application of the AE framework on our case as the analogy very quickly led its perceivers to persevere in their evaluation of the situation.

From the outset, Madeleine Albright was the most adamant of the principals in relating Kosovo to Bosnia. As she wrote in her memoirs,

The killings at Prekaz²⁸ filled me with foreboding matched by determination. I believed we had to stop Milosevic immediately. In public, I laid down a marker: “We are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with in Bosnia.” ...Earlier in the decade the international community had ignored the first signs of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. We had to learn from that mistake.²⁹

Later, discussing the early days of the Kosovo crisis in an interview with Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post*, Albright would claim that in early March 1998, she “felt that there was still time to do something about this, and that we should not wait as long as we did on Bosnia to have dreadful things happen.”³⁰ To her, the lessons

of Bosnia seemed relatively clear: first, procrastinating would only play into the hands of Milosevic, allowing him to pursue his plans for ethnic cleansing. Second, a strategy relying solely on diplomatic incentives would probably not succeed in extracting concessions from Milosevic. In 1995, it was only after NATO launched strategic air strikes against Yugoslav army assets that Milosevic finally forced the Bosnian Serbs to the bargaining table.³¹ Ultimately, high-altitude bombing was instrumental in bringing about the Dayton Peace Accords.

The decision-making process for Kosovo continued to drag on through the year. In 1998, as noted by Halberstam, as well as Moskowitz and Lantis, the Lewinsky scandal turned the administration's attention towards saving Clinton's presidency. Nevertheless, at principals meetings throughout 1998, Madeleine Albright continued to push for rapid implementation of a coercive diplomacy strategy. In her mind, the goal was clear—the US should seek “a negotiated settlement between Milosevic and the Albanians that would grant a substantial measure of self-rule to the province.”³² It was always the Secretary of State's position that tyrants such as the President of Yugoslavia understood only force. Contrary to Halberstam,³³ we would argue that this was, indeed, an instance of coercive diplomacy. Armed force was, in general, perceived by the Clinton team as a means to force a diplomatic settlement from a recalcitrant party; not as a way to militarily defeat the Yugoslav army and/or other paramilitary forces, or to provoke regime change in Belgrade.

The Bosnia analogy led to the conclusion that if any measure of force was used against Milosevic in Kosovo, he would yield. Indeed, it took only two weeks before he decided to accept the American-led peace plan in 1995.

Albright was not alone in making connections between Kosovo and the events of Bosnia at the beginning of the decade. US Army General Wesley Clark, who tried on numerous occasions to influence decision making in Washington on the latest Balkans crisis, took a similar line. First, Clark tried to use his position as NATO Supreme Allied Commander for Europe (SACEUR) to bypass his Pentagon superiors, who were oblivious to the situation arising in Kosovo in early 1998.³⁴ Clark's view was that the US should exercise leadership in devising a coercive diplomacy strategy. This was an understandable stance, given that he had been personally involved in the Dayton peace negotiations during the autumn of 1995. His bias in favor of strategic air strikes as a coercive tool stemmed from a remark Milosevic had made to the effect that his armed forces would not stand a chance against NATO airpower.³⁵ Clark recalls that by late May 1998, he was trying to convince both his military and civilian superiors that “we could use a carrot-and-stick approach to bring Milosevic to the point of negotiating a political solution to the emerging conflict.”³⁶ In June, as the administration considered negotiating with Belgrade through Holbrooke and US Ambassador Christopher Hill, Clark appears to have convinced Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Hugh Shelton, that the

military and diplomatic tracks should be linked. Clark's main argument was that this approach had worked well in 1995.³⁷ Regarding Clark's general attitude in the spring and summer of 1998, Halberstam comments, "[A]s tensions between the KLA and the Serbs escalated, he became more of an activist. To him it was a replay of events in Bosnia."³⁸

President Clinton himself seems to have linked the crisis in Kosovo with what had happened in Bosnia, to some extent. For instance, when the president met with Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova in the White House on May 27, 1998, Clinton reportedly assured him that the United States "would not allow another Bosnia to happen in Kosovo."³⁹ In his memoirs, Clinton claims, albeit with the benefit of hindsight, that he understood all along that "the killings [in Kosovo] were all too reminiscent of the early days of Bosnia."⁴⁰ It should be noted that the President was not an active policy advocate in 1998, as were Albright and Clark. He knew he would ultimately have to make the final decision and, seemingly at that point, he still wanted to assess his options. We might further speculate that his memories of Bosnia may have been a key factor in his later decision to accept the activists' point of view. Unfortunately the former President has been silent on this count both in later interviews and in his memoirs.

If we go back to the six diagnostic tasks that analogical thinking is said to support, we find that the comparison with Bosnia is applicable to five of the six. Only the question of moral rightness is not directly addressed by the Bosnia analogy. The idea that the Western allies had a moral obligation to intervene against massive human rights abuses was rooted in a mental scheme shared by most of the principals, which did not depend solely on that analogy.

Thus, the situation in Kosovo was defined by certain policymakers as a repeat of unwarranted Serbian aggression against an unarmed Muslim population. As seen in the Bosnia analogy, the stakes were high in the Kosovo crisis: ethnic cleansing was considered a crime against humanity by the international community. Furthermore, the crisis was likely to spark a flow of refugees that would destabilize an embattled region of the world.⁴¹ Incidentally, American troops were already deployed in the region. "Knowing" Milosevic, a strategy of coercive diplomacy had to be implemented without delay: if left unchecked, the Yugoslav President would not curb his abuses. The Bosnia analogy also led to the conclusion that if any measure of force was used against Milosevic, he would yield. Indeed, it took only two weeks before he decided to accept the American-led peace plan in 1995. Table 1 summarizes the policy options suggested by the analogy with Bosnia.

b. Analogies with Somalia and Vietnam: "Remember the Powell Doctrine"

Up until September 1998, William Cohen and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) reportedly resisted Albright's efforts to steer the United States towards coercive diplomacy in Kosovo. Interestingly enough, Cohen and the JCS invoked lessons from Somalia and Vietnam analogies to try to convince the President that US involvement in the Kosovo crisis should not extend to the threat of force. As

Diagnostic task	Result
Define the nature of the situation	Serbian paramilitary aggression against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo is akin to Bosnian Serb aggression against Bosnian Muslims from 1992 to 1995
Assess the stakes	Risk of humanitarian catastrophe if Milosevic is not firmly opposed
Provide prescriptions	Coercive diplomacy should be the preferred strategy: the US should threaten to use force to compel Milosevic to stop the aggression in Kosovo and force him to negotiate a settlement with the Kosovar civilian leadership
Predict the chances of success	In 1995, Milosevic yielded after 12 days of bombardment
Evaluate moral rightness	Not addressed directly
Warn about dangers associated with the options	Doing nothing lets Milosevic get away with ethnic cleansing. Pursuing coercive diplomacy worked in 1995: Milosevic quickly ended his involvement in Bosnia and agreed to the Dayton Peace Accords

TABLE 1: IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOSNIA ANALOGY FOR POLICY OPTIONS IN KOSOVO

a former Republican Senator from Maine, Secretary of Defense William Cohen did not share the inclination towards humanitarian intervention of his Democratic colleagues in the administration. He initially resisted the efforts of the activists in the Principals Committee, reminding the president that, as a senator, he had voted against the administration's Bosnia policy.⁴² Halberstam reports that during the committee's deliberations, Cohen raised the specter of Somalia and warned of the potentially dire consequences of another intervention in the Balkans.⁴³ The lesson usually drawn from Somalia was that humanitarian intervention was risky and might well end in failure. Furthermore, the American public would not tolerate US casualties in a humanitarian effort.⁴⁴

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Hugh Shelton reportedly echoed this view. According to several sources, he was opposed to any “faultily designed” use of force, due to his organizational background.⁴⁵ In this regard, Shelton was representative of the American military; traumatized by the Vietnam experience and clinging to the tenets of the Powell doctrine, which had seemingly worked so well in Operation Desert Storm.⁴⁶ Clark recalls that he had to work hard to convince Shelton and the JCS that force could be employed while negotiating with Milosevic, and that minimal use of force could therefore be contemplated.⁴⁷

The desire to avoid the “mistakes of Vietnam,” which underpinned the Powell doctrine, lurked in the background of much of the discussion. Moskowitz and Lantis note that in September 1998, NATO military planners, who were largely American officers, “reported to President Clinton a worst-case scenario: 200,000 troops would be required to stop the killings in Kosovo and occupy Serbia in the event of a ground war.”⁴⁸ The planners proposed this large number of troops, required under the Powell doctrine to articulate “overwhelming force,” even though they most certainly knew that a massive ground effort would face enormous resistance in the Democratic White House. Halberstam also suggests that the Pentagon had the analogy of Vietnam in mind; he comments that, for the military, the debate over the use of force at the White House was “a reminder of the ambiguity of the Vietnam decision making, of civilians who were willing to enter a war zone without any of the hard decisions having been made.”⁴⁹ According to Halberstam, “[t]o the Chiefs, it was a replay of both Vietnam and Somalia. Start with something small and relatively innocent, then something larger and unpredictable is born of it.”⁵⁰

The analogies with Vietnam and Somalia can be analyzed using the same framework we applied to the Bosnia analogy.

The strongest advocate of a minimalist approach that would not require the threat of military strikes was probably Sandy Berger. As National Security Advisor, he had considerable influence over the administration’s approach to Kosovo. Halberstam notes that Berger

*...knew all of Clinton’s political priorities. If he was not Clinton’s political twin in his outlook toward foreign policy and what the administration might be able to do at any given moment, then no one had ever been able to tell what the perceptible differences between the two of them were.*⁵¹

According to Moskowitz and Lantis, Berger preferred diplomatic options to military ones and even rejected early attempts by the activists to muster support for air strikes as a complement to diplomatic actions. Understanding the President’s reluctance to endorse coercive diplomacy (knowing it would be a tough sell to Congress and the American public), Berger hinted in March 1998 that members of the administration (namely Albright) should be careful not to damage the United States’ leverage “by threatening actions that the president was unwilling to undertake.”⁵² Albright recalls that in a meeting on April 23, 1998, Berger exploded: “You can’t just talk about bombing in the middle of Europe...It’s irresponsible to make threatening statements outside of some coherent plan. The way you people at

Diagnostic task	Result
Define the nature of the situation	Kosovo in 1998–1999 was akin to Vietnam in the 1960s and Somalia in 1992–1993: a peripheral problem that did not threaten US core national interests
Assess the stakes	Engagement in foreign civil wars has sometimes been catastrophic for the US
Provide prescriptions	Use overwhelming force as last resort; otherwise, refrain from using force
Predict the chances of success	Poor if the civilian decision makers are not willing to use overwhelming force to defeat the adversary
Evaluate moral rightness	A botched military operation risks wasting American servicemen’s lives; no intervention preserves those lives
Warn about dangers associated with the options	Possible quagmire if level of force is augmented incrementally without ever becoming overwhelming

TABLE 2: IMPLICATIONS OF THE VIETNAM/SOMALIA ANALOGY FOR POLICY OPTIONS IN KOSOVO

the State Department talk about bombing, you sound like lunatics.”⁵³ There is no evidence that Berger’s policy preferences were strongly influenced by analogizing. It might be expected that, as a veteran of the Bosnia debates and the man in charge of the National Security Council (NSC) taskforce that extricated the Clinton administration from its Balkan predicament, Berger might have looked to the Bosnia analogy.⁵⁴ However, the record shows that he expended more time and effort impressing Clinton’s concerns on the principals than trying to convince his boss to choose an option. In his advising role to the President, Berger seems to have been more of a “poliheuristically-minded” advocate: promises of easy victory over Milosevic made by the activists could not compensate for the domestic political risks that a foreign military adventure would create for an already embattled president.⁵⁵

COERCIVE DIPLOMACY IN ACTION AND THE LIMITS OF THE BOSNIA ANALOGY

During the summer and early autumn of 1998, clashes between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Serbs became more frequent, and accounts of massacres began to reach the West. On September 16, twenty-two Kosovar civilians were reported killed in an attack on their village by paramilitary forces, and on September 29, a massacre was reported in Donji Obrinje.⁵⁶ Between the two events, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1199, which “called for a cease-fire, a Serb withdrawal of forces, and the return of refugees.”⁵⁷

A Principals Committee meeting was held on September 30 to decide what to do about the deteriorating situation. Albright recalls in her memoirs that the committee’s final decision was to send Richard Holbrooke to Belgrade to deliver an ultimatum to Milosevic on NATO’s behalf, “to show [America’s] willingness to explore every reasonable alternative to force.”⁵⁸ According to second-hand accounts, the Secretary of State finally succeeded in convincing her colleagues of the need for action; she “reiterated her plea for air strikes to bring Milosevic to the bargaining table....[I]nstead of their usual debates...members of the committee supported her recommendations.”⁵⁹ Thus, the principals agreed in the end on a plan that replicated what had been done in Bosnia in 1995. The hope was that it would work just as well in Kosovo. Therefore, it could be said that the analogy with Bosnia prevailed over the analogies with Somalia and Vietnam at this early stage of the crisis.

On October 8, Albright went to Belgium to meet with Holbrooke, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, and US Ambassador to NATO Sandy Vershbow.⁶⁰ Everyone agreed that for a military threat to be credible, NATO had to authorize the imminent use of force; this was hastily accomplished on October 13.⁶¹ Two days later, Milosevic “agreed to withdraw the majority of Serb forces from Kosovo and ordered the end to paramilitary and police repression of Kosovars.”⁶² Additionally, an unarmed Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission would be allowed into Kosovo to supervise implementation of the deal. The international observers received weak protection from NATO reconnaissance planes, which were allowed overflight rights over Yugoslavia. Holbrooke had been able to broker this deal without the actual use of force, but the authorization for force seems to have been instrumental in getting Milosevic to acquiesce to the Americans’ terms.⁶³

The October deal survived long enough to give the Clinton administration time to deal with another foreign crisis, which arose in Iraq in December, 1998. By January, 1999, it was clear that the Serbs were not going to honor their part of the bargain. On January 15, 1999, Albright attempted to get the principals to agree that the US and its allies “should renew the threat of air strikes.”⁶⁴ Shelton, Cohen, and Berger disagreed, with Clinton ultimately favoring their position. On the same day, forty-five unarmed civilians were executed in the village of Racak.⁶⁵ When the Principals Committee reconvened on January 19, it debated the advisability of

coercive diplomacy for the last time. After heated argument, the minimalists accepted that the Racak massacre had altered the dynamics of the situation and that a more forceful posture would be needed to coerce Milosevic. According to Gellman, on that fateful evening,

...a two-part consensus evolved: ...one was to make a credible threat of military force, and the other was to demand the attendance of Serb and Kosovar representatives for a meeting at which the basic principles of a settlement would be decided in advance by the Contact Group, including Russia. These basic principles would be non-negotiable, including a NATO implementation force.⁶⁶

This proposal was an almost exact copy of the “endgame strategy” for Bosnia devised by NSC staff in July and August of 1995. As Redd notes, this consensus was obtained in Clinton’s absence, as he was preparing his testimony in his impeachment proceedings. Seemingly satisfied with the collegially devised plan, the President gave it his approval in the following days.⁶⁷ Its implementation first led to intense negotiations in Rambouillet, France beginning on February 6. The Kosovars signed the Rambouillet agreement on March 18 but the Serbs still refused to do so. After Holbrooke was sent one last time to Belgrade and was unable to sway Milosevic, Clinton finally authorized air strikes on March 24.

By the end of March, the Pentagon had prepared plans for a massive air campaign. Yet, seemingly confident that Milosevic would not hold out for long once air strikes were actually launched, the White House initially authorized only a limited list of targets.⁶⁸ That being said, Clinton and his political staff saw no harm in declaring that American ground troops might be part of an eventual peacekeeping mission but would not be engaged in combat operations in the Balkans. That statement, made at the onset of NATO’s show of force on March 24, satisfied both the military establishment and the American public. However, it may well have emboldened the Yugoslav leadership, which believed it benefited from Russian diplomatic support in defying Western demands.⁶⁹

When the limited air campaign failed to rapidly produce the desired results, decision makers faced a momentous challenge. For the first time since 1995, Milosevic had not yielded when confronted with military action. By mid-April 1999, the principals were once again divided over what to do next. Albright still believed that, given enough time, air power alone would be sufficient.⁷⁰ It would appear that, in her eyes, the Bosnia analogy still applied. General Clark was also doing all he could to persuade the key decision makers that NATO should increase its pressure from the air while the alliance prepared for an invasion.⁷¹ His view seems to have become more tactical than strategic; in order to achieve the desired political settlement, overwhelming force was now required. It should be noted that, General Shelton adamantly opposed Clark’s ideas. The JCS had accepted the idea of deploying American military personnel as peacekeepers once the war was over, but it resisted to the bitter end the concept of sending US troops into Kosovo as part of a multinational invasion force.⁷²

In the end, the matter was resolved through an *ad hoc* alliance between Cohen and Berger. They both came to the consensus that while the ground troops option was less than ideal, especially with mounting domestic and international criticism of the administration and the war, the White House would have to contemplate the possibility. As Albright put it, “if the future of Kosovo were important enough to fight in the air, it was hard to say it was not worth defending on land.”⁷³ This seems to indicate that she was convinced by Cohen and Berger that her own preferences were paralyzing the administration. Clinton finally sided with his National Security Advisor and his Secretary of Defense, and from that point on, the administration as a whole slowly inched toward the ground option.

Many factors conspired to make Milosevic accept a diplomatic settlement, but the fact that the ground option was being seriously contemplated was certainly a key consideration. On May 18, referring to the possible use of ground troops in Kosovo, “Clinton pointedly said that ‘we have not and will not take any option off the table.’”⁷⁴ On May 21, NATO “announced it would deploy 50,000 troops on the Kosovo border to ensure rapid implementation of any agreement that might be reached,”⁷⁵ underscoring the seriousness of the ground threat. During the following week, NATO members agreed to expand the list of bombing targets to include critical infrastructure in Serbia and even Serbian leaders’ residences.⁷⁶ On May 27, Cohen won agreement from the defense ministers of France, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy to start planning for an invasion.⁷⁷ Just as importantly, on June 2,

*Russia signed up along with the G-7 (sic), the seven leading industrial democracies, in backing a proposal that called for the removal of Serb troops, police, and paramilitary from Kosovo, and their replacement by genuine peacekeeping forces.*⁷⁸

On June 3, while Clinton was scheduled to meet with the JCS to assess how different ground options would play out, Russian envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin held discussions with Milosevic, accompanied by Finland’s President Martti Ahtisaari. Chernomyrdin persuaded Milosevic that NATO was about to use ground forces and Russia would not stand in the way.⁷⁹ Finally, on June 4, after eleven weeks of military operations, Milosevic accepted the G8 terms. By June 10, NATO bombardments were suspended as Yugoslav troops began withdrawing from Kosovo.⁸⁰ The war was over, although it had lasted much longer than the decision makers in Washington had expected.

CONCLUSIONS

We have tried to assess the role the analogy of Bosnia played in the Clinton administration’s decision-making process during the Kosovo crisis of 1998–1999. As we have argued, the Bosnia analogy heavily influenced the choice to use coercive diplomacy to confront Milosevic. This strategy can be understood as a major factor in explaining the duration of the Kosovo war, which lasted from March 24 to June 4, 1999. In this sense, an over-reliance on the Bosnia analogy can therefore be seen as indirectly responsible for the duration of the war.

In September 1998 and again in January 1999, Clinton clearly chose the coercive diplomacy track. This decision vindicated the analogy with Bosnia favored by Madeleine Albright and Wesley Clark, over its “rivals,” the Vietnam and Somalia analogies favored by William Cohen and Hugh Shelton. When the Rambouillet talks collapsed and NATO initiated air strikes in late March, 1999, the analogy with Bosnia dominated, especially in convincing decision makers that the war would be a short one. Unfortunately, Milosevic calculated that he could withstand the alliance’s offensive and did not yield as readily as he had in 1995. When the war did not end within the expected timeframe, the principals had no choice but to discuss the use of ground troops to achieve the war aims—an option that none had favored until that point. Only after the Western threat of ground invasion became highly credible by late May 1999, did the Yugoslav President finally yield to the demands of NATO and Washington.

Many analysts have concluded that the administration’s initial reluctance to consider committing ground troops stemmed principally from a fear of repeating Vietnam and/or Somalia. Our own analysis suggests that it was a reliance on images from Bosnia that prevented the Clinton administration from seriously considering the ground option up to May, 1999. Counterfactual analyses are admittedly fraught with risk. It might be argued that, had Bosnia not been in the decision-making equation at all, memories of Vietnam, Somalia, or even Rwanda might well have led the administration to a passive stance.⁸¹ Alternatively, it could be argued that without Bosnia, the President and his advisers would have been more inclined to consider sending in ground troops between 1998 and 1999. Without the interference of images from Bosnia, that option might have been contemplated at an earlier point in the decision-making process. In any event, images from Bosnia were, indeed, part of the equation; the evidence shows that these images ultimately misled the decision makers to think that diplomacy, backed by strategic air strikes, would avert a humanitarian catastrophe and quickly restore peace in Kosovo. The testimony of key decision makers, along with second-hand accounts from scholars and journalists, indicate that ground troops became a serious option only in May, 1999, when the air campaign was proving ineffective against Milosevic.

In the final analysis, decision making on Kosovo was heavily informed by the lessons learned in Bosnia. It is likely that the Bosnia analogy, and the coercive diplomacy approach it taught, inadvertently prolonged the war in Kosovo, further aggravating the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Yuen Foong Khong’s AE framework has proven extremely useful for investigating how analogical thinking influenced decision making on Kosovo. It showed why decision makers relied on various analogies, and how this reliance on past experiences inhibited their capacity to adapt to a rapidly changing situation. Following Khong’s principal findings, we should remember that analogical thinking is natural to human beings. In this sense, analogies should not be viewed by political scientists solely as rhetorical tools, a sign of intellectual laziness, or a lack of imagination on the part of decision makers. If, indeed, analogies are a normal

mechanism by which decision makers confront new situations, then the Clinton administration's handling of the Kosovo crisis can be seen in a different light.

Notes

¹ These include Eric Moskowitz and Jeffrey S. Lantis, "The War in Kosovo: Coercive Diplomacy," in *Contemporary Cases in US Foreign Policy: From Terrorism to Trade*, ed. Ralph G. Carter (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2002), 59–87; Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Unlearning the Lessons of Kosovo," *Foreign Policy* 116 (Fall 1999): 128–140; Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2001); Michael Mandelbaum, "A Perfect Failure: NATO's War Against Yugoslavia," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 5 (1999): 2–8; Javier Solana, "NATO's Success in Kosovo," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 6 (1999): 114–120; Adam Roberts, "NATO's 'Humanitarian War' Over Kosovo," *Survival* 41, no. 3 (1999): 102–123; David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2002), especially 360–480; Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), especially 107–161, 261–344; Madeleine Albright with Bill Woodward, *Madam Secretary* (New York: Hyperion, 2003), especially 378–428; Daniel L. Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, "Kosovo and the Great Air Power Debate," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (2000): 5–38; Barry R. Posen, "The War for Kosovo: Serbia's Political-Military Strategy," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 39–84; Arnaud Martins Da Torre, "Les illusions dangereuses d'une victoire aérienne," *La revue internationale et stratégique*, no. 36 (1999–2000): 103–121; Sean Kay, "After Kosovo: NATO's Credibility Dilemma," *Security Dialogue* 31, no. 1 (2000): 71–84.

² Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decision of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). The development of his analytical framework can be found on pages 19–68.

³ The Principals Committee is an informal body of the National Security Council (NSC) that includes the key players involved in foreign policy decision making. In 1998–1999, its usual members were President Bill Clinton, Vice-President Al Gore, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton, National Security Advisor Samuel Berger, and Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet. Richard Holbrooke (first as consultant to the State Department in 1998, then as US Ambassador to the United Nations in 1999) and Vice-Presidential National Security Advisor Leon Fuerth also were present at various times when options concerning Kosovo were debated. General Wesley Clark (US Army), NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Europe (SACEUR), was also involved in the American decision-making process. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and the President's Representative for Dayton Implementation Robert Gelbard worked closely with Albright and were sometimes invited to the meetings.

⁴ See Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

⁵ A (non exhaustive) list of the major books and articles by these authors should include Harold Lasswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (London: Whittlesey House/McGraw-Hill, 1935); Richard C. Snyder et al., *Foreign Policy Decision Making (Revisited)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), which was previously edited in 1954 and 1962; Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout, *Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout, *The Ecological Perspective on Human Affairs with Special Reference to International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Herbert Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1959). For an overview of the psychological research agenda in *Foreign Policy Analysis*, see Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1 (2005): 1–30.

⁶ Robert Jarvis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁷ Ole Holsti, "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study," in James Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, ed. James Rosenau (New York: Free Press, 1969), 543–550.

⁸ Irving Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1972).

⁹ Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decision-Making in Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

¹¹ Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflicts among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

¹² G. Matthew Bonham and Michael Shapiro, ed., *Thought and Action in Foreign Policy* (Basel: Birkhauser, 1977).

¹³ Yaacov Vertzberger, *The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Jeffrey Record, *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Khong, *Analogies at War*, 9.

¹⁶ The authors of these works focus their attention almost exclusively on cases that they label "foreign policy

failures.” It is thus not surprising that they would find that the use of analogies leads to unfortunate consequences for decision makers. Khong’s framework, by probing the cognitive use of analogies, also allows students of decision making to detect and assess the influence of analogies in cases that are considered “foreign policy successes.”

¹⁷ Khong, *Analogies at War*, 10.

¹⁸ Khong notes that, while there are formal differences between analogies and cognitive “schemas,” the two terms have become interchangeable for many psychologists and political scientists. While schemas refer to any form of generic concept stored in memory, analogies are more specific and relate to specific ideas. See *Ibid.*, 26. Our research is solely interested in analogies, understood in the stricter sense.

¹⁹ Khong, *Analogies at War*, 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 35.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴ For an introductory level discussion of the mental mechanisms presented by Khong, see Robert Sternberg, *Cognitive Psychology* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1996).

²⁵ See Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*.

Also see Paul T Hart, *Groupthink in Government: A Study of Small Groups and Policy Failure* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1990); Paul T Hart, *Beyond Groupthink: Political Group Dynamics and Foreign Policy-Making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Paul Kowert, *Groupthink or Deadlock: When Do Leaders Learn from Their Advisors?* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

²⁶ Important contributions to the study of the decision-making process on Bosnia include Ivo H. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America’s Bosnia Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); Richard Holbrooke, ed., *To End a War, Revised* (New York: Modern Library, 1999); Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*; Albright and Woodward, *Madam Secretary*; Bob Woodward, *The Choice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

²⁷ Throughout, we understand the concept of coercive diplomacy as it was classically articulated by Alexander George. Contrarily to “usual” diplomacy, which seeks to avoid military confrontations, coercive diplomacy involves the use of credible threats to have one’s adversary understand that his refusal of one’s terms will be met with punishment. See Alexander L. George et al., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1971); and Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion. Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington: US Institute of Peace Press, 1991).

²⁸ A reference to an event usually associated with the small town of Drenica. On February 28, 1998, supposedly in retaliation for the killing of two Serb policemen by “Kosovar nationalists”, Serb paramilitary units killed dozens of suspects and their families. See Albright and Woodward, *Madam Secretary*, 381.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

³⁰ Barton Gellman, “The Path to Crisis: How the United States and Its Allies Went to War,” *Washington Post*, April 18, 1999. Albright is also cited in Eric Moskowitz and Jeffrey S. Lantis, “The War in Kosovo: Coercive Diplomacy,” in *Contemporary Cases in US Foreign Policy: From Terrorism to Trade*, ed. Ralph G. Carter (Washington: CQ Press, 2002), 67.

³¹ See Alvin Z. Rubinstein et al., *The Clinton Foreign Policy Reader: Presidential Speeches with Commentary* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 168.

³² Albright and Woodward, *Madam Secretary*, 384.

³³ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 376.

³⁴ Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 107–112.

³⁵ Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 116.

³⁶ Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 117; Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo: Coercive Diplomacy,” 68. Report that many NSC staffers believed, like Clark, that “Milosevic [was] a man who, however odious his behavior, however wrong his policies, if you deal with him with the right kind of carrots and the right kind of sticks, you get a deal.” The opinion is attributed to Ivo Daalder, who was no longer working at the NSC at the time.

³⁷ Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 118.

³⁸ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 396.

³⁹ Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 69.

⁴⁰ William J. Clinton, *My Life*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 849.

⁴¹ We could further argue that, at the time, the White House ascribed to Europe an important geostrategic value for US global security. Indeed, the fact that the conflict was taking place in Kosovo may have stimulated intervention. However, as we have tried to demonstrate, the location of the conflict alone did not automatically lead the decision makers to favor the particular course of action wished for by the activists’

stance.

⁴² Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 441.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 442.

⁴⁴ See Albright and Woodward, *Madam Secretary*.

⁴⁵ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 420–425; Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 68.

⁴⁶ Daalder and O’Hanlon, “Unlearning the Lessons of Kosovo,” 133.

⁴⁷ Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 117–118.

⁴⁸ Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 69.

⁴⁹ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 465.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁵² Gellman, “The Path to Crisis;” Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 68.

⁵³ Albright and Woodward, *Madam Secretary*, 383.

⁵⁴ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 102.

⁵⁵ Steven B. Redd makes a sensibly similar point when he says that “In the early stages of the Kosovo crisis in 1998, Berger’s advice to the president was also based on political calculations. The president was hesitant to use force because of the possible negative political repercussions. Berger knew that in the early stages of the crisis military options were less feasible, and he counseled the president against even threatening the use of force”. For Redd’s complete analysis of the decision-making process concerning Kosovo, see Steven B. Redd, “The Influence of Advisers and Decision Strategies on Foreign Policy Choices: President Clinton’s Decision to Use Force in Kosovo,” *International Studies Perspectives* 6, no. 1 (2005): 129–150.

⁵⁶ See Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 70.

⁵⁷ See *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁸ Albright and Woodward, *Madame Secretary*, 388.

⁵⁹ See Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 70.

⁶⁰ Vershbow had worked at the NSC in 1995 and was part of the team that devised the “endgame strategy” during the summer of that year.

⁶¹ Albright and Woodward, *Madame Secretary*, 389–390.

⁶² See Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 71.

⁶³ According to Moskowitz and Lantis, on the same day President Clinton “hailed the deal as a triumph of coercive diplomacy—a carrot-and-stick diplomatic approach backed by threat of force.” See Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 71.

⁶⁴ Albright and Woodward, *Madame Secretary*, 392.

⁶⁵ See Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 74.

⁶⁶ Gellman, “The Path to Crisis”, quoted in Moskowitz and Lantis, “The War in Kosovo,” 76.

⁶⁷ Redd, “The Influence of Advisors,” 140–142.

⁶⁸ Barry Posen makes the same link as we do between the endgame strategy for Bosnia and the activists’ perception that the war for Kosovo would be short. See Barry R. Posen, “The War for Kosovo: Serbia’s Political-Military Strategy,” *International Security* 24, no. 4 (2000): 59–60.

⁶⁹ This is the interpretation favoured by Daalder and O’Hanlon in both “Unlearning the Lessons of Kosovo” and *Winning Ugly*. The best account of Serbia’s strategy in 1999 is probably provided by Barry Posen. See Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo*; Posen, “The War for Kosovo: Serbia’s Political-Military Strategy,” 59–60.

⁷⁰ Albright and Woodward, *Madame Secretary*, 414–415, 418.

⁷¹ Clark, *Waging Modern War*.

⁷² Clark postulates that the Joint Chiefs opposed the ground option not only from fear of a repeat of Vietnam and Somalia, but also because this plan clashed with the Pentagon’s overall defense program, which called for greater reliance on air power and high-technology weaponry. For many military planners, the conflict in Kosovo thus became an opportunity to prove that air power alone could work, making it the “war to end all ground wars” for America. Halberstam contends that only “some senior air force people [were] eager to show what airpower, without ground troops, could do.” See Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 306, 422.

⁷³ Albright and Woodward, *Madame Secretary*, 415.

⁷⁴ Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo*, 131.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁶ Posen, “The War for Kosovo: Serbia’s Political-Military Strategy”, 72.

⁷⁷ Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo*, 132; Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 475.

⁷⁸ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 477.

⁷⁹ This episode is recounted, with minor differences, by Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo*, 132; Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 477.

⁸⁰ Albright and Woodward, *Madame Secretary*, 421.

⁸¹ Regarding Rwanda, some people have argued that remorse, a result of the decision to do nothing to stop the genocide in the spring of 1994, may have conversely led some decision makers, including President Clinton, to favor intervention in Kosovo. We should remember, however, that at no point since 1994 has Clinton or his administration taken full responsibility for what they have continued to consider a multinational policy fiasco. Clinton's recognition in 1998, during a trip to Rwanda, that the West's inaction became an aggravating factor in the ethnic cleansing should not be confused with an admission of guilt.

