Credit where due

The strategy had flaws and critics, but the U.S. and NATO remained united.





BARRIE MAGUIRE

By Stephen S. Rosenfeld

They said Bill Clinton was wrong to rely on air power alone to win the war, and — assuming the details are mastered — they were wrong.

The damage that NATO air did to the Serbs' military assets, to the economic infrastructure and finally to the popular will turned out to be more than even Slobodan Milosevic could bear. Clinton had been criticized by me and others to the effect that he was a cruise-missile president who would not commit the resources to match the ample dimensions of his war aims. This time around, anyway, he showed he was right. His weighing of means and ends finally clicked.

You can argue fairly that an earlier and more evident move toward the preparing of a ground campaign would have brought a swifter victory and at less cost to the losers. British defense expert John Keegan, writing in the most recent Sunday Telegraph of London, made the case that the differences between Vietnam and Kosovo would make an invasion of Kosovo a cakewalk.

The differences were most acute on the home front, he wrote: Milosevic has enjoyed none of the strengths imparted to Ho Chi Minh by fellow Marxists, anti-Americans and deluded idealists. He has no following outside his own country and is opposed by an important minority inside it. He's an indicted war criminal. "All the differences disfavor Milosevic and his post-Communist regime, a thing of the bad old past, and favor NATO, an alliance that represents the future at its most hopeful."

But against the charge that he was slow to go to ground war, Clinton has available the defense that he gave first priority to the human costs to NATO's own forces. Here the record will show that while the estimated total of Serbian soldiers killed in the 10-week war was 5,000 (plus 10,000 wounded), the actual NATO count of deaths due to combat, not accident, was zero. Zero. 5,000 to 0.

Ground combat would surely have taken American lives. Here Clinton was lucky but deliberate as well. It was not just that he avoided ground combat. His chosen tactics in the air war punished the adversary and saved NATO lives.

The waging of war by high-tech machines and restrictive tactics is the special lesson of this war. It turned out that the principal shortage that became apparent was of viable military and economic targets. Serbia being a tough but small middle-level country, the number of these began to run short. The gap was made up by verging into targets that could be hit only by putting civilians at extra risk.

Still, the end of the war came before the NATO publics revolted against the collateral civilian kill.

Milosevic kept a close eye on the cohesion of NATO. The question in his mind was not just whether Serbia could stand the incurring of casualties but whether the alliance could stand their inflicting. Many worried that Milosevic would be right in expecting the alliance to fragment. But this didn't happen.

Clinton, with a steady emphasis on the humanitarian purposes, the bearable costs and the allies' good company, kept the country reasonably united behind his policy and also kept the alliance whole.

This demonstrated a level of leadership in foreign policy that his previous performance had not anticipated. Not a flawless performance, but in the end an effective one.

In Europe the United States now looms larger than it has since the end of World War II. We Americans went in and once again pulled the Europeans' chestnuts out of the fire. Clinton did it with a relatively light hand, however. Among the 19 allies, there were no defections in 70 difficult days. The Brits relived days of glory. The French played the unfamiliar role of loyal ally. The Germans stepped forward. The Italians did well. If we are not indispensable — a troublesome word that deserves retirement — we can be good to have around. The rebuilding of the Balkans should resume in a spirit of good feeling.

We have been given a reprieve in relations with Russia. The Russians complained mightily about American overbearing in their backyard. But they found more determination in the American attitude than many people had expected, and eventually chose cooperation in parallel with the United States. The possibility exists to reverse the decline of American-Russian relations. The way this war is ending — assuming, again, the details — bodes well for the great American-supported project of the integration of a democratic Europe.

Stephen S. Rosenfeld wrote this piece for the Washington Post.

Cracked up at the woman with an egg in her cleavage

By Trish Boppert

Color me curious.

I've just read a scintillating little piece about the so-called lighter side of environmentalism (I'd call it the lighter side of lunacy, but that's just me), about a Norwegian woman who is using the "cleavage between her breasts" (as opposed to the cleavage someplace else?) to incubate a bird's egg, which is "believed to be a curlew," the report tells us.

The "former midwife" (who presumably must really miss the whole birth thing) believes that the egg will hatch "in several weeks' time," but until that happy moment arrives, she'll keep the egg in her cleavage, "even when sleeping at night." Her husband has been told "not to touch her breasts for fear of cracking the egg."

Inquiring minds want to know: Why is the egg "believed to be a curlew"? Is there no scientist in all of Norway who can identify the mysterious oval? Where did this former Norwegian midwife find the egg? Was it in an actual nest, or mistakenly plucked from amid a carton of eggs, or did it miraculously appear "in the cleavage of her breasts" without warning as she rode the subway to work one morning?

And, speaking of cleavage, what size breasts are we talking about here? Is there a special contraption that nestles the egg between them, or are they powerful enough to grip it to themselves even as the midwife "sleeps at night"? Perhaps she is capable of sleeping the entire evening on her back, immobilized for fear of shattering the delicate eggshell. Or does her husband, now with nothing else to do, bind her into a bundling board devised for just this purpose?

Suppose we should wish to do this at home. Must the room be kept at a certain temperature, or is the pervasive heat of her bosoms sufficient? Are heat lamps needed at any point? Is showering or bathing prohibited? What about hot tubs? One wonders about her daytime apparel. Perhaps she has developed a three-cupped bra, soon to marketed as "The Incubator."

Since I'm a woman, I can ask aloud: Is it obvious to the naked eye that she's hatching an egg in there? Must she walk slowly, gingerly, as she goes about her daily tasks, or can she jounce about, uninhibited by the oval thought-to-be-a-curlew egg snuggled where it's snuggled?

I imagine her husband may complain now and then. Perhaps he, too, like many an unsung Norwegian, has incubated an egg between his own cleavages at one time or another. But still — maybe he sometimes looks over at his sleeping wife and thinks fleetingly, jealously, of snatching the egg from between her breasts and cracking it into a pan.

Yes, these two brave Norwegians are environmentalist models for us all, for anyone considering breast incubation. But, I ask on the rest of the world's behalf, what kind of parents will they be? What are their plans for their hatchling? How old will they be when their baby reaches that critical fledgling stage? What will the birdling, or the curlewlet, once hatched, imprint upon as it struggles to pull itself from the fleshy folds that surround it? One can only hope it does so gently.

Must she walk gingerly as she does her daily tasks? Does her husband complain? What kind of parents will they be?

Alas, unless more news coverage results, these questions will remain unanswered. But one fact remains. It sure beats the rhythm method for birth control.

"Not now darling. There's an egg in my cleavage."

"Oh, yes. The egg. Will it hatch soon, my beloved?"

"In several weeks, my patient hero. Till then, don't touch —"

"I know, I know."

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The Soong sisters' family history has been the history of China in the last century.

They wed, and wielded, power



Soong Chingling in 1940.



Soong Mayling in the 1980s.

By Alvin S. Felzenberg

They were stubborn, determined, tactful and strong. Close in childhood, they became rivals as adults. Each claimed to be China's rightful "first lady" — often at the same time. They were the Soong sisters.

Chingling and Mayling were two of six children born to Charlie Soong, the American-educated patriarch of one of the most powerful families in Chinese, if not world, history.

Three of Soong's sons operated at the highest levels of international finance. The husband of his oldest daughter, Ailing, became China's finance minister. (She was thought to be the power behind many family-backed thrones.)

A former missionary, Soong turned his Bible printing and noodle manufacturing companies into a business empire. He befriended Sun Yat-sen and was a major financier of the revolution that toppled the Manchu dynasty in 1911.

The Soong-Sun relationship became strained a few years later. Daughter Chingling replaced Ailing as Sun's secretary, and, although a married man, Sun began to court Chingling. The two wed secretly in 1914. The groom was 50; the bride, 20.

None of these difficulties prevented the Soongs from using Chingling's elevated status to consolidate their political position and increase their wealth. Their influence continued to rise when Soong Mayling aught the eye of the military man who would succeed Sun Yat-sen: Chiang Kai-shek.

To wed, this couple also had to rise above certain inconveniences. Chiang had to divorce his wife and become a Christian. After Sun's death in 1924, Chiang prevailed in a power struggle over control of the Kuomintang Party that governed China. In 1927, the year Soong Mayling became Madame Chiang Kai-shek, Sun's widow, Chingling, denounced her new brother-in-law for betraying the principles of Sun's revolution.

Chingling and Mayling both claimed to be China's rightful "first lady" — often at the same time.

She became incensed when Chiang turned his army against his major rivals, Chinese Communists and trade unionists, and committed massacres in Nanjing, Canton and Shanghai. (A precursor of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, Chingling pressed for a "Third Force" to counterweight both Chiang's Kuomintang and Mao Tse-tung's Communist Party.)

Chingling spent the next two decades speaking, writing and organizing against Chiang's policies and practices (including organized corruption and reliance on the underworld). Through the special standing she held with the Chinese people, she emerged as one of the few voices of opposition within Chiang's China. Of her brother-in-law's reputation for ruthlessness, Chingling said that "without Mayling, he might have been much worse."

Whatever influence Mayling had within her husband's regime, she became an effective public relations spokesman for his China to the world. A graduate of Wellesley, she served as Chiang's interpreter to visiting Americans. With the help of Henry Luce's Life and Time magazines, she bolstered international support for her husband's regime. Newsreels proclaimed her "China's Eleanor Roosevelt."

During the Chinese civil war, Mayling resumed her familiar role as Chiang's goodwill ambassador. Once her husband's Nationalist government was forced to take up residence on Taiwan, she became a favorite of the first "China lobby" (those who regarded Chiang's as the official government of China).

Chingling stayed in Shanghai. With Mao's forces now in power, she became one of three noncommunists to hold high government posts. During the "Cultural Revolution," a mob allied with Mao's wife looted her home while she was out. Days before her death in 1981, Chingling officially joined the Communist Party and was named honorary president in China.

Mayling now resides in Long Island and retains an apartment in Manhattan. Born in 1897, she is on the verge of witnessing the turn of a century for a second time. Much of its history is the story of her and her extended family.

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures about the American presidency.

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