

Public Shows Fatigue With Kosovo Conflict

Americans are showing some fatigue with the Kosovo conflict. Support for NATO's air strikes has dropped to its lowest since the campaign's early days, backing for sending ground troops has slipped and 58 percent favor negotiations with Serbia on a way out.

Fifty-nine percent of Americans still support the air campaign against Serbia, but that's down from a high of 68 percent in early April and its lowest since the bombardment's first week. Opposition is up to 38 percent, its highest since the conflict started.

Approval of Bill Clinton's handling of the situation, similarly, is down to 53 percent in this new ABC News/Washington Post poll, seven points off its peak. And support for sending ground troops if the air war fails is down to 52 percent, with a new high of 46 percent opposed. (Support falls further if there's "a good chance" of casualties; and few people, just 15 percent, favor sending ground troops now.)

	-----5/16-----		--Early April*--	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Air war	59%	38	68	29
Ground troops	52	46	57	39
Clinton's handling of Kosovo	53	41	60	34

*Air war, 4/5; others, 4/6

CHANGE – This is not a sea change in public opinion. Most Americans still support the allied effort, 54 percent say the United States did the right thing by getting involved and the public by a 2-1 margin (albeit just a plurality) still thinks NATO is winning. But the duration of the conflict, the lack of negotiations and the continuing civilian casualties do seem to be taking a toll.

CASUALTIES – On casualties, a sizable majority, 66 percent, say civilian deaths in NATO's air strikes (and the Chinese embassy bombing) are "unavoidable accidents of war." But this is down 12 points since late April, while 32 percent now say NATO is "not being careful enough to avoid civilian casualties."

Civilian casualties are:	5/16	4/26
Unavoidable accidents	66%	78
Lack of caution by NATO	32	19

HARD LINE – This poll finds doubts about NATO's hard line with Serbia. Just a narrow majority, 52 percent, say NATO should continue the bombing to pressure Serbia to withdraw; 44 percent prefer suspending the bombing as a sign of encouragement.

More strikingly, just 38 percent say the allies should "continue to require Serbia to accept NATO's terms" for ending the conflict; instead 58 percent say NATO "should negotiate with Serbia" on terms.

To end the conflict:	5/16
Negotiate terms with Serbia	58%
Impose NATO's terms on Serbia	38

NON-NEGOTIABLE – Majorities, however, see two NATO demands as non-negotiable: Requiring Serbia to withdraw almost all its forces from Kosovo (59 percent call this non-negotiable) and allowing the return of all refugees (54 percent).

However, the public divides on the negotiability of another key issue, requiring Serbia to allow a NATO-led peacekeeping force. And most, 55 percent, say limited self-rule for Kosovo as a Serbian province should be up to negotiation.

	Non- negotiable	Subject to negotiations
Withdrawal of nearly all Serbian forces from Kosovo	59%	37
Return of all refugees	54	42
NATO-led peacekeeping force	50	47
Limited self-rule for Kosovo	37	55

FRACTURES – Despite continued majority support for NATO's air campaign, this poll finds fractures in views of NATO's best approach. A third of Americans want to suspend the bombing and negotiate with Serbia; nearly a quarter want to continue the bombing and negotiate; and just over a quarter support continued bombing without negotiations.

Also, about half of those who support the air strikes also support negotiations with Serbia (as do three-quarters of those who oppose the air war). Half the people who say United States made the right decision to get involved favor negotiations, as do half of those who think the United States is winning the war.

WOMEN – Drop in support for the strikes is greater among women, who always have been more wary about the conflict. Fifty-three percent of women support the bombardment, compared to 66 percent of men; support among women is down 10 points from early April, compared to a five-point drop among men.

While half of men say the United States and its European allies are winning the conflict, that falls to 39 percent of women. And 51 percent of women think NATO should suspend its bombing, while 59 percent of men say it should continue.

PARTY – Finally, while there are divisions on many of these issues along political lines, there also are areas of agreement. Support for opening negotiations with Serbia crosses party lines, drawing 60 percent of Democrats, 56 percent of Republicans and 57 percent of independents alike.

METHODOLOGY - This poll was conducted by telephone May 16, 1999, among a random national sample of 761 adults. The results have a 3.5-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

News and research organizations wishing to receive ABC News polls via e-mail may send a request to Ben.X.Fitzpatrick@ABC.com.

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

Results follow:

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

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
5/16/99	53	41	6
4/26/99	56	36	9
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 support or oppose the United States and its European allies conducting air strikes against Serbia?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
5/16/99	59	38	3
4/26/99	65	30	5
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?

3. (and 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? (IF SUPPORT) 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?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
5/16/99			
Send in ground troops	52	46	2
if some casualties	43	56	1
4/26/99			
Send in ground troops	56	40	4
if some casualties	45	52	3
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 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. (Of those who support/don't know for sending in ground troops in Q3) Should the United States and its allies send in ground troops now, or should they give more time for the air strikes to work?

Net Table:

	Send now	Give more time	Don't send	No opin.
5/16/99	15	36	46	3

6. Do you think the United States and its European allies in the NATO alliance should negotiate with Serbia on terms for ending the conflict, or should they continue to require Serbia to accept NATO's terms?

	NATO should negotiate with Serbia on terms	Require Serbia to accept NATO's terms	No opinion
5/16/99	58	38	5

7. Should the NATO allies continue bombing Serbia to keep pressure on it to withdraw from Kosovo, or should the NATO allies suspend the bombing of Serbia to encourage Serbia to withdraw?

	Continue bombing	Suspend bombing	No opin.
5/16/99	52	44	4

8. I'm going to name some of the NATO allies' conditions for ending the conflict. For each, please tell me if you think it should be up for negotiation, or if it should be non-negotiable.

	Up for Negotiation	Should be non-negotiable	No opinion
5/16/99			
a. Requiring Serbia to remove almost all of its soldiers and special police from Kosovo	37	59	4
b. Requiring Serbia to allow a NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo	47	50	3
c. The return of all refugees to Kosovo	42	54	4
d. A political settlement allowing Kosovo limited self-rule as a			

province of Serbia

55

37

9

9. As you may know, some civilians have been killed in the air strikes against Serbia, and recently the NATO allies bombed the Chinese consulate in Serbia's capital. Do you think that the United States and its European allies are not being careful enough to avoid civilian casualties, or do you think these are just unavoidable accidents of war?

	Not being careful enough	Unavoidable accidents of war	No opinion
5/16/99*	32	66	2
4/26/99	19	78	3

*Added consulate reference

10. As of now, which side do you think is winning the Kosovo conflict - (Serbia), or (the United States and its European allies)?

	Serbia	US and its European allies	Neither/ draw (vol.)	No opin.
5/16/99	22	45	28	5
4/26/99	25	47	21	6

11. Considering everything, do you think the United States did the right thing in getting involved in a military conflict in Serbia, or do you think it was a mistake?

	Yes, right thing	No, mistake	No opinion
5/16/99	54	42	3
4/26/99	56	41	2
4/6/99	58	40	2

END