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WASHINGTON'S KOSOVO POLICY

Consequences and Contradictions

by Gary T. Dempsey

Executive Summary

Although U.S. ambassador Christopher Hill is trying to broker an interim political agreement between Belgrade and moderate ethnic Albanians in the embattled Serbian province of Kosovo, there is no assurance that the militant Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) will end its violent struggle for independence if an agreement is reached. Meanwhile, the UN has issued Security Council Resolution 1199 demanding a cease-fire in Kosovo, and the Clinton administration has poised itself militarily and rhetorically for intervention in the conflict. Yet the White House still has not explained to the American public how U.S. national security is threatened in Kosovo, what the potential costs of intervention are in American lives and defense spending, and how another military commitment in the Balkans will affect the nation's readiness to respond to crises elsewhere in the world.

Above all, the Clinton administration's present course in Kosovo is both contradictory and potentially counterproductive--a dangerous mix that threatens to mire the United States in another internecine conflict overseas. Specifically, the interventionist measures that Washington is now considering could further encourage the KLA, widen the conflict, set back the prospect of democratic reform in Yugoslavia, and perpetuate European security dependence on the United States.

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Introduction

The Clinton administration's increasing involvement in the conflict in Serbia's Kosovo province--from threatening new economic sanctions and NATO intervention against Yugoslavia, to increasing military and intelligence ties with Albania--could backfire. Specifically, the interventionist path the administration is now on could encourage the KLA, widen the conflict, further undermine the prospect of democratic reform in Yugoslavia, perpetuate European security dependence on the United States, and mire Americans in another internecine conflict in the Balkans. To fully appreciate those dangerous possibilities, however, Kosovo's long and tumultuous history must first be understood.

Kosovo's Long and Tumultuous History

Bordering Albania and Macedonia, Kosovo is the southernmost province of present-day Serbia, which, together with Montenegro, makes up what remains of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Kosovo was originally populated by Illyrians, an ancient people who inhabited the western part of the Balkans from about 2000 B.C. The earliest known Illyrian king was Hyllus, who died in 1225 B.C., and the last was Gentius, who was defeated by the Romans in 165 B.C.[1] Although many scholars dispute it, many modern Albanians contend that they are the direct descendents of the ancient Illyrians and thus the original inhabitants of Kosovo.

The first Slavs appeared around Kosovo in the late 4th century A.D. as marauders who raided Roman settlements. By the end of the 8th century, the Slavs had colonized most of the area of modern Yugoslavia, including Kosovo.

Serbs are not identified until the 10th century writings of Byzantine emperor Constantine VII. There, they are described as Slavs residing in the area of present-day Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bosnia, and who converted to Eastern Christianity in the 9th century. In the 12th century, Serbs successfully fought against the Byzantine Empire to establish an independent Serbian kingdom. Kosovo was crucial to that kingdom and to the Serbian Orthodox church for the next two centuries. In fact, virtually all of the oldest monuments in Kosovo are Serbian Orthodox and most of place names have a Serbian language root. But in 1389, the Serb dynasty fell to the Ottoman Empire at the battle of Kosovo Polje. Although they

fought alongside Serbs during the battle, most ethnic Albanians in the area converted to Islam in the 15th and 16th centuries and participated in the Ottoman administration of Kosovo.

As the Ottoman Empire declined in the 18th and 19th centuries, Kosovo became the focus of competing Serbian and Albanian independence movements. In 1878, the League of Prizren, which sought to create an independent Albanian state, was founded in Kosovo. But when the Ottoman Empire finally buckled under the weight of the First Balkan War in 1912, Kosovo became part of Serbia once again. By that time, Serbs comprised only about 20 to 25 percent of Kosovo's population.[2]

Kosovo after World War I

At the end of World War I, Serbia joined with Croatia and Slovenia to form the new state of Yugoslavia, with Kosovo remaining a constituent part of Serbia. During the 1920s, Serbian authorities attempted to repopulate Kosovo with Serbs. By 1928, the Serb population was increased to about 38 percent, mainly because of state-organized immigration from Serbia.[3] But during World War II, after Yugoslavia was defeated by the Axis Powers in April 1941, the population trend lines in Kosovo were reversed. Italy ceded the province to neighboring Albania, which had been under Axis occupation since 1939, and Kosovo was ruled as part of Italian-occupied Albania for the remainder of the war. Between 1941 and 1945, more than 70,000 Serbs fled Kosovo while 75,000 Albanians migrated there.[4]

After World War II, Kosovo was returned to Serbia. Wanting to forge a Balkan communist federation with Albania and Bulgaria, the new Yugoslav government under Josip Broz Tito hoped that the prospect of reacquiring Kosovo would draw Albania into the pact. Tito, therefore, wanted Kosovo to remain predominantly Albanian. On March 6, 1945, he issued a decree forbidding Serbs displaced by the war from returning to their homes in Kosovo.[5] The following year, Kosovo was made an "autonomous region" within Serbia. Tito’s plan to create a Balkan communist federation, however, collapsed in 1948 when Yugoslavia broke with the Soviet-led Cominform.

Nevertheless, the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo continued to grow and to push for greater autonomy. In 1963, Kosovo was made an "autonomous province," and under Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution, it was granted separate federal representation and was only formally linked with

Serbia. During that period of enhanced autonomy, ethnic Albanians exercised almost complete control over Kosovo's provincial administration, but many Serbs complained of pervasive discrimination in employment and housing, and of the authorities' unwillingness to protect them from anti-Serb violence.

Kosovo after Tito

By 1981, official census data pegged Kosovo's ethnic Albanian population at 77.5 percent.[6] The same year, in the wake of Tito's death, riots broke out in Kosovo as ethnic Albanians demanded full republic status within the Yugoslav federation. In the course of the violence, Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo were beaten, their homes and businesses burned, and their shops looted.[7] Also, a mysterious fire was set at one of Serbia's most cherished religious shrines, the Pec Patriarchate in Kosovo, a complex of medieval churches and the historical seat of the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church.[8] The civil unrest was eventually quashed by the communist authorities, but thousands of Serbs fled Kosovo following the violence.

Throughout the rest of the 1980s the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and Serbian civic groups documented numerous cases of harassment, intimidation, vandalism, destruction of Serbian monuments and churches, and attacks on Serbian priests, nuns, and civilians by ethnic Albanians. As historian Noel Malcolm reports,

> In the mid-1980s the Serbian Academy of Sciences commissioned a survey of 500 households of Serbs who had migrated to inner Serbia from Kosovo. Many of the people interviewed thought that there was a political dimension to the deterioration of conditions for the Slavs in Kosovo. . . . When giving the reasons for their migration, 41 percent mentioned "indirect pressure" from the Albanians, and 21 percent referred to direct pressure: that last category was composed of verbal abuse (8.5 percent), material damage (7.5 percent) and personal injury (5 percent).[9]

While the number of cases of abuse against Serbs varies by source, historian Miranda Vickers has concluded that "many Serbs and Montenegrins who decided to leave Kosovo [in the 1980s] had experienced intimidation, pressure, violence, and other severe abuses of their human rights because of their ethnicity."[10] Similarly, historian Richard West notes that while ethnic Albanians from Kosovo

were "always ready to tell sympathetic journalists an account of their suffering under the Serbian regime . . . foreign observers failed to notice that, although the Serbs were supposed to be the oppressors, they themselves were departing from Kosovo, complaining about the destruction of property, the desecration of graves, and many assaults and rapes."[11]

Enter Slobodan Milosevic

In April 1987, over 60,000 Serbs from Kosovo signed a petition calling on the government in Belgrade to stop the ethnic violence and intimidation aimed at them.[12] In an opportunistic attempt to raise his political profile, then Serbian Communist Party president Slobodan Milosevic traveled to Kosovo and played the nationalist card, proclaiming to Serbs everywhere, "No one should dare beat you again."[13] By October 1987, federal riot police and army troops were deployed in Kosovo following demonstrations by thousands of Serbs protesting an alleged comment by a Kosovar Albanian leader that "the incidents of [ethnic] Albanians raping Serbian women could be reduced if more Serbian women worked as prostitutes."[14] In 1989, Belgrade downgraded Kosovo's autonomy to its pre-1974 level, and Milosevic was elected president of Serbia, with 65 percent of the vote. As Aleksa Djilas later noted in Foreign Affairs, Milosevic "succeeded because he understood the power of fear and knew how to use it for his own purposes."[15]

Following the reduction of Kosovo's autonomy, Belgrade imposed "emergency measures" in Kosovo, summarily dismissing thousands of ethnic Albanians from state-sector jobs. No part of Kosovo's society was left untouched. Even the provincial theater in Pristina was placed under "emergency management" and the theater manager removed by police officers and replaced by a Serb. The greatest changes, however, occurred in education: The teaching of Albanian history, literature, and language was reduced to a minimum. Also, ethnic Albanian students were forbidden from enrolling in secondary school unless they could pass Serbian literature and language examinations, which few could do.[16]

In 1991, ethnic Albanians responded to their diminished autonomy by forming a shadow government, complete with a president, a parliament, a tax system, and schools. Shadow president Ibrahim Rugova has since worked for Kosovo's independence through peaceful means, but a more militant group has emerged.

Enter the Kosovo Liberation Army

By the mid-1990s, the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo had grown to between 85 and 90 percent, and the human rights conditions in the province continued to deteriorate.[17] As Human Rights Watch, a New York-based rights organization, reported,

> Since the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy, the human rights abuses against ethnic Albanians by the Serbian and Yugoslav governments have been constant. The names of the victims change, but the frequency and the manner of beatings, harassment, and political trials remain the same. It is a status quo of repression. . . . The brutality of the police continues against the population. Random harassment and beatings are a daily reality for ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, especially those in villages and smaller towns.[18]

In 1996, a shadowy separatist organization called the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) surfaced for the first time, claiming responsibility for a series of bombings in southern Yugoslavia. By its own admission, the KLA killed more than 50 government officials and ethnic Albanian "collaborators" over the next two years. The KLA's intention: To trigger the secession of Kosovo from the Yugoslav state. Pursuing a textbook strategy, the KLA carried out attacks on police and civilians aimed at provoking a government crackdown that would radicalize the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo. In February 1998, the KLA intensified its attacks against Yugoslav authorities and Serb civilians. Armed KLA guerrillas attacked Serb houses in the villages of Klina, Decani, and Djakovica, and a Serb refugee camp in Babaloc. KLA guerrillas also ambushed and killed two Serb policemen patrolling on the road between Glogovac and Srbica.

A government crackdown on the KLA immediately followed, and the world soon learned that nearly 80 Kosovar Albanians, including many women and children, were killed by Serbian internal security forces in Kosovo’s central Drenica region. The Yugoslav Interior Ministry claimed that the action was directed against Adem Jashari, whose clan allegedly constituted the core of the KLA organization. On a closely supervised trip to the village of Prekaz, foreign reporters were told that government security forces had killed Jashari and destroyed the power base of the KLA organization. "We have struck at their heart and we have dealt terrorists a lethal blow," a police spokesman said.[19] The spokesman was wrong. Government

versus guerrilla clashes continue in Kosovo, leaving more than 900 dead since February. "Only force keeps Kosovo inside Yugoslavia now," concludes Mark Almond, Oxford professor of modern history.[20]

Tying the Balkan Knot

Still, there are more than 180,000 Serbs living in Kosovo today, and the province is widely considered by Serbs as the cradle of Serbian culture and history.[21] In fact, over 75 percent of all Serbian cultural and national monuments are located in Kosovo, including the historic 14th century monastery of Samodrezi where the Serbian King blessed his army just before their defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1389. Accordingly, Yugoslav Army Gen. Dusan Samardzic recently told a group of new officers,

> This is a turning point for Yugoslavia, when we need to show the world our military ability and might. Kosovo-Metohija's integrity has been threatened by [ethnic] Albanian secessionists, with assistance from abroad. Our ancestry and posterity would never forgive us if we surrendered the cradle of Serb culture to someone else.[22]

At the same time, representatives of the KLA have said that they will not stop fighting the Serbian government until they achieve the "total liberation" of Kosovo.[23] Further, in a March 1998 statement, the KLA pledged revenge on Serbs, declaring, "We will wreak multiple vengeance for innocent deaths in the region of Drenica. We swear it on their blood."[24]

The conflict is Kosovo, therefore, is not simply a matter of Kosovar Albanians suffering under a brutal and repressive regime--which they are--but a complex clash of mutually exclusive political claims which are aggravated by conflicting historical grievances--real and imagined. As former U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmerman correctly observes,

> The competing claims of Serbs and Albanians have been hopelessly tangled in the webs of history and myth. In its essence, however, the main issue is as simple as it is intractable. The Serbian claim . . . is based primarily on the historical-cultural principle--the Jerusalem argument. The Albanian claim to independence is

> based largely on the demographic principle--the majority argument. Since these claims are mutually incompatible, there is little reason to believe that Kosovo will be easy to solve.[25]

Similarly, Amos Perlmutter, professor of political science at American University, notes, "Kosovo is the most intractable postwar Balkan conflict to date. . . . This is because the Serbs and their [ethnic] Albanian rivals are irreconcilable, poised to inflict heavy damage on one another to fulfill their conflicting aspirations."[26]

Ironically, over the course of the last 50 years, Kosovo has gone from being Tito's lure to bring Albania into a federation with Yugoslavia to a province that wants to secede. It is tempting to compare the situation in Kosovo today with that in Bosnia in 1991, but there are differences. The key distinction is that Kosovo, unlike Bosnia, was never a constituent republic of Yugoslavia. Indeed, since the 1913 London Treaty, which ended the First Balkan War, Kosovo has been recognized by the international community as part of Serbia.

Washington's Reaction

Washington's reaction to Belgrade's February-March crackdown was immediate. "We are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with doing in Bosnia," warned U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright on March 7.[27] Two days later, she announced that the United States reserved the right to take unilateral action against the Serbian government, saying, "We know what we need to know to believe we are seeing ethnic cleansing all over again."[28]

After holding emergency meetings in London and Bonn, the Balkan Contact Group--representing the United States, Russia, Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy--agreed on an arms embargo against Serbia, a freeze on export credits to Belgrade, and a denial of visas to officials involved in the crackdown in Kosovo. Not satisfied with the Contact Group's sanctions package, the United States left the door open to military intervention. In fact, when asked about that possibility, Robert Gelbard, President Clinton's special envoy to the Balkans, told a congressional hearing, we will first use "every possible economic sanction or other kind of tool we have diplomatically, but we aren't ruling anything out."[29]

At the same time, the political arm of NATO, the North Atlantic Council, raised the prospect of NATO intervention noting, "NATO and the international community have a legitimate interest in developments on Kosovo . . . because of their impact on the stability of the whole region."[30] NATO representatives then held an emergency meeting with the government of Albania and agreed to increase military and civilian assistance, including new communications equipment and vehicles to patrol the border.[31] But the violence in Kosovo continued. Soon afterward, NATO agreed to establish a small military mission in the Albanian capital of Tirana to oversee efforts aimed at helping the Albanians bolster their armed forces.[32] By mid-June NATO warplanes were conducting "show-of-force" air exercises over Albania and Macedonia, and in August and September, NATO participated in ground war games with Albania's army.

Today, U.S. ambassador Christopher Hill is trying to broker an interim political agreement between Belgrade and moderate ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Meanwhile, the UN has issued Security Council Resolution 1199 demanding a cease-fire to end the conflict, which has produced 200,000-300,000 refugees since February. That notwithstanding, some commentators suggest that Washington is trying to "avoid military intervention [in Kosovo]. . . at all costs."[33] But the Clinton administration has diligently put everything in place for intervention. In fact, by mid-July U.S.-NATO military planners had completed contingency plans for intervention, including air strikes and the deployment of ground troops. All that was missing was a sufficiently brutal or tragic event to trigger the process. As a senior Defense Department official told reporters on July 15, "If some levels of atrocities were reached that would be intolerable, that would probably be a trigger."[34] Sure enough, in late September NATO seized upon reports of a massacre of 10 women and children in the village of Gornje Obrinje to commence its latest--and most serious--threats against Belgrade.

NATO Intervention

The United States currently has 6,900 combat troops in Bosnia and 350 in Macedonia. As if that were not enough involvement in the volatile Balkans to tempt fate, the recent violence in Kosovo has prompted calls for more American intervention in the region--60,000 NATO troops would be necessary for a full-scale peacekeeping operation, according to one Pentagon estimate.[35] The idea of further

U.S. troop involvement in the Balkans, however, is misguided.

First, the events in Kosovo pose no threat to U.S. national security--neither the territorial integrity, nor the national sovereignty, nor the general welfare of the United States is in jeopardy. Further, a peacekeeping or other noncombat policing mission in Kosovo might actually harm U.S. national security by keeping American soldiers away from military training, thereby reducing their combat readiness. In fact, reports the Washington Post,

> Over the past decade, the [U.S.] Army has been used in 29 substantial overseas deployments, compared with 10 in the four previous decades. The strain of the pace of such operations on a much reduced force has shown up in negative trend lines across all military services across various readiness categories.[36]

A Kosovo peacekeeping mission will simply add to the problem by further compromising U.S. military preparedness.

Second, military intervention in Kosovo will encounter fervent and incompatible ethnic interests that are unlikely to be dislodged by an American presence. On one side of the dispute are ethnic Albanians, most of whom boycott Serbian state institutions, resist speaking the Serbian language, and view Serbian state security forces as an occupation army. In addition, most ethnic Albanians in Kosovo are Muslim.

On the other side of the dispute are Serbs who consider Kosovo the cradle of their culture and Christian orthodox religion, and are about as willing to give up Kosovo to Albanians as Israelis are to give up Jerusalem to Palestinians. In fact, 42 percent of Serbs polled recently said they believed that "the solution to the Kosovo problem was the removal, by force or peaceful means, of its Albanian majority."[37] And on April 23, 97 percent of Serbs participating in a national referendum reportedly said they oppose foreign mediation of talks with Kosovar Albanians.[38] Putting American ground troops in the middle of that kind of conflict is bound to produce casualties. Moreover, because intervention would entail violating the borders of Yugoslavia, it could further entrench Yugoslav strongman Slobodan Milosevic by uniting Serbs behind him.

Third, NATO intervention in Kosovo could unfold as it has in Bosnia; that is, with no end in sight. It should

be recalled that in his November 1995 address making the case for sending U.S. troops to Bosnia, President Clinton assured the American public that the operation he was proposing had a "clear, limited and achievable" mission and that the total deployment "should and will take about one year."[39] Since then, the president has twice changed his mind about U.S. troop withdrawal, and Washington now has an open-ended troop commitment to Bosnia.

It should also be recalled that the Clinton administration claimed that the Bosnia intervention would be a strictly military operation. As Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott explained in a November 1995 speech, "There will be no 'mission creep'--from purely military tasks into 'nation-building.'"[40] But it is now known that President Clinton allowed U.S. forces to be used to help elect Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, and that the U.S.-backed representative in charge of implementing the Dayton Peace Accords designed Bosnia's first national currency, imposed a national flag, and is working on a national anthem--examples of nation-building at its most basic.[41]

Fourth, NATO intervention of any kind in Kosovo could cause the already deeply flawed Dayton Peace Accords in Bosnia to completely unravel. Indeed, if it appears that Washington is facilitating Kosovo's secession, Bosnian Serbs could interpret that as a sign of a broader anti-Serb Western agenda. Not only would that expose NATO troops stationed in Bosnia to possible acts of retribution like those that occurred against the American Marines in Beirut in the 1980s, it would also threaten to undermine the fragile U.S.-brokered peace there as well.

On the other hand, if Washington appears to be forestalling Kosovo's independence by enforcing some sort of autonomy or republic status within Yugoslavia, NATO troops could find themselves trying to contain a still independence-minded KLA. That would mean that Americans would be fighting Milosevic's battle for him. And according to Alexander Vasovic, a military expert with independent Radio B92 in Belgrade, a war in Kosovo will "be like Algeria or Vietnam. . . . [Soldiers will] be isolated in military compounds. The Kosovo Liberation Army will control the rest."[42]

Encouraging the KLA

Another significant problem with NATO intervention of any kind in Kosovo is that it might actually encourage the KLA in its militant drive to break away from Yugoslavia.

Many Kosovar Albanians already believe that Washington is on their side. "One of our main struggles is to convince them that we really don't support independence," explains Richard Huckaby, director of an office of the U.S. Information Agency in Kosovo. But "they just don't get it. . . . I have tried really hard to lower their expectations."[43]

Serbs, too, believe that Washington backs the ethnic Albanians. As the Washington Post reported in March,

> The Serbs also have directed their ire at Americans, whom they regard as in league with the Albanians. At a café owned by ethnic Albanians in the town of Pec, west of Pristina, a hand grenade splattered the walls with shrapnel recently. When [Serb] police officers came to investigate, they suggested with a smirk that the bill for the damage be sent to [U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K.] Albright.[44]

Moreover, in June the administration added to the perception that it supports ethnic Albanian aspirations for independence when it demanded that Belgrade withdraw its state security forces from Kosovo before resuming political negotiations. White House spokesman Mike McCurry, for example, stated that Yugoslavia "must immediately withdraw security units involved in civilian repression, without linkage to . . . the 'stopping of [KLA] terrorist activities.'"[45] Similarly, Defense Department spokesman Kenneth Bacon said, "We don't think that there should be any linkage between an immediate withdrawal of forces by the Yugoslavs, on the one hand, and stopping terrorist activities, on the other. There ought to be complete withdrawal of military forces so that negotiations can begin."[46] The European Union, former U.S. senator Bob Dole, and others continue to voice the same opinion.[47]

Yet in demanding that Belgrade withdraw its state security forces from Kosovo before resuming negotiations, the administration was insisting on something Yugoslavia could not possibly agree to do; to effectively hand over one of its territories to an insurgency movement. In contrast, the administration was not simultaneously demanding that the KLA stop their attacks or pressuring Albania to end its complicity in providing weapons and sanctuary to Kosovo's guerrilla forces. That apparent one-sidedness led many ethnic Albanians to further conclude that the Clinton administration--despite its official statements to the contrary--backed their goal of independence.

What's more, U.S. threats of military intervention helped harden the Kosovar Albanian demand for independence from Yugoslavia. That's because military threats conveyed a contradictory message; that although U.S. policy was officially opposed to independence for Kosovo, Washington would not allow Belgrade to forcibly resist it. The U.S. threats also emboldened the KLA rebels. As the New York Times reported,

> Recently, under pressure from Western governments, the Yugoslav forces have reduced larger-scale attacks on rebel areas. . . . Now, however, some foreign diplomats say Serbian reluctance to order soldiers to retake territory is leading the rebels to assume they have little to fear from government forces. "Instead of calming things down and letting us figure out how to get everyone to the negotiation table, what we've done is give the Albanian fighters a feeling of euphoria," said a Western diplomat. . . . "This makes them bolder, and it also makes other Albanians want to join them."[48]

After that, the Clinton administration softened its threats on the Yugoslav government and made an attempt to reverse the perception that it favors the ethnic Albanian side of the Kosovo dispute. In July, the United States and five European nations made their first public criticism of the KLA, issuing a statement admonishing the rebels and stressing that "violence is inadmissible and will not solve the problem of Kosovo."[49] But the Clinton administration's actions told ethnic Albanians a different story: The administration does consider violence "admissible." In fact, U.S. special envoy Richard Holbrooke traveled to Kosovo, met with the KLA, and legitimized its violence by offering its representatives a spot on the ethnic Albanian negotiating team. In stark contrast, Ambassador Holbrooke snubbed an invitation to meet with Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemije, who leads a two year old peace movement with a plan that would simultaneously ease tensions in Kosovo and reduce the power of Slobodan Milosevic.

Today, backed by UN Security Council Resolution 1199, the Clinton administration is once again demanding that Belgrade withdraw its internal security forces from Kosovo, or face a NATO response. But if NATO intervenes, it could encourage the Kosovo conflict still further. Indeed, if intervention consists of a cruise missile attack, air strikes, or the imposition of a no-fly zone over Kosovo, the guerrilla forces of the KLA will be encouraged to con-

tinue fighting. That's because only one side of the conflict--the Yugoslav government--will feel the pressure of those measures; there are no KLA jets for NATO to shoot down, no KLA installations to bomb. As a result, attacking Serbia or imposing a no-fly zone will not deter the KLA from waging war for an independent Kosovo. In fact, the opposite could happen. The rebels will have everything to gain by exploiting the strategic opportunity that the Western suppression of Serb force creates for them. NATO, in effect, will be the KLA's air force. A similar scenario unfolded in Bosnia in 1995 when U.S. warplanes dumped more than 1,000 bombs on Serb targets, giving Muslim and Croat forces an opportunity to launch an advance that triggered a wave of 150,000 Serb refugees.[50]

On the other hand, if Washington continues to make bellicose threats and then does not follow through, Kosovar Albanians could feel betrayed by the Clinton administration, resent the United States, and probably suffer more casualties than if Washington had not meddled in the first place. As Brookings Institution fellow Alan Kuperman explains,

> This dynamic has repeated itself so frequently that it's become familiar. First, an oppressive government discriminates against a subordinate group within its borders. . . . The group then gets the attention of Western human-rights advocates and the media, who pressure the United States and/or other Western nations to issue warnings to the oppressive government, with hints of further action if it does not relent. The [oppressed] group infers optimistically from this rhetoric that the West will come to its aid if it provokes a violent government crackdown, and therefore escalates its insurgency.[51]

That scenario not only encourages further government repression, but when the West does not intervene, many people in the oppressed group die. Thus, concludes Kuperman, "American officials should do everything they can to avoid transmitting a false message to oppressed groups that [the United States] will intervene on their behalf."[52]

Spreading Kosovo's Conflict

The Clinton administration says it fears that the conflict in Kosovo could spread if NATO does not intervene. As Secretary of Defense William Cohen notes, "There is a genuine concern throughout the region that if this

goes unchecked, it could have much wider implications than just Kosovo."[53] In fact, the administration worries that if Albania enters the fray, Turkey, a state with a strong Muslim tradition, could enter on the side of the Albanians, and Greece, an Orthodox Christian state and cultural ally of Serbia, could support the Serb side. NATO intervention, the administration reasons, is therefore necessary to prevent two NATO members--Greece and Turkey--from potentially fighting one another. In stark contrast, Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright argued during the NATO enlargement debates earlier this year that expanding NATO would make Europe safer by increasing the number of countries that simply do not fight with each other.[54] The Clinton administration, in short, wants to have it both ways, arguing at one point that NATO should be expanded because alliance members do not fight with one another, and arguing later that the United States should intervene in Kosovo to keep alliance members from doing just that.

Yet military intervention could itself cause Kosovo's conflict to spread, perhaps leading to the intra-NATO conflict Washington seeks to avoid. For example, if intervention consists of deploying the 20,000 troops NATO military planners say are necessary to prevent the flow of arms from crossing the Albania-Kosovo border, that will not stop the fighting in Kosovo.[55] It will simply prevent many Kosovar Albanians from acquiring weapons. The resulting bloodshed of a continuing Serbian crackdown could create greater nationalist political pressures in neighboring Albania, not less, and increase the likelihood that Albania will become directly involved in the conflict.

The prospect of Albania's further involvement in Kosovo should not be underestimated. Former Albanian president Sali Berisha refers to the fighting in Kosovo as a "holy war" and defines the "Albanian nation" as including not only Albania but also Kosovo and western Macedonia, both of which have large ethnic Albanian populations.[56] He also called Albania's last prime minister, Fatos Nano, an "enemy of the Albanian nation" for failing to support Kosovo's secessionist forces and has given his family farm in northern Albania to the KLA to use as a military training ground.[57] Berisha's rhetoric and decision to deliver his birthplace to the rebels is part of his manipulation of the Kosovo crisis to mount a political comeback after his ouster in 1997. Last month, Berisha's supporters undertook an armed uprising in Albania's capital, seized government buildings, and set fire to Prime Minister Nano's office.[58] Nano resigned his office two weeks later.

Despite that political backdrop, NATO has been helping to arm and equip Albania's military, even selecting it as the first beneficiary of NATO's Partnership for Peace private contracting efforts.[59] Further, in August and September of this year, the alliance conducted war games with Albania's army, thereby improving its war-fighting skills and raising its confidence.[60] The CIA, meanwhile, has intensified ties with Albania's SHIK secret service agency, helping it restructure and modernize its intelligence-gathering capabilities.[61] In carrying out such activities, Washington may be unwittingly helping to build up the very forces that will initiate the spread of the Kosovo conflict should Berisha return to power.

The most dangerous scenario for spreading Kosovo's conflict is that NATO intervention inadvertently assists the KLA in its pursuit of forging a Greater Albania. The KLA has made it clear that its goal is not simply to liberate Kosovo from Yugoslavia, but to unite the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Albania.[62] It is for that reason that Macedonia's foreign minister, Blagoj Handziski, and Greece's foreign minister, Theodoros Pangalos, have put aside the squabbles between their countries and issued a joint statement opposing air strikes against Serbia because they could bolster the KLA's campaign. "Once the bitterest of neighbors," explains the Associated Press, "Greece and Macedonia have united in the fear that a successful campaign by the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army could spell disaster for the Balkans."[63]

Economic Sanctions

But it's not only military intervention that could have unintended consequences for Kosovo. Economic sanctions could prove counterproductive as well. During the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia, for example, the West imposed comprehensive economic sanctions on Serbia. Those measures caused young people to abandon the country and impoverished the general population, while Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic accumulated riches through smuggled imports.

What's more, Milosevic's grip on power actually tightened when sanctions were last imposed. He controlled several newspapers and television stations, and the sanctions enabled him to blame external forces for his failed economic policies. Leading Cuban dissidents have long pointed to similar tactics used by Castro's regime to explain away Cuba's economic woes.[64]

Economic sanctions also undermined the ability of the democratic opposition inside Serbia to organize and mount political campaigns against Milosevic and his party. With the middle class and the private business sector eviscerated by sanctions, charitable contributions to the opposition all but dried up. Moreover, the international embargo on gasoline made it difficult for local opposition leaders to travel around the country and mobilize support. More significant, sanctions made it harder for the opposition to reach voters. As Boran Karadzole, a former high-ranking Yugoslav trade official, noted,

> The years of isolation during the war brought about a general drop in the level of political enlightenment, and especially our awareness of what's going on in the world. . . . It's made people all the more susceptible to cliches.[65]

In the end, imposing new economic sanctions on Serbia will again prove counterproductive, entrenching Milosevic, further impoverishing Serbia's ordinary citizens, and undermining the democratic opposition. Ultimately, economic sanctions will encourage Serbia's young people to emigrate, thus further draining the small nation of those most receptive to democratic change--its youth.[66] As a result, new sanctions will prove inimical to the development of a democratic Yugoslavia and the emergence of a peaceful resolution to the Kosovo crisis.

Washington's Policy Contradictions

Three months before Belgrade's initial crackdown in Kosovo, France and Germany called on President Milosevic to find a negotiated settlement to the Kosovo problem and to grant the province special status. In a letter to Milosevic, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine and German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel urged negotiation among Kosovo’s Albanian community and federal and Serbian representatives, with mediation by a third party acceptable to all three sides. "A lasting solution on the European level must include special status for Kosovo," they explained.[67] In return, Vedrine and Kinkel offered to reestablish normal diplomatic relations between the European Union and Yugoslavia, support Yugoslavia’s candidacy for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, renew favorable trade relations between the European Union and Yugoslavia, and eventually integrate Yugoslavia into the European Union.

Not surprisingly, Yugoslav Foreign Minister Milan Milutinovic rejected the Franco-German deal, saying, "Kosovo is an internal matter of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It concerns only us."[68] A week later, Yugoslav Deputy Foreign Minister Zivadin Jovanovic added, "No plans or initiatives from outside which regard any form of our internal affairs are acceptable to us."[69]

Milutinovic and Jovanovic may not be the most popular diplomats in the world today, but they do have a legitimate legal point under international law: States are sovereign entities that have exclusive jurisdiction over matters within their borders. There is a move afoot to circumvent that principle by arguing that "human rights is not an internal issue," as the Council of Europe claimed on April 22.[70] But that argument should set off alarms in Washington which, more often than not, bears the largest military and financial burden for policing the world's most dangerous neighborhoods. Undeterred by that implication, Washington continues to threaten Belgrade with NATO intervention, demanding that it withdraw its internal security forces from Kosovo and commence talks for reorganizing its internal political structures.

Yet Washington's posture regarding Kosovo looks especially selective given its handling of other foreign policy matters. For instance, although ethnic Albanians make up one-fifth of the population of Serbia, they are one-third of the population in neighboring Macedonia. Oddly enough, Washington supports Macedonia’s policy of centralized government administration and does not oppose President Kiro Gligerov’s unwillingness to grant autonomous status to Macedonia’s ethnic Albanian population, which is proportionally larger than Serbia's. In sharp contrast, Washington is demanding that Belgrade enter into foreign-mediated discussions with ethnic Albanians to discuss some unspecified form of autonomy.

In another example, Turkey has repeatedly cracked down on Kurd secessionists in its southeastern region, bombing their forces and razing their villages. In fact, just four days after Belgrade's February-March crackdown in Kosovo, Turkish security forces--backed by combat helicopters--killed 26 Kurdish Workers’ Party separatists in the southeast province of Bingol.[71] Washington’s response to that crackdown was far different from its reaction to the initial Kosovo crackdown. As Simon Jenkins of the Times of London has observed, "This is boutique foreign policy at its worst."[72]

Or consider the example of India and Pakistan, which recently traded heavy mortar and artillery fire along the Kashmir border after their leaders held inconclusive talks on the secessionist enclave. The Indian part of Kashmir is the country's only state with an Islamic majority, and militants there want to break away or unite with Muslim Pakistan. Ninety-two people have been killed so far this year, and nearly 20,000 people living close to the border have shifted to safer towns.[73] There have been calls to strengthen the UN observers' group on both sides of the Kashmir border, to remove Indian army pickets, and to reduce the number of Indian troops in the Indian part of Kashmir. But Foreign Secretary K. Raghunath of India dismissed such proposals as "interference in our internal affairs."[74] Despite the obvious parallel to Belgrade's position on Kosovo, the Clinton administration has accepted India's claim that Kashmir is an internal matter.

Then there is the issue of the KLA reportedly receiving assistance (as did the Muslim-dominated regime in Bosnia) from Iran. Questions are now being raised as to the activities of radical Islamic groups operating inside Albania, particularly in the region around the town of Tropoje, a known KLA staging area.[75] In addition, there are media reports that the recent U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania may be connected to the U.S.-demanded deportation of several members of an Islamic terrorist cell in Albania who were tied to Saudi expatriate Osama bin Laden, and who intended to fight alongside the KLA.[76] That possible connection raises another contradiction in the Clinton administration's Kosovo policy. As Col. Harry G. Summers (Ret.) points out,

> One of the most disturbing aspects of the present [terrorism] crisis is that it may have been triggered by our own inept foreign policy in Bosnia and Kosovo. There, beyond all common sense, we find ourselves championing Muslim factions who draw support from the very Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups who are our mortal enemies elsewhere.[77]

Enlarging NATO's Purview--Again

NATO intervention in Kosovo would also have troubling military implications for the United States; it would complete the process of transforming NATO from a defensive alliance into an on-call police service.

The first step of that transformation was Bosnia, which set a precedent for NATO operations outside the geographic territory of its member states. Before that, NATO's purpose was to defend the borders of alliance members against external threats, particularly the Soviet Union. By the end of the Cold War, however, NATO was an alliance in search of a purpose, and peacekeeping presented it with an opportunity to justify its continued existence. In the case of Bosnia, though, the national government in Sarajevo approved of NATO intervention. In the case of Kosovo, the national government of Yugoslavia adamantly opposes intervention. If NATO goes ahead anyway, it will set an entirely new precedent: NATO can conduct "out-of-area" operations <u>even if the government of the country in question objects to it</u>.

That dangerous enlargement of NATO's purview exposes the United States to possible involvement in conflicts all around the world. Indeed, if NATO can intervene in Kosovo, it can theoretically intervene anywhere. That is an especially ominous prospect, given Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright's statement earlier this year that NATO should extend its geographic reach beyond the European continent and evolve into "a force for peace from the Middle East to Central Africa."[78] Kosovo is just one of many places in the world where a minority group within an established state has engaged in a violent effort to break away: Armenians in Azerbaijan, Christians in Sudan, Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Kashmiri Muslims in India, Karens in Burma, Tibetans and Uighurs in China, Chechens in Russia, Abkhazis in Georgia, and so on.

Europe's Role

If America's European allies ignore all the aforementioned dangers and nevertheless decide that intervening in Kosovo is in <u>their</u> interests, any military or humanitarian mission that follows should be carried out as a Western European Union (WEU) operation that does not require a U.S. troop commitment. That's because it is Europe, not the United States, that is most affected by events in the Balkans.

In carrying out a European-led mission, the WEU would take a long overdue step in building its own security and defense identity, one that does not depend psychologically and militarily on the transatlantic participation of the United States. Not only would that make those nations closest to Kosovo responsible for maintaining regional stability, but it would also strengthen the credibility of

WEU security institutions and improve the quality, consistency, impact, and profile of their operations. To a great extent, it was precisely the lack of such a robust, European-level security architecture in 1992-1995 that inhibited the Continent's ability to handle the crisis in its own backyard in Bosnia.

Over the past few years, NATO has taken the initial steps to enable the WEU to undertake such a project. Indeed, by beginning to develop procedures for releasing certain NATO assets to the WEU, designating NATO's deputy supreme allied commander as Europe's prospective strategic commander, and identifying NATO officers who could be loaned to European operations, NATO has recognized that circumstances exist in which Europe might act militarily without employing the full apparatus of the transatlantic alliance, i.e., the United States. Kosovo presents Europe with an opportunity to commence building that security architecture. As former U.S. ambassador to NATO Robert E. Hunter explains, "The Balkans is the place to test the possibilities that now exist for a true European security and defense identity."[79] More American military involvement in the Balkans will set back that goal and perpetuate Europe's security dependence on the United States.

Conclusion

Given the contradictions and counterproductive potential of Washington's current Kosovo policy, there is a compelling case to stay out of the dispute altogether. Specifically, the interventionist path the Clinton administration is now on could further encourage the KLA, widen the conflict, set back the prospect of democratic reform in Yugoslavia, perpetuate European security dependence on the United States, and mire Americans in another internecine conflict in the Balkans.

Notes

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