

A New Era of Turbulence in the Balkans?

Ted Galen Carpenter

In contrast to the 1990s, when turmoil from the breakup of Yugoslavia dominated the security agenda of the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies, the early years of the twenty-first century have been relatively quiet. Washington has viewed the reduction in turbulence with a palpable sense of relief, because the United States has had far more pressing security matters on its agenda since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. The last thing US policy makers wanted to deal with, given the requirements of the struggle against radical Islamic terrorism and the debacle of the Iraq war, were additional security problems in the Balkans.

Unfortunately, there are signs that the recent period of quiescence in the Balkans is coming to an end. This unhappy development is largely the result of policies that the United States and its principal European allies have adopted. Several of those policies threaten to reignite Balkan controversies and usher in another era of turbulence. Four developments are especially worrisome: (1) Western support for Kosovo's independence, (2) an attempt to modify the delicate Dayton peace accords with regard to Bosnia, (3) the growing reluctance to expand the European Union, and (4) the decision to offer membership in NATO to certain successor states of the former Yugoslavia.

Recognizing Kosovo

The most prominent development that could bring the period of relative stability to an end is the controversy surrounding Kosovo's declaration of

Ted Galen Carpenter is vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute and author of *Smart Power: Toward a Prudent Foreign Policy for America*.

independence. Pristina's bid for independence should hardly have come as a surprise, since US and EU policy makers had repeatedly signaled their support for that outcome. Although the United Nations resolution authorizing international governance of the province following NATO's air assault in 1999 ostensibly confirmed that Kosovo remained part of Serbia, only the most naive observers doubted that the province would ultimately be granted independence. That suspicion was strengthened in 2007 when UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari recommended "conditional" or "supervised" independence, disregarding Serbia's offer to give Kosovo extensive autonomy within the Serbian state.¹

Belgrade immediately cried foul, and for understandable reasons. Not only did the Ahtisaari plan envision the forcible dismemberment of a UN member state by international edict, it proposed the dismemberment of a *democratic* state. Russia strongly supported Serbia's protests, threatening to veto a resolution on independence if it was put before the UN Security Council.² The United States and the leading EU powers, in turn, threatened to bypass the Security Council and grant Kosovo independence without UN approval.³ That threat was reminiscent of NATO's actions in 1999, when it became clear that Russia would veto a resolution authorizing the use of force against Serbia over the Kosovo issue. On that occasion, Washington and its allies did an end run around the Security Council and waged war on NATO's supposed authority as a regional security organization.

This time, the EU became the designated proxy for the will of the "international community." In February 2008, the Kosovo government acted on the West's encouraging signals and declared independence. The United States, Britain, France, and Germany promptly extended diplomatic recognition to the new state and urged other countries to do the same.⁴ The Serbian gov-

1. Colum Lynch, "UN Mediator Calls for Kosovo Independence," *Washington Post*, 21 March 2007.

2. Katarina Subasic, "UN Kosovo Plan 'Failed,' New Negotiations Needed: Russia," *Agence France Presse*, 19 April 2007.

3. Paul Taylor, "Kosovo to Be Independent with or without the UN: US," *Reuters*, 28 April 2007; "US to Sidestep Russia Veto on Kosovo," *Australian*, 12 June 2007.

4. Paul Harrington, "European Powers and US Lead Rush to Recognize Kosovo," *Agence France Presse*, 18 February 2008; Peter Finn and Peter Baker, "Kosovo Gains Recognition by US, Some in Europe," *Washington Post*, 19 February 2008.

ernment reacted with anger, and placed most of the blame on Washington. In a speech to the nation, Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica denounced US conduct.

The phony state of Kosovo has been declared on the part of Serbia's territory that is under the military control of NATO. This unprecedented lawlessness is the result of a destructive, cruel, and immoral policy of force implemented by the United States. This act says to the whole world that America places force above the UN Charter and is ready to willingly, unscrupulously, and violently jeopardize international order for the sake of its own military interests.

Placing violence above the principles of international law, the United States used reckless force and humiliated and forced the EU to break the very principles that the EU is based on. America forced Europe to follow it in unprecedented violence demonstrated against Serbia. Europe has lowered its head today, and that is why it will be responsible for the far-reaching consequences that this violence will have on European and world order.⁵

Pristina's unilateral declaration is disruptive on several levels. For one thing, the measure sets a troubling precedent in an international system with an abundance of regional secessionist movements.⁶ Russian first deputy prime minister Sergei Ivanov was all too accurate when he warned that granting Kosovo independence would be "something close to opening a Pandora's Box."⁷ Washington and the "EU three" — Britain, France, and Germany — claim that the Kosovo situation is unique and sets no precedent, but

5. Vojislav Kostunica, "Proclamation of Phony State on Serbia's Territory Result of US Policy of Force," 17 February 2008, Official Website of the Serbian Government, www.Serbia.sr.gov.yu/.

6. Patrick Goodenough, "Kosovo Ripples Felt in Taiwan Strait, Former Soviet Union," Cybercast News Service, 21 February 2008, www.CNSNews.com. On secessionist movements and states generally, see Ted Galen Carpenter, "Staying Alive," *National Interest* (March–April, 2008): 26–31. Supporters of Kosovo's independence, of course, deny that it sets a precedent. Perhaps the boldest example of that argument comes from former US ambassador to the United Nations (and long-time Albanian partisan) Richard Holbrooke. He asserts flatly that "Kosovo is a unique case and sets no precedent for separatist movements elsewhere." Richard Holbrooke, "Russia's Test in Kosovo," *Washington Post*, 13 March 2007. For a different view, see Stanley Kober, "Europe's Approaching Train Wreck," *International Herald Tribune*, 22 March 2007.

7. Quoted in Kerstin Gehmlich, "Russia Says Europe Risks 'Pandora's Box' in Kosovo," Reuters, 10 February 2008.

that is an extraordinarily naive view, and other influential countries clearly do not agree.

Such major powers as Russia, India, Indonesia, and China worry that their own restless ethnic or political minorities could seek to emulate Kosovo.⁸ Russia frets especially about Chechnya, India about Kashmir, and China about Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan. Beijing's uneasiness about the Kosovo precedent with respect to Taiwan was not eased when Taipei promptly congratulated the Kosovars and emphasized the UN's need to respect the principle of national self-determination, that is, Taiwan's claim to sovereignty. Numerous African countries have disgruntled, geographically concentrated minorities who have demonstrated a desire to create their own states.

Separatist causes are a concern not only to governments in Asia and Africa; there are potential secessionist arenas in Europe as well. Cyprus understandably opposes Kosovo's move, given the pretensions of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Turkey, which set up the TRNC, has its own worries, given the ongoing insurgency of Kurdish secessionists. Spain may one day be less than thrilled about Pristina's action if its own Basque separatists are encouraged to intensify their violent campaign. And London, which vied with Washington in its enthusiasm for Kosovo's independence, may have reason to rue that stance if Scotland decides on independence. Hungarians in northwestern Romania could scarcely contain their enthusiasm for the Kosovo precedent, arguing that Pristina's success boosted their own bid for autonomy—or perhaps something beyond autonomy.⁹

Most significant for Balkan stability is the revival of sentiment within the Bosnian Serb substate, the Republika Srpska, for secession from Bosnia to establish a fully independent country. Despite charges of inconsistency, if not hypocrisy, US and EU officials emphatically reject those new calls.¹⁰ The uncompromising position adopted by the Western powers does not mean that the controversy will disappear, however.

8. They have reason to be concerned. See Izhar Wani, "Indian Kashmir Separatists Get Boost from Kosovo Independence," *Agence France Presse*, 23 February 2008.

9. Nicholas Kulish, "Kosovo's Actions Hearten a Hungarian Enclave," *New York Times*, 7 April 2008.

10. "Major Powers Reject Bosnian Serb Secession Calls," *Agence France Presse*, 27 February 2008.

Secessionist concerns were a major reason why an unexpectedly large number of EU members failed to recognize Kosovo's independence during the first two months. That reluctance was even more pronounced outside the EU.

As of 1 May 2008, only forty countries had recognized the new state, a number that is far short of what US and Kosovo officials expected on the eve of independence. A week before the unilateral declaration, Kosovo prime minister Hashim Thaci boasted that at least one hundred countries were ready to recognize the new country.¹¹

In addition to secessionist worries for existing states, the Kosovo precedent creates the potential for major powers to foment mischief of their own. For example, Russia could one day cite the US-EU stance on Kosovo as a precedent for dismembering neighboring Georgia by recognizing the independence of that country's Abkhazian and South Ossetian regions. Indeed, Moscow has made veiled threats that it might take that step.¹² In the more distant future, an ultranationalistic Russian government could use the Kosovo precedent as a justification to wrench Russian-speaking Crimea away from neighboring Ukraine.

In addition to encouraging secessionist movements around the world, bypassing the UN Security Council and granting Kosovo independence over the objections of Moscow and Belgrade leads to other unpleasant consequences. At the very least, it poisons Serbia's relations with both the United States and the EU. That development hardly promotes stability in the Balkans. Although both Washington and the leading EU capitals have held out the carrot of more rapid Serbian integration into NATO and the EU if Belgrade ends its objections to an independent Kosovo,¹³ that enticement is not

11. Douglas Hamilton, "Kosovo Expects Quick Recognition by '100 Countries,'" Reuters, 8 February 2008.

12. C. J. Chivers, "Russia Warns It May Back Breakaway Republics in Georgia," *New York Times*, 6 February 2008. Also see Christian Lowe, "Russian MPs Urge Recognition of Georgia Separatists," 21 March 2008. Both Abkhazian and South Ossetian leaders are encouraging such attitudes. Guy Faulconbridge, "Georgia Rebel Region Seeks Recognition after Kosovo," Reuters, 5 March 2008; "Georgia's Rebel Abkhazia Calls for Independence Recognition," Agence France Presse, 7 March 2008.

13. David Brunnstrom, "EU Calls On Serbia to Commit to Europe," Reuters, 5 March 2008.

likely to prove sufficient. Even before Pristina's declaration of independence, Serbian officials strongly signaled that they were not interested in such a deal.¹⁴ There is no indication of a change in sentiment. Not even President Boris Tadic, perhaps the most prominent pro-Western political figure remaining in Serbia, seems interested in such a deal.

If they value political survival, Serbian moderates have little choice but to take that stance. Attempting to appease the United States and the EU powers by sacrificing Serbia's claim to Kosovo would produce an extremely negative domestic reaction. The ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party is already the strongest faction in the country's legislature, and only a coalition of more moderate parties kept the Radicals out of power.¹⁵ Although the relatively moderate Tadic defeated his Radical opponent in the 2008 presidential election, he did so narrowly. Anger over the amputation of Kosovo, which most Serbs regard as the cradle of their civilization, led to anti-Western riots in Belgrade. Disputes over whether to reject any prospective ties with the EU unless it changed its Kosovo policy caused the collapse of Tadic's political alliance with Prime Minister Kostunica and forced early parliamentary elections. There is little doubt that public resentment over Western conduct on the Kosovo issue has strengthened the Radical Party and other nationalist elements—a development that Washington and its allies will certainly not welcome.

Kosovo's independence also is likely to lead to an increase in abuses against the remaining non-Albanian inhabitants there. During the 1999 war and its aftermath, more than 240,000 people (mostly Serbs but also including Roma, Bulgarians, Jews, and other groups) were driven from the province. That large-scale ethnic cleansing campaign occurred on NATO's watch, and the alliance did nothing to halt it, much less reverse the effects. The refugees are still waiting to go home, even though there is little prospect that they will ever be allowed to do so. In addition to the initial campaign of ethnic cleansing, the Kosovar government and its supporters have ignored (if not actually

14. Douglas Hamilton, "Serbia Says It Won't Trade Kosovo for EU or NATO," Reuters, 12 June 2007.

15. David Vujanovic, "Ultra-Nationalist Win Clouds Serbia's Future," Agence France Presse, 22 January 2007; Strategic Forecasting, Inc., "Serbia: The New Government's Precarious Position," *Global Intelligence Brief*, 16 May 2007.

fomented) acts of violence against the remaining non-Albanian populations as well as presided over the systematic destruction of Christian churches and Serbian historical sites. Again, NATO's response to these depredations has been anemic at best.¹⁶

US and EU supporters of an independent Kosovo profess to believe that Pristina will now respect the rights of ethnic minorities. That is little more than self-deception based on the fiction that Kosovo is a multi-ethnic state. The probability is that, if there is no partition of Kosovo that leaves predominantly Serbian portions under Belgrade's jurisdiction and protection, it will simply be a matter of time until virtually all non-Albanians are driven from the province.¹⁷ If NATO has been unwilling or unable to prevent ethnic cleansing while occupying Kosovo with thousands of troops, it is certainly going to be incapable of preventing further atrocities once those forces are withdrawn. Given Pristina's track record, there is little realistic reason to expect that non-Albanians will be treated with even a modicum of decency once NATO leaves.¹⁸

The Serbian remnant understands that probability all too well. There have already been large, and sometimes violent, demonstrations against Kosovo's declaration of independence in the largest remaining Serbian enclave in the city of Mitrovica and other portions of northern Kosovo. Serb inhabitants refuse to recognize Kosovo's independence and insist that their region remains part of Serbia.¹⁹ The Serbian government has already suggested dividing Kosovo along ethnic lines, which would seem to be an implicit retreat from Belgrade's previous position that the entire province be restored to Serbia's jurisdiction.²⁰ The Western powers vehemently oppose any parti-

16. Doug Bandow, "A Separate Peace?" *National Interest Online*, 27 September 2006.

17. For an argument that partition would at least limit the extent of ethnic cleansing, see Timothy William Peters, "A Separate Peace," *New York Times*, 1 February 2007.

18. Matt Robinson, "UN Braced for Serb Exodus from Kosovo: Report," Reuters, 31 May 2007; Doug Bandow, "Blind Eyes over Kosovo," *American Spectator*, 20 July 2006.

19. Bojan Pancevski, "Serbian Settlers Plan Partition of Kosovo," *Telegraph* (UK), 23 February 2008; Andre Birukoff, "A Month after Independence, Kosovo Threatened by Possible Serb Secession," Agence France Presse, 15 March 2008.

20. Dan Bilefsky, "Serbia Formally Proposes Ethnic Partition of Kosovo," *New York Times*, 25 March 2008.

tion of Kosovo, however, apparently adopting the view that the boundaries of this newly minted state must be considered sacrosanct.²¹

An independent Kosovo is likely to exacerbate problems with several neighboring countries. There is scant evidence that advocates of a “Greater Albania” have relinquished their territorial claims in the Balkans. Within months of the NATO-orchestrated Kosovar victory in 1999, Albanian populations in the neighboring Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) began to wage a low-grade insurgency.²² Under intense Western pressure, the government in Skopje made a variety of concessions to grant predominantly Albanian areas greater autonomy. That settlement is unlikely to hold if Greater Albania proponents can use Kosovo as a base from which to pressure FYROM. It was an ominous development that less than a month after Pristina’s declaration of independence, the leading ethnic Albanian party in FYROM threatened to withdraw its support and bring down the government because of what party leaders described as a failure to support minority rights or to recognize Kosovo’s independence. Among that party’s demands were greater use of the Albanian language and flag in the increasingly autonomous northwestern region of Macedonia and increased benefits to veterans of the 2000–1 Albanian guerrilla insurgency.²³

There also has been agitation in largely Albanian regions elsewhere in Serbia as well as in Montenegro. Greater Albania advocates in both Kosovo and Albania even cast covetous eyes toward Epirus, a region in northwestern Greece. Western policy makers who believe that the emergence of an independent Kosovo will end irredentist Albanian claims elsewhere in the Balkans are likely to be disappointed. It will more likely reinforce those claims and lead to more instability.

Aside from the political ramifications, an independent Kosovo may intensify other worrisome trends. Even under international occupation, Kosovo has

21. Neil MacDonald, “Kosovo Envoy Stands Firm against Partition,” *Financial Times*, 28 February 2008; “Kosovo Overseers Say No Split and No Separate Police,” Reuters, 28 February 2008.

22. For a discussion of that episode, see Ted Galen Carpenter, “Waist Deep in the Balkans and Sinking: Washington Confronts the Crisis in Macedonia,” *Cato Institute Policy Analysis*, no. 397, 30 April 2001.

23. Kole Casule and Matt Robinson, “Albanian Party Threatens to Bring Down Macedonian Government,” Reuters, 12 March 2008.

become a nexus for organized crime in Europe.²⁴ Indeed, Kosovo (along with neighboring Albania) has emerged as the principal center for both drug trafficking and prostitution.²⁵

There is also the matter of penetration by radical Islamic elements. Revelations that several members of the terrorist cell that planned attacks against Fort Dix were immigrants from Kosovo may merely be a harbinger of a much more pervasive danger.²⁶ In his new book, *The Coming Balkan Caliphate: The Threat of Radical Islam to Europe and the West*, journalist Christopher Deliso makes a credible case that Islamic extremists have penetrated both Bosnia and Kosovo to an alarming extent and are intimidating more moderate Muslim factions.²⁷ The Kosovo Liberation Army's long-standing connections to terrorist elements elsewhere in the Muslim world is especially worrisome, given that so many Kosovo Liberation Army alumni now hold influential posts in the Pristina government. Again, if these problems have already reached severe levels despite a measure of international supervision, one can only speculate how bad they might become once international supervision disappears.

Modifying the Dayton Accords

Although US and EU policy regarding Kosovo is the main factor threatening to bring about a renewed period of turbulence in the Balkans, it is not

24. Tom Walker, "Rampage of the Mafia May Delay Kosovo Independence," *Times* (London), 9 April 2006.

25. Curiously, though, neither Kosovo nor Albania was given "tier 3" status (the worst level) in the State Department's latest report on human trafficking, even though several countries with less egregious records were put in that category. See "US Blacklist on Human Trafficking Grows," Associated Press, 12 June 2007.

26. Jerry Seper, "Six Held in Plot to Hit Fort Dix," *Washington Times*, 9 May 2007. The problem of radical Islamic penetration may be even more severe in Bosnia. See Isabel Vincent, "Terrorist Plans Seized in Bosnia," *National Post*, 21 March 2002; Sherrie Gossett, "Jihadists Find Convenient Base in Bosnia," Cybercast News Service, 17 August 2005, www.CNSNews.com; and Daria Sito-Sucic, "Bosnia's Muslims Divided over Inroads of Wahhabism," Reuters, 29 December 2006.

27. Christopher Deliso, *The Coming Balkan Caliphate: The Threat of Radical Islam to Europe and the West* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2007), especially 4–27, 41–7, 53–4. Charles V. Pena, a scholar at the Independent Institute, takes a somewhat more sanguine view, contending that the danger of an extensive radical Islamic presence in the Balkans is exaggerated. Charles V. Pena, "Al Qaeda: The Balkans Connection," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2005): 65–76.

the only one. Western tinkering with the Dayton Accords regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina also threatens to destabilize a very delicate arrangement.

Bosnia under the Dayton system has hardly been an unalloyed success. It is still a country that lacks a meaningful sense of nationhood or even the basic political cohesion to be an effective state. The reality is that, if secession were allowed, the overwhelming majority of Bosnian Serbs would vote to detach their self-governing region (the Republika Srpska) from Bosnia and form an independent country or merge with Serbia.²⁸ Most Croats would also likely choose to secede and join with Croatia. Bosnian Muslims constitute the only faction that wishes to maintain Bosnia-Herzegovina in its current incarnation.

Political paralysis has plagued Bosnia in the years since the Dayton Accords were signed. To the extent that political power has been exercised by the country's inhabitants at all, it has been at the subnational level, that is, the Republika Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation. The national government has been weak to the point of impotence. Most real political power has been exercised by the UN high representative, an international potentate who has ruled like a colonial governor.²⁹ High representatives have routinely removed elected officials from office, disqualified candidates for elections, and imposed various policies by decree.

The economic situation has not been much better. Bosnia's economy is still in terrible shape more than a decade after Dayton. Indeed, without the financial inputs from international aid agencies and the spending by the swarms of international bureaucrats in the country (which account for more than a third of the country's gross domestic product), Bosnia would scarcely have a functioning economy at all. Even with that assistance, the country's unemployment rate stands at a staggering 45 percent. Nor has economic freedom and the rule of law developed significantly. The latest global survey of economic freedom by the Heritage Foundation and the *Wall Street Journal*

28. Olga Lola Ninkovic, "Montenegro Vote Spurs Bosnia Serb Referendum Calls," Reuters, 29 May 2007. A November 2007 poll indicated that 77 percent of Bosnian Serbs favored secession if Kosovo gained that right. See Olja Stanic, "Bosnian Serbs Want Secession if Kosovo Goes—Poll," Reuters, 21 November 2007.

29. See Ted Galen Carpenter, "Jackboot Nation Building: The West Brings 'Democracy' to Bosnia," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11, no 1 (2000).

ranks Bosnia 121st out of 162 countries in the survey—right between those enlightened liberal economic models Malawi and Gabon. Even more sobering, Bosnia's rank has dropped six places from the previous survey—hardly an encouraging trend.³⁰

Yet despite the political and economic failures, the Dayton Accords did end the Bosnian civil war, and the country has maintained a peaceful course for more than twelve years. That achievement has occurred because Dayton established a fragile equilibrium. Bosnian Serbs have enjoyed a sufficient degree of self-government (albeit having to tolerate the heavy-handed policies of the high representative) that it did not seem worthwhile to resume the fighting. Bosnian Muslims were satisfied enough with the fiction of a united state and a disproportionate share of the economic spoils from the international occupation to refrain from trying to extend their authority over the Republika Srpska.

But Western officials seem unwilling to leave well enough alone. The reality that Bosnia was (and is) largely a pretend country has always grated on them. In recent years, they have pushed a campaign to invest Bosnia's weak central government with greater powers—to make it a true, effective, national government.³¹ That is a very dangerous venture. It threatens to upset the delicate political equilibrium that has existed since Dayton.³² In particular, the Serbs are increasingly nervous that they may lose much of the self-government that they have enjoyed and that they might again face the prospect of domination by their Muslim adversaries. It was the fear of Muslim subjugation that led the Serb minority to make its initial bid for secession in the early 1990s.

30. Kim R. Holmes, Edwin J. Feulner, Mary Anastasia O'Grady, Anthony B. Kim, and Daniella Markheim, *2008 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, DC, and New York: Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal, 2008), 11–2. Mary Anastasia O'Grady, "The Poor Get Richer," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 January 2007. For an account that manages to miss nearly all of Bosnia's political and economic deficiencies, see Gianne Brownell and Kris Anderson, "Bosnia Reborn," *Newsweek International*, 6 August 2006.

31. Nedim Dervisbegovic, "US Urges Bosnians to Strengthen Common State," Reuters, 12 October 2005. Under intense pressure from both the United States and the EU, the three ethnic factions in Bosnia have taken some steps in that direction. See Nedim Dervisbegovic, "Bosnians Agree to Reform Presidency, Parliament," *Reuters*, 18 May 2006.

32. Nicholas Wood, "Fiery Campaign Imperils Bosnia's Progress," *New York Times*, 27 August 2006; Andrew Purvis, "Can Bosnia's Peace Survive?" *Time Europe*, 2 October 2006; "Bosnia Appears Split on Whether to Unify," *New York Times*, 1 October 2006; and Dino Sito-Sucic, "Bosnian Serb PM Rejects US-Backed Reform Plan," Reuters, 24 May 2007.

Even if the worst-case scenario does not emerge (a renewal of the Bosnian civil war), efforts to strengthen the central government are likely to boost Muslim assertiveness and reignite Serbian fears.

Some Bosnian Serbs are already flirting with a secessionist agenda again, arguing that they should have the same right to establish an independent country as the Muslim population in Kosovo did—with the West's blessing. At the very least, attempts to modify the Dayton Accords and constrain the autonomy that the Bosnian Serbs now enjoy portend an increase in tensions in Bosnia and put additional strains on the still insecure democracies in Serbia and Croatia, which would come under pressure to defend the interests of their ethnic compatriots across the border.

Slowing EU Expansion

Another Western policy that threatens to bring a new period of turbulence to the Balkans is the growing reluctance to expand the EU. A prominent carrot that EU leaders held out to the feuding factions in the former Yugoslavia was membership in the broader European community—if they would choose the path of peace. According to that logic, national borders—and nationalism itself—would become progressively less important in the “new Europe.” Ethnic, religious, and nationalist disputes would fade as the benefits of participation in a united Europe became apparent. Such violent episodes would become shameful historical relics.³³ Alexandros P. Mallias, Greece's ambassador to the United States, articulates that rationale, noting that the international community offered “a new vision to the countries of southeastern Europe, a vision realized through the expansion of European and Euro-Atlantic values and principles. This vision consists of the integration, without exception, of those countries in the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.”³⁴

But that argument was based on the twin assumptions (and the implicit

33. EU proponents still make that argument. See Judy Blatt, “The EU's ‘Soft Power’ at Work in the Balkans,” *Comment* (EU Institute for Security Studies), no. 19, July 2006.

34. Alexandros P. Mallias, “The Balkans: In the Era of Peace and Stability,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (2008): 1.

promise) that EU expansion would be broad and relatively rapid. Those assumptions are now increasingly dubious. There is growing opposition among the existing EU members to further enlargement in the near term. Indeed, some European leaders have argued that the latest round of expansion should be the last one for the foreseeable future.³⁵ That caution seems to reflect public opinion in the existing EU countries.³⁶ Although opposition is strongest regarding Turkey's possible membership, the reluctance is broader. There are concerns that some of the most recent members in Central and Eastern Europe were not really ready, economically or politically, for membership. That concern was especially pronounced regarding the admission of Romania and Bulgaria in January 2007. EU leaders fear that the next round of prospective candidates (especially in the former Yugoslavia) are even less qualified.

In September 2006, after the EU had agreed to admit Bulgaria and Romania, European Commission president José Manuel Barroso suggested that the latest round of enlargement might have to be the last until the EU constitution was adopted or EU institutions were updated through treaty amendment. A few weeks later, German chancellor Angela Merkel spoke of the need for a "pause" in expansion and asked EU enlargement commissioner Oli Rehn to prepare a report on the EU's ability to further absorb new members.³⁷ Berlin's growing caution on the expansion issue is especially significant since Germany is the most influential EU member.

In addition, the members of the EU have encountered great difficulties in agreeing to a new constitution for the bloc. Until that matter is resolved, and the proposed treaty still requires parliamentary ratification in numerous countries, expansion is almost a moot point.

Difficulties with regard to EU expansion are not merely an abstract con-

35. Constant Brand, "EU Chief: Bulgaria, Romania and No More," Associated Press, 25 September 2006; "German Leader Says Further EU Expansion Unlikely in Near Future," Agence France Presse, 7 October 2006; and Paul Harrington, "EU Leaders Endorse Enlargement Slow-Down," Agence France Presse, 15 December 2006.

36. Lisa Trei, "Citizens Resist Expansion of European Union, Support Later Retirement, Poll Finds," *Stanford Report*, 31 October 2007, <http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/2007/october31/euroresults-103>.

37. Kristin Archick and Vince L. Morelli, "European Union Enlargement," Congressional Research Service, *CSR Report for Congress*, RS21344, 25 October 2006, 5.

cern. If it becomes clear to the various factions in the former Yugoslavia that membership in the EU is not forthcoming anytime soon, that significantly reduces a crucial incentive to mute their disputes. Quarrels over territory and political power could again surge to the surface.

Expanding NATO

Yet even as the EU has markedly slowed the process of enlargement, NATO is expanding its membership to include some states of the former Yugoslavia. Slovenia was admitted to the alliance during the second round of expansion earlier this decade, but that move was relatively uncontroversial since Slovenia had been largely immune from the violence and disorder (except for a brief period at the beginning of Yugoslavia's disintegration) that marked the 1990s. Nor does the country now have tense and confrontational relations with its neighbors. NATO's decision at the April 2008 summit in Bucharest to invite Croatia and Albania to join the alliance is a different matter.

Croatia's relations with Serbia, although much improved from the days of open warfare in the early and mid-1990s, remain tense. It is certainly not out of the question that territorial or other disputes could arise between Zagreb and Belgrade in the future. Croatia's relations with Bosnia are also unsettled. Even the more liberal, pro-Western governments that have held power since the demise of Franjo Tudjman's regime are not pleased that largely Croatian areas remain part of the Bosnian state instead of being allowed to join Croatia—which they would most likely do if given a free choice.

Bringing Albania into NATO is even more ill advised. Albania's political stability remains highly uncertain, as the country is barely a decade removed from the political chaos and near civil war that led to an armed multilateral peacekeeping intervention, Operation Alba, led by Greece and Italy. Long-standing animosity between the two principal ethno-linguistic factions—the Gëgs, who dominate the northern part of the country, and the Tosks, who dominate the southern portion—shows no clear signs of abating. It is important to remember that those ethnic tensions contributed to the disorder in the late 1990s.

In addition to such troubling signs, the government in Tirana openly backs Kosovo's independence, a stance that creates diplomatic difficulties with both

Serbia and Greece. Sentiment for a Greater Albania is noticeable in Albania just as it is in Kosovo. Greece especially worries that Albania (or Albania in alliance with Kosovo) might press territorial claims not only in FYROM but in northern Greece.

By inviting Croatia and Albania to join NATO, the alliance—and especially the United States as the leader of the alliance—is now directly involved in such murky quarrels. In an April speech in Zagreb following the Bucharest NATO summit, President Bush reassured his Croatian audience: “Henceforth, should any danger threaten your people, America and the alliance will stand with you and no one will be able to take your freedom away.”³⁸

Why the United States and the other major NATO powers would want to undertake such burdens and risks is perplexing. They certainly get few tangible military benefits to offset those costs and risks. Both Croatia and Albania are minuscule military players. Croatia’s annual military budget is only \$875 million, and the country has an active-duty force of 17,660. Albania’s potential military contribution is more trivial, with a budget of \$208 million and a force of 11,020 troops.³⁹ Their combined military budgets are less than the United States spends in Iraq in three days. Those countries are not credible military assets for NATO; indeed, given their uncertain political stability and their assortment of tensions and disputes with neighboring states, they are liabilities.

Fortunately, the alliance did not invite FYROM to join at the Bucharest summit. Such a step would have had great potential to involve NATO in two unpleasant controversies. As noted, FYROM may be headed for another round of troubles with its Albanian minority in the northwest of the country and with that secessionist faction’s supporters in Kosovo and Albania. Skopje also has difficulties with Greece. Indeed, the primary reason that FYROM was not invited to join NATO was because Athens continued to object to that country using the name “Macedonia,” which Greeks insist applies only to a region of their nation.

38. Quoted in Matt Spetainick and Igor Ilic, “Bush Sees NATO Future for Macedonia and All Balkans,” Reuters, 5 April 2008.

39. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: 2008* (London: Routledge, 2008), 164, 171.

That is not merely a historical and linguistic point. Greeks worry that the Skopje government's insistence on calling its country Macedonia implies a territorial claim to Greek Macedonia. Maps circulating in FYROM that include major chunks of Greek territory as part of a "Greater Macedonia" do nothing to allay such fears. In early 2008, FYROM's prime minister was photographed laying a wreath at a monument that features a map of Greater Macedonia, which even included Greece's second largest city, Thessaloniki.⁴⁰

Ambassador Mallias warns that FYROM's claim to the name Macedonia "constitutes a vehicle of irredentist and hostile propaganda against Greece." He complains that "FYROM's maps and history books show parts of Macedonia as being 'occupied' by Greece." Such actions, Mallias asserts, "poison the minds and souls of young Slav-Macedonian generations with the distorted historical picture of unredeemed parts of their nation and state under Greek oppression and occupation. This makes the establishment of peaceful, good neighborly relations in the region impossible."⁴¹

Yet President Bush stated in his Zagreb speech, "America's position is clear: Macedonia should take its place in NATO as soon as possible."⁴² Bush added that he hoped that Montenegro, Bosnia, and, perhaps, Serbia would also join the alliance at some point in the future. Bush's expectation is only partly sincere. Montenegro will almost certainly be asked to become a NATO member within a few years, and Bosnia has a reasonable prospect of receiving an invitation. But given the ongoing hostility to Serbia among the political elites in the United States and the major European powers, Belgrade's membership is unlikely in the foreseeable future. And membership for Kosovo, the latest state to emerge from the wreckage of the former Yugoslavia, is also unlikely, since several key European states decline even to recognize the independence of that country. NATO's expansion into the former Yugoslavia, therefore, threatens to solidify and possibly exacerbate divisions within the region. It is not a comforting prospect to have Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro, and possibly Bosnia inside the alliance, while Kosovo, Serbia, and possibly FYROM remain on the outside—with Serbia still being treated as little more than a pariah.

40. Dora Bakoyannis, "All in a Name," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 April 2008.

41. Mallias, 3.

42. Quoted in Spetainick and Ilic.

All of these factors combine to make the end of quiescence in the Balkans a distinct possibility. The key question for American policy makers is whether they will allow the United States to be drawn into any new round of turmoil, or whether they will take the position that such matters are purely Europe's responsibility. In the 1990s, the United States seized the initiative from the EU members and led the Western response to the conflicts in the Balkans. But on that occasion, the United States did not have pressing security problems of its own. America does not have that luxury this time. In all likelihood, Washington will want to off-load responsibility for Balkan issues to its European allies.

Whether US leaders will be able to do so, even if that is their preference, is highly uncertain. NATO membership for at least three states in the former Yugoslavia complicates any American goal of disengagement from Balkan quarrels. The United States is the leader of the alliance, and the other members are likely to look to Washington for leadership in the event of a new Balkan crisis. Moreover, if the crisis has any crossborder dimensions, the affected NATO member has a right to call on its alliance colleagues for assistance, because Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty proclaims that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

If Washington is able to lower its profile in the Balkans, one hopes that the EU countries will respond with better policies than the United States has foisted on the region. But there is little reason for such hope. The bitter truth is that the principal EU powers have been just as culpable as the United States in adopting measures that exacerbated Balkan problems in the 1990s, and now, after a few years of relative quiescence, threaten to revive the turbulence. Even worse, the EU seems to lack either the requisite unity or wisdom to deal with the coming troubles.