

53. Exiting the Balkan Morass

Congress should

- urge America's West European allies to take over military responsibility for Bosnia and Kosovo,
- discontinue funding the ill-conceived nation-building experiments in Bosnia and Kosovo and insist on the withdrawal of U.S. ground troops by 2002,
- oppose taking on another Balkan dependent by firmly objecting to possible U.S. military intervention in Montenegro, and
- resist the temptation to reimpose sanctions on Yugoslavia if its newly elected democratic government does not always see eye to eye with Washington.

Since 1992 the Balkans have held a top spot on the U.S. foreign policy agenda, but Washington's attention to the region has been disproportionate considering the peripheral nature of U.S. interests there and the proximity of rich and powerful American allies. Washington's Balkans policy, therefore, should be overhauled.

NATO Peacekeeping

Because Europe is the area most directly affected by events in the Balkans, the five-year-old peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and the year-and-a-half-old peacekeeping mission in Kosovo should both be redefined as European operations that do not require a U.S. troop presence. In carrying out the rest of the Bosnia and Kosovo missions itself, Europe 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. That would not only make those closest to Bosnia and Kosovo responsible for maintaining regional stability, but it would also strengthen the credibility of European security

institutions and improve the quality, consistency, impact, and visibility of their operations. To a great extent, it was precisely the lack of such a robust, European security architecture in 1992–95 that inhibited the Continent’s ability to handle the crisis in Bosnia in the first place. Now is the time to replace the NATO-led peacekeeping operation in Bosnia—which currently includes 5,000 American soldiers—with a European operation. Only then will Europe begin to seriously construct its own security identity and institutions.

Over the past few years, NATO has taken steps to enable Europe to undertake just such a project. Indeed, by beginning to work out procedures for releasing certain NATO assets to the Western European Union, 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 there are circumstances in which Europe should act militarily without bringing into play the full apparatus of the transatlantic alliance (i.e., the United States). Bosnia and Kosovo present Europe with a unique opportunity to commence building a security architecture. As former U.S. ambassador to NATO Robert E. Hunter correctly explains, “The Balkans is the place to test the possibilities that now exist for a true European security and defense identity.”

Bosnia

Shortly after the Dayton Peace Accords halted the fighting in Bosnia in late 1995, the World Bank announced that it would raise \$5 billion in reconstruction aid. Concerned with securing large pledges from the United States and other Western governments, bank officials claimed that the breakaway Yugoslav republic was intent on privatizing its economy as soon as possible. Bosnia was expected to respond quickly to privatization, explained the bank’s director for Central Europe, Kemal Dervis. “This is not an economy like the former Soviet republics,” he assured skeptics. “Yugoslavia was halfway to the market when the war started.”

Five years and more than \$5 billion in aid later, Bosnia has yet to implement a comprehensive privatization plan to desocialize its economy. The primary obstacle to privatization in Bosnia has been political foot-dragging. Many Bosnian officials are resisting privatization in order to protect a highly bureaucratic system of jobs and privileges left over from communist days. In many cases the heads of Bosnia’s major state-owned enterprises—such as the main utility, Elektroprivreda—are also members of the local ruling party. Party officials use state-owned enterprises to

further their own financial and political interests. Officials close to Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic, for example, run the state-owned television station. So far, they have resisted privatization and blocked the start-up of an independent, Western-financed competitor.

Bosnia's ongoing failure to implement a viable privatization plan has had a disastrous economic impact. Although its economy grew 11 percent in 1999, most of that "growth" reflects an influx of billions of dollars in international aid, not an expanding national economy. Bosnians may be building bridges and airports with aid money, but that activity only masks the underlying sickness of their economy.

The reality is that Bosnia is in an economic coma. Most state-owned enterprises are struggling to stay open. Many are completely dormant. Unemployment, which fell after the war, has improved little. Fifty percent of the workers in the Muslim-Croat half of the country are still idle, and 70 percent of workers in the Serbian half remain unemployed. Moreover, the Bosnian government's unwillingness to privatize state-owned banks has held back the formation of financial institutions capable of offering reasonable commercial loans to start new businesses. Other remnants of the communist era—onerous taxes and regulations—also continue to thwart business start-ups. "The leaders on all sides have learned the words to use: *free enterprise, Western-style economy, dynamic, efficient,*" recently explained a French investment entrepreneur in Bosnia. "They say these things with great passion, but that is superficial. Nothing has changed from the days when this was a communist country."

The Bosnian government's resistance to privatization, of course, was known when President Clinton informed American taxpayers that they would have to pay for additional reconstruction aid for Bosnia. With little prospect for real economic growth and foreign investment in Bosnia without privatization, the question now is, What impact will the foreign aid actually have? As one U.S. official noted, "The goal is not to rebuild a socialist economy" in Bosnia. Unfortunately, that is precisely what has been happening. In fact, a recent economic study of 161 nations ranked Bosnia the 10th *least* free economy in the world, just ahead of countries such as Iran, Cuba, Libya, Iraq, and North Korea.

High-Handed High Representative

With a staff of more than 300 specialists at his disposal, the top nation builder in Bosnia is Austrian diplomat Wolfgang Petritsch. Known as the High Representative, Petritsch is the international official in charge of

implementing the Dayton Agreement for the Peace Implementation Council—the multinational body overseeing the Dayton peace plan. In December 1997, the Peace Implementation Council met in Bonn, Germany, and granted the Office of the High Representative a broad mandate to make decisions for Bosnian officials if they missed any Western-imposed deadlines. The Peace Implementation Council also gave the High Representative the power to dismiss elected Bosnian officials who resist his efforts at building a Western-style democratic society.

But, according to Petritsch's predecessor, Spanish diplomat Carlos Westendorp, the Office of the High Representative did not need the Peace Implementation Council's approval to begin making decisions for the Bosnian people and dismissing elected officials. "You see, if you read Dayton carefully," he explained, "Annex 10 gives me the possibility to interpret my own authorities and powers. Therefore I do not need anything new, in the legal sense. . . . If they want to give this to me in writing at the Bonn conference it would be the best, and if not, I am going to do it anyway."

After the Peace Implementation Council meeting in Bonn concluded, Westendorp returned to Bosnia and began to rule by fiat. In 1998, when Bosnian authorities could not agree among themselves, Westendorp imposed a national flag, the music for a national anthem, a national currency design, and common automobile license plates. Over the next eight months, he imposed 42 other laws and executive orders and removed 13 elected Bosnian officials from power.

Westendorp's actions should come as no surprise; they were consistent with his patronizing treatment of the Bosnian people. As he explained to them in a speech, "I have to take decisions now and in the future with your best interests in mind." Westendorp's successor, Petritsch, is no less patronizing. The people of Bosnia, he says, "don't believe in themselves; [they] want me to do their job for them."

So far Petritsch has removed 22 elected Bosnian officials, including two leading figures in the principal Croat and Muslim parties. "The dismissed officials are not the officials that Bosnia needs," explained Petritsch's spokesperson. Petritsch also removed the president of the Bosnian Serb Republic and banned his party from running candidates in the 1999 municipal elections.

But even this level of control has not satisfied Bosnia's nation builders. In April 1998 the Office of the High Representative created a media commission that has the power to shut down or fine radio stations, televi-

sion stations, and newspapers it decides are engaging in reporting or editorializing that hinders the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. Called the Independent Media Commission, the body has an annual budget of \$2.7 million, financed in part by the United States. The IMC is headed by a non-Bosnian, and half the 30-person staff is foreigners. A U.S. State Department official has admitted that “there are obvious free-speech concerns,” but Western diplomats hesitate to characterize the commission as a censorship organ. Yet, following the April 2000 municipal elections, the IMC found five Bosnian TV broadcasters in violation of its “Code on Media Rules in Elections” and fined them. According to the IMC’s enforcement panel, four of the stations were fined for violating the commission’s rule on media silence, which forbids airing election-related material on election day.

Such imperious behavior on the part of Western nation builders exposes the fundamental hypocrisy of the U.S.-led Dayton Peace Accords. That is, in attempting to impose democracy and Western-style liberalism in Bosnia, the United States has allowed unelected foreign officials to behave like autocrats. Petritsch says he needs U.S. troops to stay in Bosnia so he can carry out his work. But since hostilities ended in 1995, only 110,000 refugees have returned to areas where they would be in the ethnic minority. Over the same three-year period, the United States has spent more than \$12 billion on peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts in Bosnia (not to mention that corruption and fraud have led to the disappearance of \$1 billion in public funds and international aid money). Congress should stop funding the West’s quasi-colonial rule over Bosnia. That money has been put to ineffective and illiberal uses and has subsidized the institutional remnants of a defunct communist state.

Kosovo

Adopted on June 10, 1999, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 articulates the military and political framework for the West’s nation-building effort in Kosovo. Specifically, the resolution calls for the deployment of an international “security presence” in the Serbian province of Kosovo, as well as the establishment of an international “civil presence” to oversee the development of democratic structures that will “ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants of Kosovo” and pave the way for “substantial autonomy.” In other words, the resolution is aimed at creating a multiethnic Kosovo that is both democratic and self-governing.

More than a year and a half later, most of Kosovo's Serbs, Gypsies, Goranians, Montenegrins, and other minority residents have been driven from or have fled the predominantly ethnic Albanian province, while those non-Albanians who are too old or too poor to leave have steadily moved into NATO-protected enclaves. Meanwhile, Washington's de facto wartime ally, the Kosovo Liberation Army, has shown little concrete interest in autonomy within Yugoslavia or multiethnic democracy; the KLA is currently fomenting insurgency elsewhere in the Balkans. What is more, Kosovo has become a playground for armed gangsters and drug traffickers who slip across the border into Albania and Macedonia with impunity. Nevertheless, the UN's top official in charge of nation building in Kosovo, UN Special Representative Bernard Kouchner, insists that for "the UN people the Kosovo mission is a success. We are building a modern democratic society."

In reality, however, Kosovo is a militarized protectorate of the West. Nearly 40,000 foreign soldiers, including 6,000 Americans, occupy Kosovo as part of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), and under the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Special Representative Kouchner oversees more than 1,500 UN specialists and 3,500 UN police, including 540 Americans, who now conduct the province's daily administration. A record 335 relief and other nongovernmental organizations also are currently operating in Kosovo, bringing with them a small army of aid workers. "This is just the beginning of a very long involvement of the international community," says Kouchner. So far UNMIK has taken over responsibility for Kosovo's health care, education, banking, telecommunications, mail delivery, and garbage collection systems. It has also declared the German mark the local currency; pays the wages of teachers, doctors, and civil servants; and decides on matters such as how much vending licenses to sell ice cream on Kosovo's street corners should cost. According to Gen. Klaus Reinhardt, NATO's chief commander in Kosovo, NATO and the UN have to stay in Kosovo for 10 years. Former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, who helped negotiate NATO's terms for entering Kosovo, is even less optimistic. He estimates that it will take two or three generations for Kosovo to become a normal society. American taxpayers have so far spent more than \$5.5 billion on Kosovo.

No "Post-Colonial Sensitivities"

Even before NATO's air campaign ended, advocates of the intervention began calling for the foreign occupation and administration of Kosovo.

For example, Carlos Westendorp, the West's former top administrator in Bosnia, argued at the height of NATO bombing that "a full international protectorate is required" for Kosovo. "Yes, this disregards the principles of sovereignty," he said, "but so what? This is not the moment for post-colonial sensitivities." Westendorp wasn't alone in that view. "The only viable course," editorialized one Western newspaper, "is to . . . establish a NATO protectorate in Kosovo," and another newspaper boasted, "We have argued from the start . . . for a land war to capture Kosovo and turn it into an international protectorate."

Once NATO ended its air war, the Clinton administration enthusiastically supported the idea of running Kosovo as a protectorate. In fact, the administration quickly endorsed a UN mandate broader than anything the international organization had undertaken before, and, unlike the case of the Bosnia operation, administration officials avoided all talk of "exit dates." The first regulation enacted by the UN in Kosovo stated, "All legislative and executive authority with respect to Kosovo, including the administration of the judiciary, is vested in UNMIK and is exercised by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General." By August 1999 the new American ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, was encouraging UN officials in Kosovo, including Kouchner, not to worry about the UN's cumbersome bureaucracy in New York but to focus on what they deemed necessary to successfully administer Kosovo. "Don't always ask—just do it," Holbrooke told them.

Today, Kouchner oversees virtually all of Kosovo's day-to-day affairs. He has transferred all Yugoslav state-owned enterprises and social services to his administrative authority, and his office now decides who manages those companies and institutions. He has organized no province-level elections and has instead installed the Interim Administrative Council, an unelected body whose members he handpicked himself. Kouchner has also set up a legal system under which KFOR soldiers can arrest people on the basis of their own country's national laws and bring them before a panel of UN-appointed judges who have the authority to make laws as they go using the old Yugoslav legal code as only a guide. In the realm of media, Kouchner's UN staff, not local managers, took over the TV broadcasts after the Yugoslav authorities left, and they have exercised their authority to shut down newspapers for publishing controversial material and opinions.

Kouchner took an active role in trying to shape the outcome of local elections. He signed a municipal election law, for example, that stipulated

that political parties would be elected on a proportional basis only, with no individual candidates' identities being made public in advance. Another one of his rules excluded people who left Kosovo before January 1, 1998, from registering to vote. That, in effect, meant that tens of thousands of Serbs who fled Kosovo after the war ended could vote, but tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians who left Kosovo during the 1990s because of the Serbian regime's political, economic, and police repression could not.

Such pervasive regulation of life in Kosovo has not gone unnoticed by Kosovo's majority ethnic Albanian population. Many ethnic Albanians considered Kouchner's election guidelines unfair and believed that they were designed to diminish the influence of ethnic Albanians. At the main hospital in Pristina, Kouchner's appointment of a British director resulted in the local staff's organizing a parallel system similar to the one they had when Belgrade ran the province. And Kouchner's sidelining of ethnic Albanian political rule has led to further factionalization and infighting as competing political elites vie for the patronage and largesse of the international officials who formally run Kosovo.

Illusory Goals

Though Western nation builders may claim the "Clinton administration deserves credit for having done several things right" in Kosovo, highlighting the obvious—that not everything has gone wrong—that is not a compelling defense; it is a rhetorical diversion. The uncomfortable truth is that Washington's peacekeeping effort in Kosovo rests on a false peace; the KLA has not given up on its wartime agenda, and Kosovo's limbo status perpetuates the competing fears of both ethnic Albanians and Serbs. These facts virtually ensure that Washington's attempt at nation building will fail. Indeed, nearly a year into Washington's effort, the U.S. General Accounting Office released a 90-page report that lamented, "The continuing hostilities and lack of political and social reconciliation between Kosovar Albanians and non-Albanians have overshadowed positive developments that have occurred since the end on the NATO bombing campaign." Though full-scale military hostilities between Serbian and Yugoslav forces and KLA forces have ceased, the report added, the security situation in the Balkans is still "volatile," and "local political leaders and people of their respective ethnic groups have failed to embrace the political and social reconciliation considered necessary to build multiethnic, democratic societies and institutions." In other words, the conditions the Clinton administration and others said were required for U.S. troops to one day

leave Kosovo are, in fact, not being created. Congress should, therefore, stop funding this expensive and futile policy.

Montenegro

Given the ill-conceived nation-building missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, Congress should also firmly object to any efforts that will lead to Washington's taking on yet another ward in Southeastern Europe. Montenegro, which together with Serbia makes up what remains of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has hinted that it is still interested in independence, even though strongman Slobodan Milosevic is no longer in power in Belgrade. Washington has pumped millions of dollars in aid money to Montenegro and warned Belgrade to keep its hands off the small republic. Congress should make it clear that the United States is not the baby sitter of the Balkans.

Yugoslavia

In October 2000, Milosevic's 13-year rule over Yugoslavia finally came to an end. The response from the Clinton administration was self-congratulatory, as if American policy had been decisive in ensuring Milosevic's defeat. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Yugoslavia's newly elected democratic president, Vojislav Kostunica, even once lamented that the "consequences of Western policy, above all of the American policy, are objectively such that . . . they are more helpful to Milosevic than to his opponents." For example, explained Kostunica, the Western bombs that wounded and killed thousands of Yugoslav civilians living nowhere near Kosovo made it more difficult to promote Western values. The bombing also gave Milosevic a national security pretext for cracking down on Yugoslavia's democratic forces. Furthermore, when Washington announced in August 2000 that it would open an office in Hungary to support the democratic opposition in Yugoslavia, Kostunica protested that Milosevic would use the announcement to propagandize that the opposition was in Washington's back pocket. Milosevic did just that, boosting his poll ratings in the days preceding the election.

Most destructively, Washington's decade-long imposition of sanctions eviscerated Yugoslavia's private sector and impoverished its middle class, thus ruining the democratic opposition's natural financial base. The sanctions also encouraged many of Yugoslavia's young people to leave the country, draining it of those most open to democratic change.

That dubious track record notwithstanding, some people in Washington seem determined to continue the habit of undermining Yugoslavia's democratic forces. Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.), for example, says that sanctions should be used to force Kostunica to comply with Washington's every demand, including supporting its flawed policies in Bosnia and Kosovo and turning Milosevic over to The Hague war crimes tribunal to be judged by outsiders. Those demands are nonstarters for Kostunica, and so Washington could ironically end up penalizing Yugoslavia's victorious democrats. Milosevic, who is still a political force in Yugoslavia, can only be laughing at that prospect.

Future U.S. Policy

For eight years, Washington's Balkans policy has been futile and wasteful. Congress should commence efforts to extricate the U.S. military from the Clinton administration's ill-conceived nation-building missions in the Balkans, transfer security responsibility for the region to the Europeans, object to possible U.S. military intervention in Montenegro, and resist the temptation to reimpose economic sanctions against Yugoslavia if it does not see eye to eye with Washington.

Suggested Readings

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—Prepared by Gary Dempsey