

PAPER FOR VIENNA CONFERENCE June 2010

James Pettifer

Summary

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS KOSOVA 1989-2008

1 Introduction

I would first like to read to you a few lines from the work of the well known Serbian historian Mihailo Stojanovic which were written in 1939. He was considering in his book 'The Great Powers and the Balkans 1875-78't the situation of the Powers at the time of the Congress of Berlin.

" The crisis of 1875-1878 may be considered as a prelude to the World War of 1914, at least so far as Europe was concerned. It opened in the Balkans with a question which seemed to be a local one, but which in fact cut deeply into the question of the predominance in the Balkans, and therefore had great repercussions on the position of the Powers in general. The main factors which determined the grouping of the Powers were already in existence at that time."

This framework of analysis may seem archaic to us today, but there is one constant, I would suggest, in the era of a single superpower, or, as some prefer the United States as 'hyperpower'. The

conditions in which policy was made and exercised were dependent on contingent events, which neither the Powers then or the USA today really controlled, and in unstable conditions that developed towards intermittent major crises over a long period of time.

US foreign policy evolves under the pressure of events like that of any other country. The central event in the last twenty years in south east Europe has been the end of Yugoslavia. Kosova was then an integral part of Yugoslavia and much of what I want to say in the first part of this paper concerns US policy towards Yugoslavia as a whole. There was no separate Kosova policy for many years, arguably not until 1997-1998 when the Kosova Liberation Army appeared on the scene and it was clear another major ground conflict was beginning. The Albanian majority wanted independence but the international community in the main did not, fearing to disturb another hornets' nest in the Balkans. And that was in many ways the end of the subject. Yet a disintegration of Yugoslavia was already foreseen in many quarters in Washington and many old issues including the future of Kosova would inevitably emerge. In the well known Central Intelligence Agency document produced in 1990, a violent end to Yugoslavia was predicted. It is but a short step to seeing this as an issue of causality, where the document of intelligence analysis was the father to the practical policy, as Shakespeare once wrote the child is father to the man.

It is certainly an important document, and there are many others in the remarkable volume that was published in 2006 in Washington, "Yugoslav Communism- from National Communism 'to National Collapse'" which I think will prove seminal in all future historical writing on this subject. I say historical writing because I think this is how the region is best studied, and not in faculties of political science, economics, anthropology, religion or art history, to name a few where during the wartime period their parameters had an often determinate role on the analytical discourse.

The terrible conflicts we witnessed were very unfortunate, in my view, to take place when the ideas of Francis Fukuyama and others about the end of history were very current, and particularly so in the

United States¹. I think it is a fair comment to say that the violent eruption of 'history' in the form of the ex Yugoslav wars was seen as such an aberration when all Western publics were being told in 1989 by many liberal commentators that history had in some sense ended. The Balkans returned when Europe was supposed to be the future, neo-liberal in economics, or social market, and where communism was seen as responsible for most ethnic conflict and 'nationalism' in eastern Europe. The main period of effective resistance to Yugoslav revisionist communism in Kosovo had taken place between 1987 and 1989, as I have indicated in my book 'Kosova Express'. The Albanian majority in Kosova were a beaten people under the heel of the Milosevic martial law system by 1990 and 1991 and could be left out of most international calculations.ⁱ

American foreign policy has many mansions, as befits a very large and complex nation that found itself the world's only superpower after 1989 and 1990. There are nevertheless some basic continuities, for instance I think there is no doubt that the general perception in Albania and Kosova that the US is the only country that can really be trusted to protect it goes back ultimately to the positions taken by President Woodrow Wilson before the First World War when nations like France and Greece were not in favour of the boundaries of the modern Albanian state. We can nevertheless try to sketch out a basic narrative, in line with the changes in administrations and Presidents over these years, and also some continuities. There is also a great deal of ideology around. The end of history in 1990 did not mean the end of historical indeed historicist ideology. We passed from the neo-realist pragmatic conservatism most usually associated with the name of Henry Kissinger to the quietism one might associate with Warren Christopher and Sandy Berger to the influence of the theories of globalization and the neo-liberal interventionism that came with the neo-cons. I am sure I need not remind you that while the US

role in Bosnia is perhaps the prototype for the latter, Kosovo was the first fully fledged example of neo-liberal interventionism in actionⁱⁱ. In the background is always the shadow of the theories of Samuel Huntington and the clash of civilization theory, into which, I must say at the outset, Yugoslavia and its collapse did not fit. But that did not stop Huntington's acolytes from attempting to see it that way for a long time.

I think there are three main phases of policy development. The first was with the beginning of the breakup of Yugoslavia from 1990 to 1993 and the onset of the Bosnian war. This was the period of traditionalist policy where the US government sought to in essence continue policies that had developed for many years in the latter stages of the Cold War. Yugoslavia was seen as a potential friend, and sometimes an actual friend. In the contest for influence with Russia and the Warsaw Pact in the region, Yugoslavia was a barrier against the spread of further Russian influence in the region. A unitary Yugoslavia was essential in these circumstances. Within Yugoslavia it was always acknowledged that there were human rights and national problems. Optimists saw Titoism as evolving towards greater democracy, while pessimists, often conservative and often republican saw Titoism as the best that could be hoped for in a volatile region like the Balkans and Tito as making the best of a bad job. There were also those who saw Yugoslav communism as an enemy and as part of the problem of the 'captive nations of eastern Europe' but they were on the whole in a small minority and usually Republican and often tied with what were then regarded as the sectional interests of particular exiled south east European ethnic groups within US politics

1990 was well before the days of modern professional lobbies on Capitol Hill but lobbies nonetheless existed with local regional foci, like the Croatian factor in Pittsburg and Pennsylvania and the Albanians

in New Jersey and New York and the Serbs in Cleveland Ohio, Chicago and the industrial mid-west in general. I think it also important to remember that in the US there were always commentators and authors of a responsible and informed kind who did not accept the legitimacy of Yugoslav communism, such as Slobodan Draskovich with his book 'Tito- Moscow's Trojan Horse'ⁱⁱⁱ. This is said to have been a major influence on the young Madelaine Albright. Now I don't know whether that is a correct speculation or not but I think it is important to note that this kind of current of opinion existed in US academia in a way that it did not much – or at all – in the Britain or France. In London in the Cold War Tito was seen as a barrier to Moscow influence, almost exclusively, in mainstream Foreign office circles, as the memoirs of numerous British Ambassadors to Belgrade in the 1950's and 1960's indicate.

Like many other nations, when the conflicts began in 1990 and 1991, the US did not know what to do. But it was not at this stage called upon to play a particularly important role. This was, after all, the hour of Europe, as the first European Union foreign policy envoys to the Balkans put it, and there was a very strong sense that this was an evolving problem for the Europeans and should be solved by them. I would draw your attention to a book title, by a Dutch author, Norbert Both, about the Dutch foreign policy and the Balkans. It was called 'From Indifference to Entrapment'^{iv}. Much the same could be said of the processes of US policy at the time. Early records by those such as US Ambassador Warren Zimmerman are focused on the irrationality and difficulty of dealing with the different national leaders, primarily Milosevic and Tudjman, of course, in his book but always within the parameters of trying to keep a reformed and future democratic Yugoslavia together. The crisis of Yugoslavia was seen as in mainstream Washington as a crisis of the absence of rational leadership. In Europe it was often seen very differently, as a problem of old nationalist resurgence, ethnic war and religious conflict. Ironically, in many some EU leaders absorbed the Huntingtonian script much more than the United States did.

Yet it was also the time of US Secretary of State James Baker's well known remark in 1992 that he would like to see Serbia return to the size it was before the battle of Kumanovo, in other words its pre-Balkan wars borders. The warning to Milosevic was given the same year from US President George Bush that there was a 'Line in the Sand' over Kosova and if Milosevic spread the war there, US intervention would become at least a possibility. The Republican Party was much more open to the influence of the 'captive nations' theorists who saw nations such as Croatia and Slovenia and Kosovo and Macedonia as effectively imprisoned within an imposed construct called Yugoslavia. As the conflicts developed other powerful lobbies came into play. The most obvious and best known of these is the Vatican and elements in the US Italian orbit who wanted to see an independent Croatia. Vatican influence was in my view substantial in some of the US intelligence agencies and also the National Security Council and the decommunisation of Poland and the arrival of a Polish origin Pope are linked background factors. Change in Poland was a key US foreign policy objective in Europe in this period, along with the reunification of Germany. German influence is always much stronger, in my opinion, in the US, than is often realized and Germany was much more open to the possibility of new independent states in the Balkans than Britain or France, above all, and also most other EU partner states.

It did not take long for this policy to show serious strains under the pressure of events. The conflict of policy between the UK and Germany over the recognition of Croatia is well known and I need not dwell on it in this paper, or the serious strains caused to traditional policy positions by the violence and scale of the Serbian-Croatian war. This also affected the intelligence and policy world in the USA. As early as mid-1992 there were resignations of State Department officials who wanted a more activist policy and despaired of getting the US involved in the region as an anti-Milosevic force. They were opposed to

those I would call the centralists in Washington who often knew very well what they were dealing with in Milosevic but felt that the alternative of a possible social breakdown and general civil war in Yugoslavia was worse^{vi}. This was also the dominant school of thought in Britain and the Conservative government was deeply wedded to both the idea of a Yugoslavia and also what many would see as Serbia's preponderance within it. Carol Hodge's work on the Serb lobby in Great Britain, and the journalism and books of Noel Malcolm and book of Brendan Simms on Britain and the Bosnian war illustrates this clearly I think. Transatlantic influences in the special relationship certainly encouraged policy conservatism and effective appeasement of Belgrade at this time.

But the State Department was not the only agency involved. The CIA knew the extent of the human rights violations that were developing in the Bosnian conflict through human sources and the media and electronic intercepts, particularly the role of Milosevic himself. The NSC was well aware of the scale of conservative forces in Yeltsin's Russia that were strongly pro-Milosevic. The Pentagon, the Department of Defense, was also concerned. It is sometimes forgotten how much the modern United States position as a superpower depends on the projection of effective naval power. For these agencies the issue of relations with Belgrade was always indissolubly linked with global policy preoccupations about Moscow and Russia. This was much less the case in Europe. The Adriatic coast has always been of central strategic importance in the history of the Mediterranean, even since ancient, medieval and modern times. It was contested by the French and British in the Napoleonic wars and then in the twentieth century by the various competing powers. In the early Yugoslav period Russian naval bases existed there. I think the Pentagon was happy to see the emergence of an independent and sovereign Croatia that would be pro-Nato and allow its coast to become a NATO strategic asset. The same applied also to Albania where the local lobby in the USA was particularly influential in some states in the Republican party^{vii}. By comparison Belgrade had little to offer the US in modern national security terms in a

globalised world This was something I think Milosevic and perhaps the entire Serbian political elite never really understood until too late.

The arrival of the Clinton administration did not at first change many of these policy parameters.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher did not believe in Balkan activism but the pressure of events again soon became overwhelming. NATO became more and more involved in the Bosnian conflict and ended up undertaking serious military action against the Bosnian Serbs. Clinton was reluctant to see any involvement of US ground troops in the region but was happy to use American air power. The old State Department quietism was under intense pressure from public opinion in the West which wanted to see an end to the savagery of the Bosnian war, and the developing international community identity around a liberal human rights agenda. The Holbrook Balkan peace mission was the exemplar of this change of policy. In Britain the involvement of the government with the Milosevic regime had reached a critical stage, and was subject to very widespread criticism in the media and in independent policy circles. So how do we define this second stage of developing policy? I would suggest it was directed at holding Yugoslavia together, accepting the permanence of the Milosevic regime, but hoping to isolate it by creating a cordon sanitaire of new states like Croatia that would be viable long-term allies of the US.

There is no sense in this period of a need to arrange the overthrow of the Milosevic regime, in a context where I think it would be true to say that Richard Holbrooke saw no obvious alternative ruler, as his fine memoir book *To End a War* shows. So in Althusserian terms, there was no epistemological break with the past, a kind of focus on Belgrade remained but where US power in the region would be exercised through a chain of new friendly states and semi-client rulers, as Berisha's Albania and Tudjman's Croatia became in some important respects.

The third stage is, I think well known. After the Dayton Accords in 1995 the US believed the Balkans had become a significant area of policy achievement and as a result a degree of complacency crept in. The problem of the future of Kosova had not been addressed at Dayton. And Dayton was a great achievement for the US, and there was a very strong incentive not to upset Milosevic by pressing the Kosova issue. But the Kosovars did not wait. The militarization of the issue by the KLA was exactly the same kind of event on the ground that produced policy obsolescence. The military and Department of Defense influence in Washington was growing stronger and stronger all the time, as the prospect of a collapse in Kosova linked to the actual collapse in Albania in 1997 would put into question the entire Department of Defense southern Adriatic policy. Military action against the Bosnian Serbs had produced rapid dividends in the way diplomacy had not. If Milosevic was very successful in Kosova, there was also no reason to think he might return to reopen the question of Bosnia.

A significant factor affecting US policy in this period was the growth in effectiveness of the Albanian lobby on Capitol Hill in the Congress and in the US generally. There had been many organizations of the Albanian Diaspora in the US, some of them venerable, like the cultural organization VATRA which dated back to the last years of the nineteenth century. But the modern lobby has its roots in the anti-communist Albanian and Kosova people who arrived after 1945. The Kosovars were much the most numerous and

The evolution of policy during the Kosova conflict period is also very well known.. The Clinton administration was drawn into the war as the scale and number of human rights violations by the Serbian military forces increased during the summer and autumn of 1998.^{viii} The central dilemma was in military terms always over the use of US ground forces. The political dilemma was more complex. The

State Department was worried about upsetting the Dayton settlement if they went too far against Milosevic over Kosova and had no particular wish to see the increasing but abstract commitment to an independent Kosova translated into active support for the Kosova Albanian guerillas. Key figures such as Madelaine Albright and Richard Holbrooke had nonetheless seen in May-June 1998 that a settlement in Kosova would be impossible without the involvement of the KLA, and had modified policy accordingly.^{ix}

From the autumn of 1998 onwards, events on the ground determined policy, as the Racak massacre in January 1999 made international intervention under US and NATO leadership inevitable. But this should not be misunderstood as a change in active political policy. Policy was driven by a humanitarian agenda. The priority was to end the ethnic cleansing, restore peace of some kind and hopefully produce a negotiated deal with Milosevic to allow an international peacekeeping force into Kosova. These were all worthy objectives but did not even touch on the problem of sovereignty or governance, except insofar as if there was a large NATO-led peacekeeping force in situ, it would become the effective government in many dimensions and might preclude any decision of the political status or independence of Kosova for a long time.

In practice, of course, the US military was plunged into a peacekeeping role in the NATO KFOR force that began work in Kosova in summer 1999, but in a very different operative environment to that which some military planners had anticipated a year or two before. The south east Operational Zone was large, overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian and with an imminent conflict in the Preshevo Valley in south east Serbia over the order about to break out^x. The pressing need to avoid casualties led to many peacekeeping duties being loosely defined, and in any event, most of the American soldiers there were top front rank troops from Pathfinder and other elite regiments who had little training in the often dull routines of peacekeeping. The long term objectives of the Pentagon were soon exemplified by the construction of Camp Bondsteel as a permanent and very large American base

The chosen instrument of Secretary of State Condi Rice wanted to run a diametrically opposite policy. The well known US proclivity of seeing the problems of a society as those caused by the 'bad guy at the top' was in action, with the removal of Milosevic seen as the removal of the problem of Yugoslavia itself. Mistakenly, the removal of Milosevic was seen as a solution to the national question in the remaining 'captive' lands of Montenegro and Kosova. Nation building with all its difficulties would not be required if the old Yugoslavia could be kept alive in some form. The most committed 'New World Order' people did not see that the US however powerful the US was in the world generally – and this period in Kosova coincided with the most elevated period of the Bush administrations international ambitions – the USA could not ride roughshod over all local Balkan nationalist opinion. Much of the political psychology and cosmic optimism of the immediate post 1989 world in eastern Europe resurfaced several years later after the Fall of Milosevic. It was noticeable at the time that some key US initiatives towards Belgrade, such as getting openings for US media actors like CNN originated in the summer after the entry of NATO into Kosova.

In Washington there were many competing voices seeking to attract favour with the Bush administration. Liberals and those close to the Democrats saw the chance to build a new democratic Yugoslavia and keep Kosovo within Serbia. In Britain with its important influence on US Kosova policy under Tony Blair the government was losing interest in developments and was content to hand over matters to the UNMIK international administration. The odd course the UNMIK administration of Kosovo followed between 2000 and 2004 was a policy primarily evolved in pro-Serb quarters in Europe^{xi}. London was important in these deliberations, with the establishment of a secret Serbia task force composed of intelligence officers and diplomats that worked out of the British Embassy in Budapest between 1999 and 2003. The general ethos of this group was not in the main against the 1999 NATO intervention but sought to resist Kosova Albanian nationalist objectives and restore a 'democratic'

Belgrade to a central position of influence in the Balkans, preferably in a new Yugoslavia. Like many British Balkan initiatives, it was strongly marked by nostalgia and an obsolete preoccupation with Serbia as the most important force in the Balkans when in reality under neo-liberal economic influences and US defence policy its central focus was moving to the coast of the Adriatic. Some US Ambassadors in the region, like William Montgomery knew about this venture and were keen to assist it but others were suspicious of British objectives and saw the operation as a way to restore the traditional British 'special relationship' with Belgrade. There were close British links to the post-Milosevic government of Kostunica and the latter had attended pro-Royalist conferences at Windsor and in London in December 2000. An interesting feature of the immediate post-Milosevic world future students of the region will study will be the background Royalist influences in the overthrow period in 2000 and immediately afterwards. Again, much of this activity was in London rather than Washington, as the ex-King of Greece resides in the United Kingdom, the pretender to the Serbian throne lives in London, and there is a considerable overlap between supporters of the restoration of both monarchs.^{xii} In Greece, the King's supporters had been very active in promoting the cause of the 2004 Olympic Games and were trying to get the active support of the Bush administration for a referendum in Athens on the return of the King. The swing away for the Albanians and towards Belgrade in this period was a London-engendered movement and it did not change the developing conviction in Washington that a return to the old days of a federal Yugoslavia were over and the reality of a move towards Kosova independence was inevitable. This perception was strengthened by the spring 2004 riots in Kosova which led to fatalities and a crisis for the credibility of the existing UNMIK international administration.^{xiii}

The cause of Kosova Albanian independence had been damaged by the human rights violations many of the Kosova Serb minority had suffered in summer 1999. The US policy once again went along with the policy of 'nursing Kosova back towards Serbia', as one US official once put it to me. But events had

their momentum, as we have seen, and after the violence of 2003 and 2004 in Kosova the message got across that the patience of nine out of ten citizens was running out and independence could not any longer be prevented, particularly in the absence of any alternative policy that was credible. Kosova is now independent, or at least has a form of dependent and unsatisfactory independence. The independence of Montenegro in 2004 was the precursor, and Yugoslavia no longer exists. And Kosova has one of the most pro-American majority population of any nations in the world, and the decisions of Woodrow Wilson nearly a hundred years ago continue to reverberate around the region.

Critics of the United States role in the region since 1999, principally in Serbia , Greece and Russia have tended to base their views on the real or alleged existence of an overall master plan for American control of he Balkans and the encouragement (or at least tolerance of) local nationalisms as an antidote to internationalist Europeanism. This would appear to be far from the truth. After 1990 policy eveolved uneasily, often in fits and starts and without an overall consensus among the main government departments and agencies. This meant policy was prone to sudden changes of direction, as after 1999, when a particularly well organized group or lobby succeeded in imposing a new paradigm. Most of all, changes of tack have occurred as a necessity in order to adapt to new realities created on the ground by new political actors, very often . The US has involved itself in such iniatives, as in 'Operation Storm' in Cratia in early 1999 but generally in a cautious framework of backing existing winners rather than trying to change the outcome of the contest. It can be argued that this was the case even with the 76-day NATO bombing campaign in Kosova, for as even an international leader so ardently pro-Kosova as UK Prime Minister Tony Blair revealed in 1999,there had been little international community discussions about the final status issue at the time of the military campaign^{xiv} .

ⁱ Pettifer.J,'Kosova Express', London and Wisconsin, 2005

ⁱⁱ There is a large and growing literature in the US and elsewhere on this subject e.g. the work of Bacevich and Cohen, and extensive writing on the military operations.

ⁱⁱⁱ Draskovich.S 'Tito Moscow's Trojan Horse', Chicago,1957

^{iv} Both.N 'From Indifference to Entrapment The Netherlands and the Yugoslav crisis 1990-1995', Amsterdam, 2000

^v Recently published material on the 'Wikileaks' website would appear to confirm at least some aspects of my speculation here.

^{vi} A prominent State Department resignation who resigned as a protest about US Balkan policy at the time was f Jim Hooper, who later went on to become involved in the development of the International Crisis Group research and advocacy NGO which published many reports on the region in the wartime period.

^{vii} E.g. in Michigan

^{viii} For details of the war on the ground, see Pettifer.J,'The Kosova Liberation Army Conspiracy and History 1948-2001', London and New York, 2011.

^{ix} See Pettifer.J,Op.cit

^x See Churcher.R,published material on the Preshevo conflict 2000-2001 on www.mod.csrc.ac.uk , under 'Balkan Publications' category.

^{xi} The policy 'solutions'put forward to end the Preshevo crisis in 2000, such as the spring 2000 'Covil Plan' certainly fall intot his category.

^{xii} In, for instance, the organization of some of the first 'unity' meetings of the Serbian opposition which took place near Athens and were alleged to be financed by prominent London-based Greek shipowning families.

^{xiii} There is an extensive literature on the problems of the UNMIK administration. See Mason.W and Oliver.I 'Peace at any Price', London, 2005 for an account by disillusioned UNMIK staff that gives a good general picture although many might wish to disagree with some detailed evaluations.

^{xiv} Pettifer.J.Op.cit