



# Backgroundnder

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## Executive Summary

No. 1400

October 27, 2000

## THE LESSONS OF MILOSEVIC'S FALL

*KIM R. HOLMES, PH.D.*

Many people can take credit for the fall of Yugoslavian dictator Slobodan Milosevic: Vojislav Kostunica for uniting the Serbian opposition, the Serbian people for rising up against Milosevic, George Bush for starting the policy of containment and sanctions against Milosevic in the early 1990s, Bill Clinton for expanding that policy and standing up to Milosevic in Bosnia and Kosovo, and NATO for holding firm against the Serbian leader despite his many attempts to divide the alliance.

But there is a danger that U.S. policymakers may draw the wrong lessons in the middle of all this self-congratulation. The policy of containment against Yugoslavia has been vindicated, but it would be wrong to conclude that Milosevic's fall vindicates everything the United States and NATO did with respect to the Balkans. Indeed, it may be that mistakes made by NATO and the Clinton Administration unwittingly prolonged Milosevic's stay in power. And it may be that the intervention by NATO in Kosovo was unnecessary and thus has lessened the prospects for peace and democracy in that war-torn region.

### LEGACIES OF DAYTON AND KOSOVO

When fighting broke out in Kosovo in 1998, it represented the failure of the containment policy that had brought Milosevic to heel in Bosnia. The Dayton Accords were supposed not only to bring peace to Bosnia, but also to prevent the spread of

violence elsewhere in the Balkans, including Kosovo. But the Dayton Accords did not prevent the spreading of war in the Balkans; instead, they provided Milosevic with a respite during which he could prepare for a showdown over Kosovo.

### The Kosovo Intervention: Making Matters Worse.

Kostunica's victory puts the United States and NATO in a very uncomfortable position in Kosovo. So long as the Albanian Kosovars had Milosevic as their enemy, they could hope that NATO forces inside Kosovo would someday support them in their bid for complete independence. Now that Serbia has an ostensibly democratic leader, those hopes have been dashed.

**Dayton Revisited.** Kostunica's victory will do little to solve the basic problem with the Dayton Accords: the contradiction between the two

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Produced by the  
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Published by  
The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E.  
Washington, D.C.  
20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400  
<http://www.heritage.org>



This paper, in its entirety, can  
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opposing goals of democratization and multi-ethnicity. The essential problem is that NATO is enforcing a constitutional order on Bosnia that many of its ethnic communities reject. Since the unified Bosnian state lacks legitimacy in the eyes of many of its citizens, it can be maintained only by outside force. Thus, NATO, and through it the United States, will function not merely as a peace-keeper—something that most Bosnians now welcome. It may also be perceived eventually as a foreign occupying force denying them their democratic choice of self-rule.

### **DAYTON AND KOSOVO: DID THEY PLAY A ROLE IN MILOSEVIC'S FALL?**

The most important reason for the fall of Slobodan Milosevic can be found in internal Serbian politics, not in the impact of the Kosovo intervention. The key reasons that Kostunica won the election were the economic crisis, which was exacerbated by international sanctions, and the fact that Serbia's democratic opposition became unified behind a common candidate.

If anything, the Kosovo intervention made it more difficult for the opposition to bring Milosevic down. Kostunica and the democratic opposition vehemently opposed the NATO intervention in Kosovo. This created complications for the United States and NATO. Because of the political fallout from the Kosovo intervention, the democratic opposition in Serbia was isolated from the West at a time when they could have used its financial and political backing.

On balance, NATO's Kosovo intervention did more to keep Milosevic in power than to remove him. Kostunica won the Yugoslavian presidential election in spite of the Kosovo intervention, not because of it. If the sanctions on Yugoslavia had

not been lifted in 1995 as a result of the Dayton Accords, disillusionment with Milosevic might have peaked earlier.

### **THE LESSONS OF MILOSEVIC'S FALL**

Reviewing the history of the Balkans over the past decade, certain lessons can be drawn for U.S. policymakers. For example, sanctions can work when they are universally applied by a broader coalition and other circumstances are favorable. Moreover, in resolving regional disputes, U.S. policy must be sharply focused and absolutely consistent; special care must be taken to avoid expedient short-term initiatives or compromises that undermine the long-term strategy. In addition, policymakers should ensure that the political settlement is consistent with democratic principles. Finally, the United States should make greater efforts to build democratic opposition movements in civil conflicts, giving America options other than direct intervention.

### **CONCLUSION**

The worst mistake made by U.S. policymakers in the Balkans was to let misguided humanitarian impulses cloud their judgment of the political complexities of the Balkans. This led them to hastily make Milosevic a partner in peace in Bosnia. It made them miscalculate his intentions at the peace conference in Rambouillet. And it led U.S. policymakers to create an artificial, non-democratic state in Bosnia that can be sustained only by the application of outside military force.

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## THE LESSONS OF MILOSEVIC'S FALL

*KIM R. HOLMES<sup>1</sup>*

Many people can take credit for the fall of Yugoslavian dictator Slobodan Milosevic: Vojislav Kostunica for uniting the Serbian opposition, the Serbian people for rising up against Milosevic, George Bush for starting the policy of containment and sanctions against Milosevic in the early 1990s, Bill Clinton for expanding that policy and standing up to Milosevic in Bosnia and Kosovo, and NATO for holding firm against the Serbian leader despite his many attempts to divide the alliance.

But there is a danger that U.S. policymakers may draw the wrong lessons in the middle of all this self-congratulation. To be sure, the policy of containment against Yugoslavia has been vindicated. Serbs finally came to realize that normalcy was not possible in their lives so long as Milosevic was at the helm. Moreover, with Russia weak and thus unable and unwilling to save Milosevic, Yugoslavia's isolation from its European neighbors and the rest of the world proved to be a burden that could not be forever sustained on a continent that knows so much prosperity and democracy.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that Milosevic's fall vindicates everything the United States and NATO did with respect to the Balkans. Indeed, it may be that mistakes made by NATO and the Clinton Administration unwittingly

prolonged Milosevic's stay in power. And it may be that the intervention by NATO in Kosovo was unnecessary and thus has lessened the prospects for peace and democracy in that war-torn region.

Before too many celebration toasts are made, Western policymakers should pause and reflect on what they should have done differently, not only to avoid future mistakes, but also to understand what needs to be done now to build peace and democracy in the Balkans.

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### THE ROAD TO DAYTON

Over the past decade, there has been little disagreement in the United States and NATO about the need to contain Slobodan Milosevic's

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1. The author would like to thank Michael Scardaville, a Research Assistant at The Heritage Foundation, for his valuable contribution in preparing this study.

expansionist tendencies and keep him isolated internationally. Since 1992, a broad bipartisan consensus has existed in the United States in favor of the policy of sanctions against Yugoslavia. There were differences of opinion at various times in the United States and Europe about the wisdom of military intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo, but these were argued on military, practical, and even moral grounds, and not as a challenge to the strategy of containment per se.

The U.S. sanctions policy against Yugoslavia began with President George Bush. In response to Milosevic's support for Serbian aggression in Bosnia, Bush froze Yugoslav assets on May 30, 1992.<sup>2</sup> A few days later, he added trade and economic sanctions in compliance with United Nations Resolution 757.<sup>3</sup> Bush expanded the sanctions again on January 15, 1993, to ensure compliance with U.N. Resolution 787, which tightened the embargo on Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this period, Bush opposed the use of U.S. force in Bosnia unless there was a clear and achievable mission; he also supported, in addition to the sanctions, humanitarian relief efforts and a no-fly zone over Bosnia. The President enjoyed bipartisan support for these policies in Congress.

Bill Clinton's election as President did not change matters very much. Clinton took a harder line on Bosnia than Bush during the 1992 presidential campaign. During the campaign, Clinton complained that Bush was doing too little to support the people's aspirations for freedom in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, and he accused Bush of ignoring Milosevic's emergence as one of Europe's bloodiest tyrants.<sup>5</sup>

However, once he took office, President Clinton toned down his rhetoric. He kept the sanctions imposed by Bush but promised that he would not deploy U.S. ground troops to Bosnia.<sup>6</sup> On April 25, 1993, Clinton expanded sanctions against Yugoslavia after Bosnian Serbs rejected a U.N.-brokered cease-fire, saying that the "address of the war [in Bosnia] in whole or in large part is Belgrade."<sup>7</sup> But for much of 1993–1994, as the United Nations mission in Yugoslavia floundered, Clinton did little to change Bush's policy in the Balkans.

All that changed when Senator Bob Dole and Members of Congress began to criticize Clinton for being too soft on Milosevic. In 1994, Dole sponsored the Dole–Lieberman amendment, which would have lifted the arms embargo on Bosnia. The purpose was to level the fighting field for the Bosnian Muslims. Dole was highly critical of the United Nations mission in Yugoslavia, preferring instead that NATO take the lead. Indeed, Dole eventually came to support NATO air strikes on Serbian military forces inside Bosnia. Clinton and the Europeans rejected this "lift and strike" proposal as being destabilizing. As a matter of fact, Vice President Al Gore broke the tie and blocked the vote on the Dole–Lieberman amendment on July 1, 1994. This not only ended any chance of arming the Bosnian Muslims, but also put him on the opposite side of the issue from his future vice presidential nominee.<sup>8</sup>

But Clinton had felt the political heat. As the 1996 presidential campaign approached, Clinton feared that Dole would make a campaign issue of his weakness on Bosnia, much as Clinton had

2. George Bush, "Letter to the Congress on the National Emergency with Respect to Yugoslavia," May 30, 1992.
3. George Bush, "Message to the Congress on the National Emergency with Respect to Yugoslavia." June 5, 1992.
4. George Bush, "Letter to the Congressional Leaders on Additional Measures with Respect to Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)," January 19, 1993.
5. "Governor Bill Clinton, Democratic Presidential Nominee Speech on Foreign Policy Before the Los Angeles World Affairs Council," Federal News Service, August 13, 1992.
6. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on Larry King Live," July 20, 1993.
7. Terence Hunt, "U.S. Imposes New Economic Sanctions on Yugoslavia," Associated Press, April, 26, 1993.
8. Gore opposed arming the Muslims as a unilateral measure. Transcript of Electronic Town Meeting with Vice President Gore, U.S. Newswire, January 14, 1994.

done with Bush four years earlier. Clinton thus decided to launch a major peace offensive to resolve the Bosnian crisis before the 1996 election. He dispatched then-Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Richard Holbrooke in August 1995 to find a settlement to the Bosnian conflict. Holbrooke eventually engineered the Dayton Accords in November 1995 settling the Bosnian conflict.

At Dayton, the negotiators agreed to create an ostensibly multi-ethnic federation made up of semi-sovereign ethnic entities protected by the presence of NATO peacekeepers. Three factors made the Dayton Accords possible:

- The Bosnia Serbs were exhausted after suffering a terrible military defeat in August 1995 at the hands of the Croatians in the Krajina region;
- NATO bombing had demonstrated Western resolve; and
- Holbrooke convinced Milosevic to cut back on his support for the Bosnia Serbs in exchange for the lifting of sanctions.

The Dayton Accords ended the containment policy against Milosevic that had been established by George Bush three years earlier. They made Milosevic a partner and guarantor of the settlement. Sanctions against Yugoslavia were suspended in 1995 because, as the President explained, “the economic and military sanctions had achieved their purpose of bringing the Serbs to the negotiating table to forge a peace agreement.”<sup>9</sup> The negotiators of the Dayton Accord celebrated the arrival of peace in the Balkans. It was assumed that Milosevic would cooperate in keeping the peace not merely in Bosnia but in Kosovo as well. Neither assumption proved to be correct.

## THE FAILURES OF PEACE IN THE BALKANS

**The Tragedy of Bosnia: No Fighting, No Peace, No Nation.** After the euphoria over the Dayton Accords had died down, NATO and United Nations officials began to realize how difficult the task of building peace in Bosnia would be. Today, over five years later, the multi-ethnic state envisioned by the architects of the Dayton Accords remains an illusion as nationalist parties who reject a unified Bosnian state continue to win elections and refugees are still reluctant to return to areas in which they are minorities.

In last spring’s municipal elections in the *Republika Srpska*, the Serbian enclave of Bosnia, Radovan Karadzic’s hard-line nationalist Serbian Democratic Party won in 49 of the 61 municipalities.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in the Croatian regions of the Bosniac–Croat Federation, the ultra-nationalist Croatian Democratic Union took every district. As the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jacques Klein, concludes, “five sets of internationally run elections in five years have not yet had the desired effect of empowering the democratic leaders.”<sup>11</sup>

While modest progress has been made in the return of refugees, the overwhelming majority of them have not returned to their homes. At the time the Dayton Accords were signed, 2.3 million people had been displaced in Bosnia.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1999, only around 132,275 had returned to their homes.<sup>13</sup> According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 19,750 refugees returned during the first six months of 2000.<sup>14</sup> This still leaves around 2 million refugees who have not returned to their homes. One senior official admitted that since the refugee numbers are

9. “Clinton Puts Sanctions on Hold,” *Chicago Sun–Times*, December 29, 1995, p. 22.

10. *Bosnia’s Municipal Elections 2000: Winners and Losers*, ICG Balkans Report No. 91, Sarajevo, Bosnia, April 27, 2000, p. 1.

11. “UN Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Briefs Security Council,” M2 Presswire, June 14, 2000.

12. U.S. General Accounting Office, *Balkans Security Current and Projected Factors Affecting Regional Stability*, April 2000, p. 18.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

14. UNHCR Bosnia and Herzegovina Programme, *2000 Mid-year Review*, at <http://www.unhcr.ch/fdrs/my2000/bih.pdf>.

still so high, “we cannot undo ethnic cleansing [in Bosnia].”<sup>15</sup>

The International Crisis Group, a private organization known for its support of U.N. efforts in Bosnia, concluded last year that “The few successes of Dayton—the Central Bank, a common currency, common license plates, state symbols and custom reforms—are superficial.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, they mask an underlying refusal on the part of many Bosnians to accept the fundamental concept of the multi-ethnic state. Nation-building in Bosnia is failing because the people of Bosnia do not believe in the nation that NATO and the United Nations have established for them.

### **Collapse of the Peace Process in Kosovo.**

While the fighting stopped in Bosnia during the uneasy peace following Dayton, tensions began to mount in Kosovo. Shortly after the Dayton Accords were signed, the Kosovar Albanians abandoned the path of peaceful resistance against the government and embarked on a campaign of armed rebellion against government repression. In May 1998, Special Envoy in Bosnia and Kosovo Richard Holbrooke began a round of shuttle diplomacy to resolve the approaching crisis in Kosovo. In October, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe brokered a cease-fire agreement that led to the withdrawal of some Yugoslav forces from Kosovo. However, the cease-fire did not hold; within a month, fighting had resumed and Yugoslav forces were reinserted into Kosovo. By February 1999, the situation had deteriorated to the point where a major conference of the so-called Contact Group of the U.S., Russia, and other European nations was convened in Rambouillet, France, to deal with the crisis.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright presented the Serb and Kosovo delegations with the Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo, more commonly known as the Rambouillet Agreement. It called for NATO to station peacekeepers throughout the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Serbia. It also required a final settlement of Kosovo’s status by popular referendum within three years. While Milosevic had earlier signaled a willingness to accept an agreement, these two provisions proved to be too much for him. Vuk Draskovic, head of the opposition Serbian Renewal Movement and a minister in the Yugoslav government, complained that “If there had been any ‘cake’, Mr. Milosevic may have cut a deal.”<sup>17</sup>

However, that was not to be. Believing that Milosevic would back down, Albright stuck to the provisions on peacekeepers in Serbia and the Kosovo referendum. She threatened Milosevic with air strikes if he refused. But refuse he did. Peace talks were suspended on March 18, and a few days later, after a last-ditch effort by Holbrooke to broker a deal, Operation Allied Force began its military campaign against Yugoslavia.

A massive humanitarian crisis ensued. Using the NATO bombing as an excuse, Milosevic stepped up the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Within days, thousands of refugees were forced from their homes. Before the war began, 230,000 people had been displaced in Kosovo;<sup>18</sup> by the end of the war, 1.4 million people had become refugees.<sup>19</sup> The year before the air war, 2,500 Albanians had been killed in Kosovo;<sup>20</sup> 11 weeks after the NATO air campaign began, 12,000 had been killed.<sup>21</sup>

15. Peter Ford, “Bosnia Four Years Later: Few Gains,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 28, 2000, p. 1.

16. *Is Dayton Failing?: Bosnia Four Years After the Peace Agreement*, ICG Balkans Report No. 80, Sarajevo, Bosnia, October 28, 1999, p. i.

17. Blaine Harden, “Crisis in the Balkans: Doing the Deal,” *The New York Times*, June 6, 1999, p. 1.

18. Fareed Zakaria, “The Balkans; Keeping Kosovo; The Costs of Liberal Imperialism.” *National Review*, September 27, 1999.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. Sandra Laville, “News: Kosovo Refugees: Deadline that Everybody Is Dreading,” *The Daily Telegraph*, June 23, 2000, p. 4.

The U.S. and NATO were taken by surprise and were militarily unprepared for the air campaign against Yugoslavia. Refusing to use ground forces, NATO stood by helplessly, targeting with air strikes tanks, bridges, and other weaponry not involved in the killing and ethnic cleansing and leaving the smaller Yugoslav units relatively free to roam the Kosovo countryside, murdering, raping, and forcing Albanians from their homes.

When the fighting and killing were over, Milosevic agreed to a settlement that was more favorable to him than the one tabled at Rambouillet. Drafted this time by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, Russian Balkan Envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin, and former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari, the new agreement softened the very provisions that had stiffened Milosevic's resistance at Rambouillet. The resulting agreement, embodied in United Nations Resolution 1244, provided for an international peacekeeping force with a substantial NATO component (instead of a NATO operation only) only in Kosovo, and not in Serbia, as had been proposed at Rambouillet. Moreover, there was no demand for a referendum on Kosovo's final status. Rather, there were only vague descriptions of the need for autonomy in Kosovo—something that, in principle, Milosevic had not objected to at Rambouillet.

Milosevic accepted the agreement quickly—on the second day of negotiations—not merely because he wanted to stop the bombing of his country, but because he had obtained concessions that he would most likely have agreed to earlier had they been proposed. Despite the bombing campaign, Milosevic ended up getting about what he would have settled for at Rambouillet.

## LEGACIES OF DAYTON AND KOSOVO

When fighting broke out in Kosovo in 1998, it represented the failure of the containment policy that had brought Milosevic to heel in Bosnia. The Dayton Accords were supposed not only to bring peace to Bosnia, but also to prevent the spread of violence elsewhere in the Balkans, including Kos-

ovo. As President Clinton said during his radio address to the nation after the signing of the Dayton Accords, “Securing the peace will also prevent the war in Bosnia from reigniting and then from spreading, sparking an even wider and more dangerous conflict right in the heart of Europe in the Balkan regions where there is still of lot of tension and potential for conflict.”<sup>22</sup>

The Dayton Accords did not prevent the “spreading” of war in the Balkans. Instead, they provided Milosevic with a respite during which he could prepare for a showdown over Kosovo.

**The Kosovo Intervention: Making Matters Worse.** The record shows that the NATO intervention in Kosovo was not inevitable. Had Madeleine Albright initially proposed peace terms to Milosevic that were eventually accepted by NATO after the air war ended—particularly the proposal that peacekeepers not be deployed in Serbia and that a referendum not be held in Kosovo—the chances are good that Milosevic would have accepted them.

While it is true that Milosevic may have been intent on wiping out the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in the spring of 1999, which would certainly have escalated the violence, there is no evidence that he had planned a massive ethnic cleansing campaign. It took the NATO intervention to provide the excuse for that. In the early weeks of the bombing, hundreds of thousands of refugees were forced out of their homes. Restricted only to an air campaign, NATO refrained from sending in the ground forces that could have stopped the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo.

NATO therefore stood by helplessly in the face of a massive humanitarian crisis that its leaders had unwittingly contributed to by miscalculating Milosevic's intentions at the conference in Rambouillet. NATO leaders only made matters worse by strengthening Milosevic's military options by forswearing the use of ground forces.

While U.S. and NATO leaders should in no way be held morally accountable for the atrocities committed by Yugoslav forces, these leaders

22. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Radio Address of the President to the Nation,” November 25, 1995.

(particularly Madeleine Albright) should be held responsible for the diplomatic incompetence and military decisionmaking that made the crisis worse. Albright claimed that she wanted, above all, to stop the killing. At the very least, such humanitarian concern should have led her to adopt the motto, "Above all, do no harm." Of course, a great deal of harm is exactly what ensued. The Secretary of State stumbled into a military intervention for which the United States was unprepared and which could have been avoided had she not misjudged Milosevic's intentions.

Why would it have been better to avoid the showdown with Milosevic over Kosovo? To have avoided the humanitarian crisis is not the only answer. The other answer is that the circumstances for creating a lasting peace in Kosovo are now worse since Vojislav Kostunica has been elected as a democratically elected, legitimate leader of Yugoslavia.

Kostunica's victory is, of course, good news for Serbia and Europe, but it is not necessarily good news for the Albanian Kosovars who want independence. As a democrat favored by the United States, NATO, and the European Union, Kostunica may be less prone than Milosevic to violence in Kosovo, but he is no less committed to retaining Serbian sovereignty over it. As he reminded the Europeans, Albanian independence is "impossible because there is the U.N. Security Council's Resolution 1244 that guarantees that territorial integrity and sovereignty of the FRY."<sup>23</sup>

Kostunica also has linked the release of Albanian prisoners in Serbia to the fate of missing Kosovar Serbs. Moreover, he has expressed open hostility toward the municipal elections administered by the United Nations in Kosovo, arguing that they would "legalize ethnic cleansing against the Serbs."<sup>24</sup> This is complicating not only

NATO's and the U.N.'s positions in Kosovo, but also Kostunica's relations with the European Union.<sup>25</sup>

Kostunica's victory puts the United States and NATO in a very uncomfortable position in Kosovo. So long as the Albanian Kosovars had Milosevic as their enemy, they could hope that NATO forces inside Kosovo would someday support them in their bid for complete independence. Now that Serbia has an ostensibly democratic leader, those hopes have been dashed.

As Hashim Thaci, former leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army and now head of the Kosovo Democratic Party, has promised, "Kosovo will not be part of Serbia whether it's dictatorial Serbia or a democratic Serbia."<sup>26</sup> Bernard Kouchner, the head of the United Nations mission in Kosovo, says that Kosovo Albanians are highly suspicious of Kostunica. "It would be childish to pretend that they [Kosovo Albanians] have been fighting only against Milosevic," says Kouchner.<sup>27</sup>

NATO may now face a situation in which its friendliness with Kostunica causes a conflict between NATO and the Albanian Kosovars. Disappointed that their dreams of independence are no longer realizable, they may turn to violence against NATO, particularly if Serbs begin returning to Kosovo. Caught between a democratic nationalist Serbia and a non-democratic but nationalist Kosovo liberation movement demanding independence, NATO at the very least will be torn between two very bad choices. At the very worst, it could end up fighting a guerilla war against the people it was supposed to protect—the Albanian Kosovars.

Clearly, in hindsight, it would have been better not to involve U.S. and NATO peacekeeping forces directly in Kosovo. The question, then, is what

23. "Kostunica—Constitution Does Not Permit Kosovo, Montenegro's Independence," Tanjug News Agency, October 10, 2000.

24. "Belgrade Hostile Towards 'Untimely' Kosovo Elections," Agence France-Presse, October 26, 2000.

25. "Kostunica Refuses to Yield on Kosovo Prisoners," IPR Strategic Business Database, October 17, 2000.

26. Peter Finn, "Change Seen in Kosovo, Montenegro," *The Washington Post*, October 7, 2000, p. A18.

27. "Kosovo Wary of Kostunica," *CNN.com*, October 9, 2000.



could have been done differently? Any alternative to direct NATO intervention would have been less than perfect. After all, the high degree of risk and uncertainty associated with alternatives like arming the KLA was instrumental in convincing U.S. and NATO leaders to choose direct intervention. But it is also true that the current situation is less than perfect. On top of that, it presents the U.S. with serious dilemmas whose resolution bears directly on America's credibility as a world power.

The United States should have had choices other than supporting the KLA and direct NATO intervention in Kosovo. The KLA was not a good candidate for U.S. military assistance. Their leadership had ties to organized crime and extremist left-wing political causes. Efforts should have been made years before to identify and create an alternative to the KLA—in other words, a viable democratic opposition that was not corrupt and avoided leftist and Islamic extremism. Had this been done, the U.S. might not have been left with so few alternatives once the fighting began inside Kosovo.

Had the U.S. been able to help forge a democratic opposition in Kosovo less intent on demanding complete independence, it might have been able to provide them with enough assistance, including arms, to fight Milosevic to a standstill inside Kosovo. This might have produced an internal settlement providing Kosovo with more autonomy. Arguably, one of the main driving forces behind the independence movement inside Kosovo was the feeling of Albanian helplessness in the face of Yugoslav repression. Had the Albanians been able to defend themselves early on—and had the groundwork been done to find democratic, secular alternative leadership inside the Kosovo opposition movement—the Albanians might have been less demanding of independence as a final solution to Kosovo's problems.

At least this way, the U.S. and NATO would not have been directly involved as guarantors of a settlement that is in political trouble. Moreover, the complicity of the U.S. and NATO in making deals with Milosevic, which was implicit at Rambouillet, would have been avoided. Sanctions on Yugoslavia

could have been continued—something that likely would not have happened had Milosevic accepted an agreement at Rambouillet. Pressure would have continued on Milosevic unabated, and most likely increased, as a result of the sanctions and the military pressure of Albanians resisting his repression inside Kosovo.

**Dayton Revisited.** The Dayton Accords have left the U.S. in a bind in Bosnia, but not one on which Kostunica's victory will have much of an effect. Kostunica has pledged cooperation with his neighbors, including Bosnia. This is good news for the stability of the Balkans.

But the U.S. should not expect Kostunica to be in full agreement with it on all matters relating to Bosnia. NATO should not expect Kostunica to be cooperative in bringing such war criminals as Ratko Mladic or Radovan Karadzic to justice. After all, he has refused to turn over the chief war criminal—Milosevic—to Western authorities. Kostunica has been quite close to Karadzic in the past.<sup>28</sup>

Kostunica's victory will do little to solve the basic problem with the Dayton Accords: the contradiction between the two opposing goals of democratization and multi-ethnicity. The Dayton Accords created a loose multi-ethnic confederation that in reality is a partitioned state consisting of independently functioning ethnic entities. Most of the people living in the Serb, Croat, and Muslim parts of this state will not vote to elect leaders who believe in the multi-ethnic ideal of the Bosnia state. They will instead choose extremist leaders who promise to protect them from their ethnic enemies.

Under these circumstances, NATO peacekeepers will be necessary for many years to come to enforce the unity of the Bosnian state. The essential problem is that NATO is enforcing a constitutional order on Bosnia that many of its ethnic communities reject. Since the unified Bosnian state lacks legitimacy in the eyes of many of its citizens, it can be maintained only by outside force. Thus, NATO, and through it the United States, will function not merely as a peacekeeper—something that

28. Zoran Cirjakovic and Russell Watson, "The New Un-Milosevic," *Newsweek*, September 18, 2000, p. 16.

most Bosnians now welcome. It may also be perceived eventually as a foreign occupying force denying them their democratic choice of self-rule.

In hindsight, it would have been far better to follow the advice of Bob Dole and others who advocated lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims to allow them to defend themselves. This would have prevented the need for a NATO intervention in the first place. Able to defend themselves, the Bosnian Muslims would not have needed direct protection from NATO.

Moreover, it would have avoided creating the current impossible political situation inside Bosnia. Establishing a balance of power inside Bosnia, arming the Muslims would have given them the security to reach an accord with the Serbs based on strength, rather than weakness.<sup>29</sup> This approach also would have avoided lifting the sanctions on Milosevic. Thus, instead of three years of respite from sanctions, during which Milosevic made trouble in Kosovo, there would have been three years of the relentless pressure that eventually could have brought the dictator down.

It should always be remembered that NATO was kicking in a rotten door with the Bosnian intervention. The Bosnian Serbs had been defeated on the battlefield by a combination of the Croatian offensive in the Krajina, the cooperation of the Muslim–Croat Confederation, and NATO bombing. When NATO peacekeepers entered Bosnia, they were entering not as combatants but as peacekeepers facing a defeated and demoralized Serbian force. Although all the major parties, including Milosevic, agreed to these accords, it was plain at the time that they were doing so out of exhaustion and fear rather than out of confidence in the terms of the political settlement established at Dayton.

Had the United States and NATO provided armed support to the Muslims in Bosnia against the Bosnian Serbs, Milosevic would have faced

intense pressure on two fronts—in Serbia and Bosnia. No one will ever know how this internal pressure would have affected Milosevic’s political fortunes. At the very least, he would not have had free rein to crack down on Kosovo. Tied down in Bosnia, and not enjoying the benefits of lifted sanctions, Milosevic might have found a stepped-up military repression in Kosovo too costly to undertake—particularly if NATO bombing was a constant threat. Instead, after Dayton, he was free to crack down on the KLA because the Bosnian front was quiet, and at least up until 1998 had good reason to believe that his Western negotiating partners might give him a free hand in Kosovo if he left Bosnia alone.

### **DAYTON AND KOSOVO: DID THEY PLAY A ROLE IN MILOSEVIC’S FALL?**

Some analysts have concluded that the Kosovo intervention and the Dayton Accords contributed directly to the downfall of Milosevic. They argue that they demonstrated Western resolve and put tremendous pressure on Milosevic, contributing to his isolation. They were, in this view, linchpins in the West’s containment strategy against Serbia.

A review of the facts tells a different story. The most important reason for the fall of Slobodan Milosevic can be found in internal Serbian politics, not in the impact of the Kosovo intervention. The key development in the rise of Vojislav Kostunica was that Serbia’s democratic opposition became unified behind a common candidate. The emergence of Kostunica as a credible opposition candidate who could win an election brought a revolutionary change to Serbian politics. The opposition had been unified once before, in 1996, but Milosevic had stolen their electoral victories from them. The unification of the opposition behind Kostunica was motivated by the desire to avoid having the elections stolen once again, and

29. Such an accord may very well have led to partition, but sometimes separation is necessary to break the psychological barriers to peace. As Robert Kaplan says in his new book, *Eastward to Tartary: Travels in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus* (New York: Random House, 2000), “The ‘peace process’ is like a divorce process for a couple. A messy and complicated divorce can take a long time, but once the divorce has been made final, the people involved can treat each other like human beings again.” Quoted in Georgie Anne Geyer, “Is Separation in Their Future?” *The Washington Times*, October 26, 2000, p. A17.

in recognition that the opposition's weakness played into the hands of Milosevic's divide-and-rule strategy.

Surprisingly, according to the polls, Milosevic's military defeat in Kosovo had little to do with his fall from power. Milosevic's failure in Kosovo made him very unpopular in the months following the NATO intervention, but his popularity began to rise as the memory of the NATO bombing dissipated. Milosevic's popularity hit an all-time low after the Kosovo defeat. In 1999, his approval rating dropped to its lowest point of 20 percent<sup>30</sup> However, throughout 2000, his popularity began to rise again. By April 2000, it had risen to its pre-Kosovo level of 34 percent<sup>31</sup> Milosevic had recovered popular support temporarily lost by the Kosovo defeat. Indeed, his rising popularity gave him renewed confidence and was an important reason why he called for new elections.

The decisive change in public opinion at this time, however, was not about Milosevic, but about the rising support for Kostunica. This occurred dramatically after Milosevic announced the new elections in July 2000. Once it became clear that the opposition was united behind a non-corrupt democratic candidate, Kostunica's fortunes began to skyrocket in the polls. His approval rating rose from 34 percent at the time the elections were announced to 49 percent by August.<sup>32</sup> All the while, Milosevic's approval ratings remained flat at around 34 percent.<sup>33</sup>

The decisive difference in this electoral campaign was the changing fortunes and perceptions of the opposition, not Milosevic's standing with the Serbian people. Milosevic's popularity at the time of the election announcement was about

what it was in 1997 before the Kosovo intervention began.

More important than the Kosovo failure in Milosevic's downfall was the continuing economic crisis. People blamed the crisis on Milosevic. In fact, 41 percent of those surveyed in a post-election opinion poll by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs listed the economic crisis and poverty as the most important issues in the election campaign.<sup>34</sup> Added to Yugoslavia's increasing sense of international isolation, which had been underscored by the re-imposition of sanctions in 1998, Serbs found it increasingly difficult to imagine a positive future with Milosevic in power. While it is true that Milosevic's defeat in Kosovo underscored Serbia's isolation, it is not true that it was decisive or even more important than the economic crisis in turning public opinion against him.

If anything, the Kosovo intervention made it more difficult for the opposition to bring Milosevic down. Kostunica and the democratic opposition vehemently opposed the NATO intervention in Kosovo. They denounced it in terms much the same as those employed by Milosevic. On the campaign trail, Kostunica referred to the NATO air campaign as "NATO's criminal bombing of Yugoslavia."<sup>35</sup>

Not wanting to appear to be kowtowing to the West, Kostunica and other opposition leaders kept their distance from the United States and other Western countries. Unlike Vuk Draskovic, whose picture kissing Albright's hand had become famous in Serbia, Kostunica refused to be seen as an advocate of close relations with the West. His criticism of NATO's intervention and his distance from the West—coupled with his reputation for

30. For example, see the independent Center for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research at the Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade, <http://www.cpijm.org.yu>.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. National Democratic Institute, "Serbia Post-Election Poll," October 6, 2000.

35. Steven Erlanger and Carlotta Gall, "In Yugoslavia's Campaign, Rallies Highlight 2 Worlds in Serious Conflict," *International Herald Tribune*, September 22, 2000, p. 4.

being incorruptible—gave Kostunica credibility in the eyes of the Serbian people.

This created complications for the United States and NATO. Because of the political fallout of the Kosovo intervention, the democratic opposition in Serbia was isolated from the West at a time when they could have used its financial and political backing. Since such aid would have discredited Kostunica, he did not ask for it. Indeed, because of the democratic opposition's nationalism, Western countries found it difficult if not impossible to conceive of an effective aid or support strategy for the democratic opposition. On Kosovo, many in the opposition sounded like clones of Milosevic. On top of that, Kostunica wanted to have nothing to do with the West and its promises of assistance.

On balance, NATO's Kosovo intervention did more to keep Milosevic in power than to remove him. Kostunica won the Yugoslavian presidential election in spite of the Kosovo intervention, not because of it. If the sanctions on Yugoslavia had not been lifted in 1995 as a result of the Dayton Accords, disillusionment with Milosevic might have peaked earlier. While it is true that the destruction caused by NATO bombing contributed to Serbia's economic problems, and thereby reinforced the feeling of hopelessness inside Serbia, it also created a nationalist backlash that Milosevic exploited to hang onto power. And it deepened the alienation of the Serbian opposition from the West, not only depriving them of outside support, but also creating a deep-seated mistrust that will make it exceedingly difficult to solve problems in Kosovo now that Kostunica has been elected president of Yugoslavia.

## THE LESSONS OF MILOSEVIC'S FALL

Reviewing the history of the Balkans over the past decade, certain lessons can be drawn for U.S. policymakers.

- **Sanctions can work when they are universally applied by a broader coalition and other circumstances are favorable.** One of the keys to the success of the containment policy against Milosevic was the fact that the sanctions were applied universally. All European

countries, including the Russians, joined in most of the sanctions. Since the United Nations backed them, so did most of the rest of the world. This only shows what could be done against other rogue states such as Iraq and Iran if the U.S. were to enjoy greater support from its allies in their sanctions policies against countries that threaten international peace and stability.

- **In resolving regional disputes, U.S. policy must be sharply focused and absolutely consistent; special care must be taken to avoid expedient short-term initiatives or compromises that undermine the long-term strategy.** Clearly, the goal of U.S. Balkan policy should have been focused consistently on getting rid of Milosevic. Nothing should have distracted U.S. policy and negotiations from that goal. Yet that is precisely what happened at Dayton. As a result, Milosevic was given a new lease on life to make trouble in Kosovo. This was a serious miscalculation that may have prolonged Milosevic's tenure in power and convinced him that he could get away with a crackdown in Kosovo.
- **Threaten force only when adequately prepared to follow through, and only then when the use of force will be decisive in reaching a final settlement of the problem.** Secretary of State Albright showed exceedingly bad judgement in threatening force against Milosevic without adequate preparation. When her bluff was called, the United States was ill-prepared to deal with the military and humanitarian crisis Milosevic unleashed on Kosovo. When threatening military action, the U.S. not only must be militarily prepared, with adequate resources on hand and well-prepared contingency plans in place. It also must have thought through the political implications of its policy. Albright's belated readiness to accept terms that had been rejected at Rambouillet raises serious questions about what the air strikes were supposed to achieve. These air strikes unintentionally sparked a massive humanitarian crisis that NATO was not prepared to stop (by using ground forces, for

example). Moreover, since Milosevic got a better deal after the intervention than before, Albright might have saved a large number of lives had she proposed the terms of the final Kosovo settlement at Rambouillet.

- **Commit U.S. ground forces in civil conflicts only as a last resort, and then only with a clear military mission and exit strategy.** U.S. forces are now stuck in the middle of an ethnic dispute between an emerging democratic Serbia and a non-democratic Albanian majority in Kosovo on whose behalf NATO first intervened. Clearly, it would have been far better for the Kosovars, the United States, and Europe as whole had the Kosovo war never occurred. Instead of thinking of U.S. military force as a first option in solving these conflicts, ways should be found to resolve conflicts without direct U.S. military intervention. Sustained pressure on Milosevic and less bluffing on the part of U.S. negotiators might have prevented the crisis that eventually only force could resolve.
- **Delegate to allies the main responsibility for peacemaking and peacekeeping in civil conflicts.** If direct military intervention in civil conflicts is deemed to be absolutely necessary, U.S. military involvement should be minimized. U.S. armed forces should become directly involved in peacemaking and peacekeeping operations only if U.S. national security interests are endangered, the mission and exit strategy are clear, and the use of U.S. forces will be decisive. Otherwise, with U.S. logistical and perhaps air support, allied ground forces should take the lead in peacemaking and peacekeeping operations. Such operations degrade America's war-fighting capability.
- **Ensure that the political settlement is consistent with democratic principles.** Freedom and democracy are the bedrock principles of the American nation, and U.S. policymakers forget these principles at their peril. Attempts to create new political configurations with force, as was done with the creation of a non-democratic multi-ethnic state in Bosnia, not

only will be corrosive of American principles, but also are not likely to bring peace and stability. When the U.S. sponsors a settlement of a civil war or regional conflict, it should always ensure that it respects the democratic will of the people.

- **Make greater efforts to build democratic opposition movements in civil conflicts, giving the U.S. options other than direct intervention.** The corrupt and political nature of the Kosovo Liberation Army reduced U.S. options considerably in Kosovo. Direct military intervention by NATO was deemed a better alternative than arming an extremist group that many people mistrusted. But something surely could have been done earlier to find alternative leaders who were more willing to accept democratic principles in return for Western aid. At the very least, leaders could have been found who were less corrupt and more willing to isolate political and Islamic extremists. The U.S. has decades of experience in finding and working with democratic politicians in unstable regions of the world. This seems to have been forgotten in Kosovo.

Although such preventive action must be taken, however, U.S. leaders should not make the perfect the enemy of the good. Sometimes, the U.S. will have to support groups that do not fully share American values. But this a compromise the United States makes all the time—in establishing close relations with non-democratic states like Saudi Arabia and in providing assistance to people like Haitian leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who have less than perfect democratic credentials. This, too, seems to have been forgotten in Kosovo.

## CONCLUSION

The worst mistake made by U.S. policymakers in the Balkans is that misguided humanitarian impulses clouded their judgement of the political complexities of the Balkans. It led them to hastily make Milosevic a partner in peace in Bosnia. It made them miscalculate his intentions at Rambouillet. And it led U.S. policymakers to create an

artificial, non-democratic state in Bosnia that can be sustained only by the application of outside military force.

Kostunica's victory will do nothing to alleviate the contradictions of U.S. policy in Bosnia and Kosovo. In Kosovo, it may actually make matters worse. President Clinton and his administration have tried to convince the American people that their actions were necessary and inevitable. That simply is not true. Like all policy decisions, other

choices could have been made. Had they made them, the Balkans would have been in a better condition to take advantage of something for which America and Europe have been waiting a very long time—the election of a democratic president in Yugoslavia.

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