

## **Support for Action in Kosovo Is Tempered by Risks of War**

The public's humanitarian impulses in Kosovo are tempered by the risks of war: While seven in 10 Americans now say the United States is morally obliged to try to establish peace there, support for sending in ground troops could fade if casualties mounted.

Fifty-seven percent in an ABC News/Nightline poll support sending in ground troops if the air war fails. But that declines to 44 percent if there were a good chance of "some" casualties, 37 percent if it could cost up to 100 U.S. soldiers' lives, and 26 percent if up to 1,000 lives were lost.

These numbers are suggestive but not predictive; public response to actual casualties in an actual ground war remains to be seen. But the results do underscore the nature of public support for the military action: It's viewed as a humanitarian mission or as an issue of local stability, but a majority of Americans don't think U.S. vital interests are at stake. That may weaken public tolerance for losses on the ground.

	Support	Oppose
If air war fails, send ground troops	57%	39
..if some casualties	44	50
..if 100 casualties	37	57
..if 500 casualties	31	62
..if 1,000 casualties	26	66

EXPECT IT – How's it gone so far? Sixty-eight percent in this poll say "it's too early to tell" if the military action so far has been a success or a failure for the NATO allies. The rest divide about evenly: 16 percent success, 14 percent failure.

However, six in 10 Americans do believe the United States is headed for a ground war – that the air war itself won't halt Serbia's military action in Kosovo. When a ground war should start is another matter: People divide on the question of how much longer the United States should give the air war to work, although their time frame is more apt to be weeks than months.

	When to send ground troops?				
Week	Few weeks	Month	Few months	Longer	
20%	22	25	9	9	

Overall, 64 percent in this poll support the air strikes, and 56 percent approve of Bill Clinton's handling of the situation.

**MOTIVATIONS** - A strong reason to support a war in general is the belief that it's in the United States' vital interests. But people are evenly split on that question: Forty-seven percent think U.S. vital interests are at stake, 49 percent think not. These numbers have been more or less stable since a few days after the air strikes began.

What has changed is the refugee crisis. It's had several effects: Raising humanitarian concerns; creating public anger at Serbia; elevating public understanding of NATO's purposes; and as a result of these, bolstering support for military action.

Most people, now 57 percent, continue to say the refugee crisis is "entirely Serbia's" fault. Fifty-six percent say it has made them more likely to support sending ground troops into Kosovo. And, as noted, 71 percent think the United States has a moral obligation to try to establish peace there – up from 52 percent in a Gallup poll in February.

That view of a moral obligation is a key factor in support for military action. Among people who feel the United States has a moral obligation to intervene, 77 percent support the air attacks; among those who don't see a moral obligation, support for air strikes falls to 34 percent.

The division is even greater on the question of deploying ground troops. Among those who see a moral obligation, 71 percent support sending ground troops if the air war fails. Among those who don't see a moral imperative, just 21 percent favor sending ground troops.

**UNDERSTANDING** – Sixty-five percent of Americans feel they have a good understanding of why the United States is involved in the Kosovo conflict, and this, too, is a critical factor in support for military action. Among people who feel they understand why the United States is involved, 75 percent support the air strikes; among those who don't understand, support for the air strikes falls to 42 percent.

Similarly, among those who understand U.S. involvement, 68 percent support the use of ground troops if the air strikes fail to halt Serbia's military action in Kosovo. That falls to 37 percent of those who feel they don't understand why the United States is involved.

Among the options offered for U.S. involvement, most say it's either for humanitarian purposes (38 percent) or to prevent the conflict from spreading to neighboring countries (23 percent). Protecting NATO's credibility or the credibility of U.S. foreign policy are lower on the list.

**GROUPS** – Here's a summary of opinion among some population groups:

-Men feel they understand the mission more than women do, by 72 percent to 58 percent.

-Expectation of a ground war runs highest among those who disapprove of Clinton's work on the crisis. Seventy-three percent of people who disapprove of Clinton's handling of Kosovo think the United States will get involved in a ground war; this drops to 52 percent of those who approve of Clinton's work.

-Clinton's critics, however, are not ready to call the campaign a failure. Just 27 percent of those who disapprove of Clinton's handling of the situation say the NATO military action thus far is a failure. Most, 63 percent, mirror broader opinion and say it is too early to tell.

-Similarly, only a fraction of those opposed to the air strikes, 26 percent, consider the strikes to date a failure. Again two-thirds say it's too early to tell.

-Sympathy for the refugees could grow into additional support for sending in ground troops. That's because a quarter of those who currently oppose sending in ground troops say the refugee crisis has made them more inclined to support that option.

-The humanitarian plight seems to have made NATO's purpose easier to understand. Among those who see a moral obligation to help the Kosovars, 75 percent say they have a good understanding of why the United States is involved. Among those who don't see a moral obligation, 42 percent understand our involvement.

A WORD ON WORDING – Polls this week have found support for sending ground troops within about a 10-point band. It appears that opinion depends to some extent on the circumstances posed by the question. This poll asks if people support or oppose sending ground troops to Kosovo if the air war fails to stop Serbia's military action there. Polls that ask about ground troops without any reference to the air war – perhaps implying the ground war would start immediately – find somewhat less support. Polls that bring politics into it, by asking support or opposition to President Clinton sending troops (as opposed to the United States sending troops) also find somewhat less support.

METHODOLOGY - This poll was conducted by telephone April 8, 1999, among a random national sample of 506 adults. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer and Ben Fitzpatrick.

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 approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling the situation in Kosovo?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
4/8/99	56	38	6
4/6/99	60	34	6
4/5/99	57	36	8

3/30/99	54	30	16
3/28/99	51	31	17
3/26/99	51	32	17
3/23/99	48	39	12

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

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/8/99	47	49	4
4/6/99	46	49	5
4/5/99	46	50	4
3/30/99	47	42	11
3/28/99	42	44	14
3/26/99	39	51	10
3/23/99	41	54	5
3/14/99	27	57	15

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

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
4/8/99	64	32	4
4/6/99	67	30	3
4/5/99	68	29	3
3/30/99	55	33	11
3/28/99	55	33	12
3/26/99	60	31	9

Compare to:

3/23/99*	47	47	6
3/14/99**	26	62	12

\*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?

\*\*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?

4. Suppose the bombing does NOT stop Serbia's military action in Kosovo. Would you support or oppose the United States and its European allies sending in ground troops to try to end the conflict in Kosovo?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
4/8/99: Send in ground troops	57	39	4
..if some casualties*	44	50	5
..if 100 casualties**	37	57	6
..if 500 casualties***	31	62	7
..1,000 casualties****	26	66	7
4/6/99: Send in ground troops	57	39	5
4/5/99: Send in ground troops	55	41	4

\*(IF SUPPORT GROUND TROOPS in q4) Would you support or oppose sending in ground troops if there was a good chance that some U.S. soldiers would be killed in the fighting?

\*\* (IF SOME).. if there was a good chance that up to 100 U.S. soldiers would be killed in the fighting?

\*\*\* (IF 100) up to 500?

\*\*\*\* (IF 1000) up to 1,000?

5. Just your best guess, do you think the United States is going to get into a ground war in Kosovo, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/8/99	60	36	5

6. How much more time should the United States and its European allies give the air strikes to work before sending in ground troops - a week or so, a few weeks, about a month, a few months, or longer than that?

	Week	Few weeks	About a month	A few months	Longer	Now (vol.)	Never (vol.)	Stop the air strikes (vol.)	No opin.
4/8/99	20	22	25	9	9	2	4	3	6

7. Do you think the United States and its allies bear some of the blame for the Kosovo

refugee situation, or is it entirely Serbia's fault?

	U.S./allies	Serbia's	No opinion
4/8/99	36	57	7
4/6/99	30	61	9
4/5/99	32	60	8

8. Has the Kosovo refugee situation made you more likely to support sending ground troops into Kosovo, less likely, or what?

	More likely	Less likely	Same (vol.)	No opinion
4/6/99	56	30	8	6

Compare To: Has the Kosovo refugee situation made you more likely to support allied military action against Serbia, less likely, or what?

	More likely	Less likely	Same (vol.)	No opinion
4/6/99	58	29	7	6

9. Do you think the United States has a moral obligation to try to establish peace in Kosovo, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/8/99	71	27	2
4/6/99	66	31	3
3/25/99*	64	32	4
3/21/99	58	37	5
2/21/99	52	43	5

\*3/25 and previous: Gallup; "help keep the peace"

10. Do you think the military action so far has been a success or a failure for the United States and its allies, or is it too early to tell?

	Success	Failure	Too early to tell	No opinion
4/8/99	16	14	68	2

11. Do you feel you have a good understanding of why the United States is involved in the Kosovo conflict, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/8/99	65	34	1

12. What do you feel is the main reason for U.S. involvement in the Kosovo conflict - is it mainly for humanitarian purposes; to protect the credibility of U.S. foreign policy; to protect the credibility of the U.S. and European military alliance called NATO; to prevent the conflict from spreading into neighboring countries?

	Humanitarian Purposes	US Foreign Policy	Alliance US/Europe	Prevent conflict from spreading	Other Reason (vol.)	All Reasons (vol.)	No opin.
4/8/99	38	8	16	23	8	5	3

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