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FROM CLINTON TO BUSH: THE WORST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS?**

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MARTIN SLETZINGER is the Director of the East European Studies program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Dr. Sletzinger spoke at the conference “The Future of the Balkans: Beyond Conflict and Underdevelopment” hosted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC on March 30, 2001. This piece is a written version of his presentation.

Policy Drift

If one looks at where U.S. policy is today, it can be assessed as having gone almost overnight from over-commitment to virtually no commitment, from moralizing micro-management to unrealistic

reaping what they sowed in the Balkans. The war against Milosevic, justified by humanitarian considerations, also justified their alliance with Albanian extremists who are now trying to do in Macedonia what they did to Serb authority in Kosovo.” Stated another way, perhaps less elegantly, in trying to combat one evil -- the air war to defeat Milosevic and his regime in Kosovo -- we have ended up empowering another evil: armed and trained groups of Albanian hard men bent on creating an all-Albanian state which, if successful, could be even more destabilizing and damaging to regional security and U.S. interests than the original sin itself.

As a result, several questions emerge: “Is this why we bombed Yugoslav-Serb forces twice, in Bosnia in 1995 and Yugoslavia in 1999? Is this going to be the sum total of U.S. and western policy on the ground in the Balkans after nearly a decade – that having moved heaven and earth to prevent the creation of a greater Serbia and a greater Croatia we could be on the verge of facilitating a greater Albania?” One should also ask, “in what way, shape, or form is a greater Albania preferable to, more moral than, or more conducive to regional stability or U.S. interests than the other two?”

The major challenge for the new Bush administration, which inherited this mess, is not to make the situation worse through evasion and expect the Europeans to handle it. We need a middle ground. Currently, the Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo, as very likely many Serbs and Croats in Bosnia, are interpreting the U.S. desire to scale back and leave the Balkans as a message that they can eventually get away with carving out their own mono-ethnic states or attach themselves to one of the

need a better understanding of and appreciation for the roots of this multi-faceted conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Otherwise, we will never achieve a sustainable peace in the region. This understanding is far more complicated than blaming the current problems on the evil and mendacity of just a few powerful men in the wrong place at the wrong time and expecting that dragging them to the Hague will resolve the main problems.

History does matter in this part of the world, and it matters a lot. Just look at the course of the conflict in the four regions during the past decade and you will see that they follow well-defined, historic and ethnic fault lines, and mark regions where killings and mass murder have occurred in previous decades, and even centuries. Specific examples in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo illustrate this point.

During the war in Croatia from 1991-1992, the areas where some of the most vicious fighting and killing occurred just happened to parallel regions of the country where Serbs had been slaughtered en masse during WWII under conditions which by current day definitions would have to be called genocide. The policies of Milosevic fanned the flames of hatred, and Serbs committed grave crimes against Croats, but there are definite historical antecedents to the war in Croatia. The Serb population of Croatia at that time scarcely needed propaganda from Belgrade to feel very uncomfortable, isolated and afraid in a brand-new Tudjman-led Croatia.

In Bosnia, for all the horrors of that war, the conflict cannot be understood properly and accurately if it is dismissed simply as a war of Serbian or Yugoslav aggression. Once again, the prospect of living in an independent Bosnia -- four decades earlier, the site of horrific killing grounds of Serbs and others -- left large segments of especially the rural Serb population feeling very isolated and very fearful.

While in no way trying to apologize for or exonerate the Serbs for their action during the Bosnian war, the fact remains that despite a post-WWII tradition of multi-culturalism and intermarriage, in rural areas especially where Serbs predominate, there was a deep-seeded fear of domination by Muslims and a collective memory of WWII killings and slaughters.

In this regard there is an excellent book that was published a few years ago by former *NY Times* correspondent Chuck Sudetic entitled "Blood and Vengeance" in which while tracing the course of the Bosnian war leading to the tragedy of Srebrenica, he shows how both the Serb and the Muslim communities in eastern Bosnia harbored these historically-motivated mutual fears and hatreds and that each was waiting for the opportunity to "do unto others." He sets this out in a chapter called "Kad Tad, Kad Tad."

In Kosovo, once again there is no defense for Serb actions in this region over the past decade, and especially not for the mass deportation and killing of Albanians begun as the NATO air war started in March 1999. But we must take a step back and remember that a good part of the reason Milosevic was swept to power in Yugoslavia in 1987-1988 was the perception by Serbs of inequities they had suffered in Kosovo during the final decades of Titoist Yugoslavia, when Kosovo was run

Kosovo and probably at least several hundred, if not several thousand, backing up the KFOR force in Macedonia.

Arguably, in the Clinton administration, the Balkan issue was the predominant foreign policy issue. It took more time and effort than any other region. This means Clinton spent more time on the Balkans than he did on Russia, China, the Middle East, or Latin America. The proliferation of special envoys and special coordinators for various Balkan activities just within the State Department itself is striking evidence of this deep involvement.

U.S. involvement, however, has been far deeper and more comprehensive than just the large scale investments of time, personnel, and resources. U.S. officials have been and still are at the center of most of the key peacekeeping institutions on the ground in Bosnia and Kosovo, and not just the military positions. Just to give a few examples:

as in Kosovo, Burg has emphasized, is that the existence of this international high authority and the deep hands-on involvement of U.S. officials has freed the local parties of ever having to agree on anything meaningful. It has, in their view, freed them of the need for compromise and has freed local politicians of accountability and responsibility for the future of Bosnia and for Kosovo.

This is in part why despite positive features such as increased refugee returns and an improved economic picture, we see support for Dayton fraying along central political fault lines - Herzegovinian Croats have unilaterally declared they are forming their own state and some are defecting from the so-called Bosnian army. The Muslims want the entities dissolved and central authority enhanced, while

What is a Realistic, Sustainable U.S. Policy in the Balkans?

U.S. policy in the Balkans, we have seen, has moved from deep commitment and involvement during the Clinton administration to an evolving policy under President George W. Bush looking to gradually disengage from the region. What is needed is some middle ground between the two, so that we can avoid the stark policy choice between remaining there heavily involved or leaving altogether.

Such a policy would consist of two separate and distinct elements. The first, a redeployment of our peacekeeping troops in such a manner that U.S. and Allied forces can remain on the ground in the Balkans, providing vital security, stability, and separation, while scaling back the intensive and intrusive “nation-building and peace-building” functions that the new Bush administration, the Congress, and presumably eventually the American people could soon oppose. The second element is tying this limited disengagement to a broader regional approach to the conflict by involving diplomatic, political and economic efforts, as well as significant disarmament and confidence-building measures.

Redeployment of Peacekeeping Troops Along Borders

Much of the opposition to the Balkan peacekeeping exercise, and the growing fear in the current administration and among the public that we are mired forever in the Balkans, stems from the perception that our forces on the ground are engaged in the daily business of building civil and political society, i.e. nation-building or state building.

In my view, opposition to keeping our troops on the ground could largely be dissipated if U.S. and Allied troops were not perceived to be engaged in such nation-building activities. Currently, they are deployed within Bosnia-Herzegovina and within Kosovo where they come into contact with the local populations and are potentially threatened by those who could oppose what we are trying to do.

A way to signal to the region that we are beginning to disengage from the nuts and bolts of building new societies, but yet sustaining assurances that we will remain on the ground in the region, is to redeploy our troops both in Bosnia and in Kosovo around the borders of those states or entities, but no longer within them, with the assurance that these troops will continue to provide this necessary buffer for a prolonged, indefinite period.

This would have the effect of keeping borders secure by providing more troops to prevent cross-border infiltrations of the sort we have recently seen in Macedonia and Serbia, and keeping the military forces of all the parties separated. In this view, peacekeepers within Kosovo would be redeployed between Kosovo and Serbia, between Kosovo and Macedonia, and between Kosovo and Albania, and the troops in Bosnia would be reinforced along the inter-ethnic boundary line between the two entities as well as along Bosnia’s borders with Yugoslavia and Croatia. To some extent, this is already happening in Bosnia, where the number of peacekeeping troops has been cut by 2/3 since the original deployment.

In Bosnia, some will argue that such a redeployment along the borders or lines of separation will be tantamount to partition, but in reality this is only an acknowledgment of what is actually taking place on the ground. Such a peacekeeping configuration in Bosnia would be in a way like the Green Line in Cyprus that has divided that island. Yet, this Green Line has also kept the peace for 27 years.

It should also be emphasized that such a redeployment of peacekeeping forces is not intended to support a formal dismemberment of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The key elements of the Dayton Peace Process should be preserved - Bosnia should be kept unified as a single country and efforts must continue to keep the institutions of the Bosnian state functioning to the extent possible.

There is another advantage to such a redeployment from the U.S. perspective. If NATO and international troops are removed from hands-on nation-building tasks and not exposed within the entities and regions but deployed along clearly defined border lines, this could make it easier for the U.S. to gradually disengage ground force units and to hand over most of the responsibility to the Europeans who already make up approximately 75% or more of NATO's peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo. The Europeans, in turn, might find it more acceptable to inherit this task than if they were engaged in a more "robust enforcement" of the letter of Dayton or the peace in Kosovo.

The "nation-building" tasks, including the job of protecting minority refugee returns and other civil and political tasks, would be performed by re-trained local police working together with the international police task force in Bosnia and its equivalent in Kosovo. If matters really got out of hand, peacekeeping troops on the border could be called in for limited duty.

In Kosovo, we need to acknowledge that after nearly two years of peacekeeping there is virtually no chance to rebuild the so-called multi-ethnicity which largely never existed. There is no need after two years for the continued subdivision of Kosovo into five peacekeeping zones. There were probably, in 1999, good internal NATO reasons for this division of labor, but now it is time to move on. We must take these troops and deploy them along Kosovo's borders - to seal them off.

This will mean, regrettably, that the small Serb minority left in Kosovo will probably have to move into the north of Kosovo, controlled by Serbs, or into Serbia proper. But 40,000 peacekeepers cannot keep guarding a 50,000 minority indefinitely. Kosovo is probably lost to Yugoslavia, and all the international community can do now is regulate the disassociation. We do not need troops within Kosovo to do this. We need them to take charge of its international borders where the greatest destabilization of the whole Balkan region is now taking place, and is likely to do so in the future.

The Need for a Comprehensive, Regional Settlement Including Disarmament Measures

The second facet of this new U.S. policy would be support for an international effort led by