

The rules of leadership

Bill Clinton hoisted the flag of intervention in Bosnia, but when it was up, his allies refused to salute it. Indeed, instead of training their guns on the nose-thumbing Serbs, Americans and Europeans engaged each other in a shouting war across the Atlantic. And now both the Americans and the Europeans seem content to continue sniping at one another while Moscow wrests the initiative from Washington.

Listen to Sen. Joseph Biden, Democrat from Delaware, accusing the allies of "indifference, self-delusion and hypocrisy" in the face of Serbian "fascist thuggery." Or to Sen. Richard Lugar, Republican from Indiana, assailing Europe's "obstructionism." Denmark, which is currently presiding over the European Community, declared that American charges were "absurd" and had "no foundation whatsoever." Spat an unnamed European diplomat: "Garbage!"

It has been a while since the allies traded such compliments, and that raises two intriguing questions. First: If they are so much better at lobbing bombs at each other than at Serbian artillery, is NATO another casualty of the Balkan war? Second: Is Clinton washed up as the West's No. 1?

Though neither NATO nor Clinton's presidency looks very healthy, it is too early to write either's obituary. Instead, we might take a sober look at the rules of real leadership and compare them with the D+ performance of Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher in the run-up to the trans-Atlantic war of epithets over Bosnia.

■ **Rule No. 1:** *An uncertain trumpet won't rally the troops.* It took Clinton weeks of agonizing to reach the conclusion that, yes, maybe the allies should use a little force to persuade the Serbs to take another look at the Vance-Owen peace plan. Inevitably, the internal debate spilled out, signaling to friends and foes that America was wallowing in ambivalence. Nor were the Europeans impressed by U.S. polls that kept reporting majorities against intervention.

■ **Rule No. 2:** *Make sure the troops are ready before raising the flag.* Instead of quietly building a coalition before sounding the call, the president blabbed first and dispatched his secretary of state to Europe later. Over there, Christopher displayed some more ambivalence, hinting that bombs on Bosnia were not a must on the American agenda. Faced with a resistible force, the allies hemmed, hawed and stonewalled.

■ **Rule No. 3:** *If you don't know where you are going, don't expect others to follow.* Or more brutally: Don't expend pre-

cious political capital on shaky ventures. In their hearts, both Americans and Europeans know they face a high-risk, low-payoff game in the Balkans, and this is why both sides have chosen caution over commitment.

Even Senators Biden and Lugar have a hard time answering the key question: What is the purpose of bombing in Bosnia? (Pun intended.) Unless the West is willing to blanket the country with entire armies (which it is not), the

fighting will continue. Bosnia is Yugoslavia writ small, a country that never was and a place where Serbs, Croats and Muslims are all battling for turf, faith and nation. After each bombing run, all of them will try to recoup their losses or improve on their gains. And the Serbs are not the only problem. In order to force acceptance of the Vance-Owen plan, we would have to bomb the Serbs round-the-clock and the Croats and Muslims on alternate days.

Where does that leave Bill Clinton and NATO? Both now look the worse for wear, but neither is punched out. And so both sides will do well to draw the right lesson from the duel. Clinton should call in two pros for an extended coaching session: George Bush and Jim Baker.

Their book was written during the gulf war. Bosnia does not measure up to the stake represented by oil-rich Arabia, but the lessons apply. After Saddam Hussein's lunge into Kuwait, Bush did not fake leadership but grabbed it (Rule 1) by drawing a line in the Saudi sand and pouring U.S. troops into the theater. For the next move, the expulsion of the Iraqis, he needed allies. So between August 1990 and January 1991, Bush and Baker doggedly (Rule 2) cobbled to-

gether a coalition stretching from Egypt to France. And to keep everybody in harness, Bush never allowed the need for day-to-day diplomatic flexibility to overwhelm his central strategic objective (Rule 3): Separate Hussein from his booty. At no time did Baker just wander off to allied capitals and muse: "If you are willing to follow, we might be willing to lead." In short, to lead is to commit.

And the Europeans should be forewarned: Don't fake a response. They were less committed to using force in Bosnia than they made Clinton believe. When they balked, the president ended up with egg on his face—which will not encourage him to stick his neck out again. Maybe Bosnia will burn itself out. But in a world full of arsonists, what about the fire next time? NATO is the only fire brigade in town, and it will rush to the rescue only if the United States jumps into the lead truck. ■



Christopher hinted that bombs were not a must.