

Majority Now Rallies Behind the Raids on Serbia

Most Americans are lining up behind the U.S. military action in the Kosovo conflict, with support for NATO air strikes rising to 60 percent in a new ABC News/Nightline poll, up from 47 percent the night before the bombing began.

Nearly six in 10 also say reports of new Serbian attacks on civilians in Kosovo only strengthens their support for the strikes. And the public is expressing a greater willingness to tolerate U.S. casualties as the cost of bringing peace to Kosovo.

Tuesday night, Americans by 59-37 percent said helping bring peace to Kosovo was not worth the loss of U.S. soldiers' lives. By Friday that had moved to nearly an even split, 49-45 percent. The NATO assault on Serbia began Wednesday.

	Support the air strikes?		Is peace in Kosovo worth U.S. lives?	
	3/26	3/23	3/26	3/23
Yes	60%	47	45%	37
No	31	47	49	59

UNDERSTANDING – Some of the support for the action represents a rally-'round-the-flag effect, since half of Americans feel they don't have a "good basic understanding" of the situation. Indeed majorities support the air strikes whether they feel they understand the Serbian conflict or not.

PERSUASION – Persuasion is more salient than knowledge. Among people who feel Bill Clinton "has said enough to explain the military action," 82 percent support it. But among those who feel he hasn't said enough, support drops sharply, to 46 percent.

CLINTON – The president's own grades in the affair are lukewarm at best. Fifty-one percent approve of his handling of the situation, while 32 percent disapprove. And a majority, 52 percent, says he has not done enough to explain the U.S. involvement.

There are political differences in Clinton's ratings; 69 percent of Democrats approve of his handling of the situation, while only 38 percent of Republicans agree. And Democrats are 20 points more likely than Republicans to support the NATO strikes, 73 percent to 53 percent.

VITAL – Considerably less than half the public, 39 percent, says vital U.S. interests are at stake in the Kosovo conflict; that’s essentially unchanged this week, though up from where it was early last week. This can be an important factor in public support for military action, though other matters – such as a strong humanitarian goal – also matter.

Among people who do think vital U.S. interests are at stake, 69 percent support the NATO air strikes. Among those who do not see U.S. vital interests in Kosovo, support for the air strikes declines to 52 percent.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone March 26, 1999, among a random national sample of 518 adults. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at: <http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Full results follow:

1. Do you feel you have a good basic understanding of the conflict involving Serbia and Kosovo, or would you say you really don't know that much about it?

	Understand	Don't Know Much	No opinion
3/26/99	49	50	1

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling the situation in Kosovo?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
3/26/99	51	32	17
3/23/99	48	39	12

3. Do you think America's vital interests are at stake in the situation involving Kosovo, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/26/99	39	51	10
3/23/99	41	54	5
3/14/99	27	57	15

4. Do you support or oppose the United States and its European allies conducting air strikes against Serbia?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/26/99	60	31	9

Compare To: The United States and its European allies have said they may bomb military targets in Serbia because it won't agree to a peace plan for Kosovo. If Serbia does not agree to the peace plan, should the United States participate in bombing Serbia, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/23/99	47	47	6

Compare To: The United States has said it may bomb Serbia unless Serbia agrees to a peace plan for Kosovo. If Serbia does not agree to the peace plan, should the United States bomb Serbia or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/14/99	26	62	12

5. There have been reports that since the bombing began, Serbian forces have increased their attacks on civilians in Kosovo. Does this development make you more likely to support the air strikes against Serbia, more likely to oppose the air strikes, or what?

	Support	Oppose	No difference (vol.)	No opinion
3/26/99	57	29	9	5

6. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statement: It would be worth the loss of some American soldiers' lives if the United States could help bring peace to Kosovo.

	Worth it	Not worth it	No opinion
3/26/99	45	49	6
3/23/99	37	59	4

7. Do you think Clinton has said enough to explain the U.S. military involvement in the Kosovo situation, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/26/99	38	52	10

END