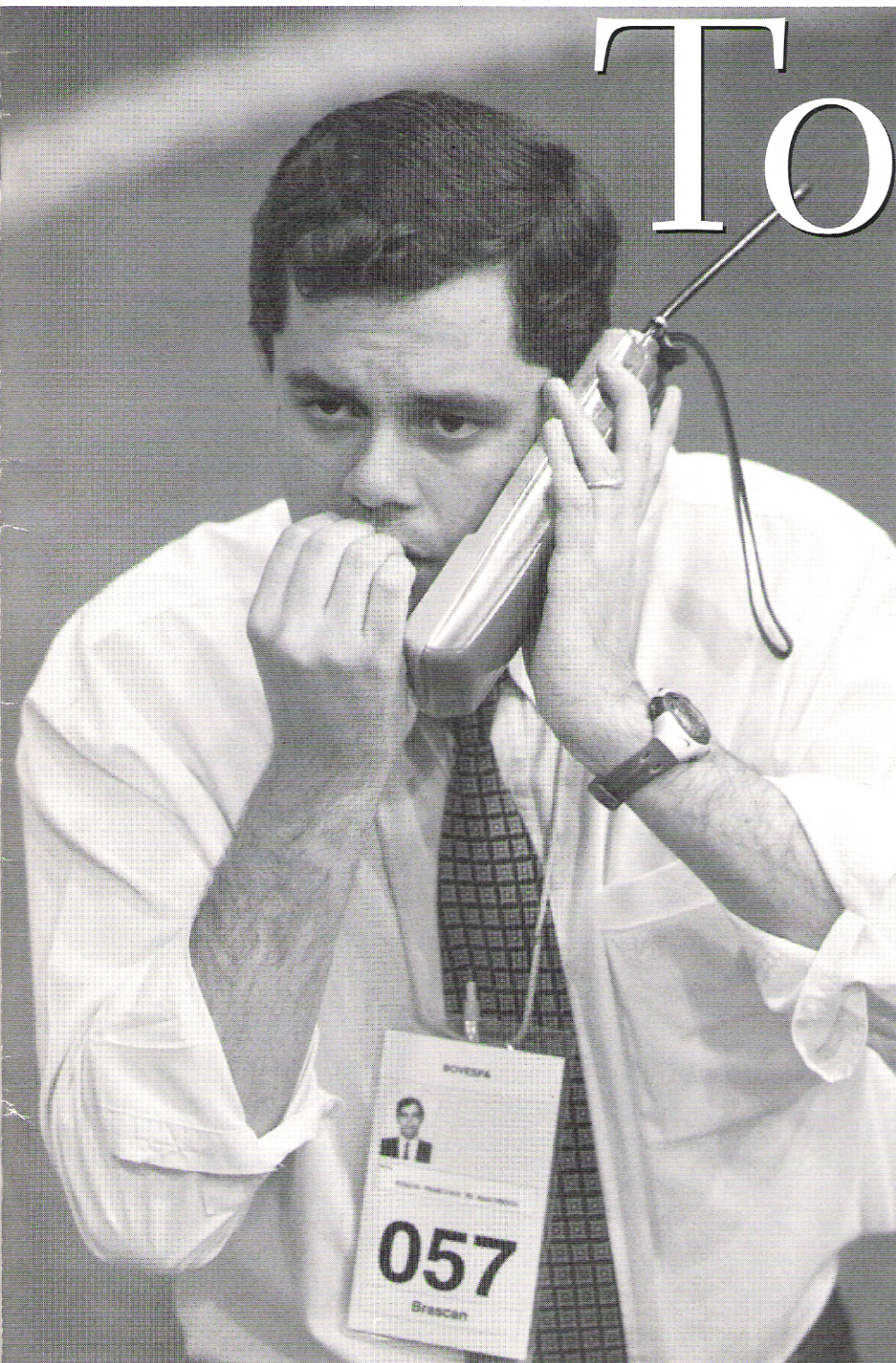


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The World Today



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FACING REALITIES IN

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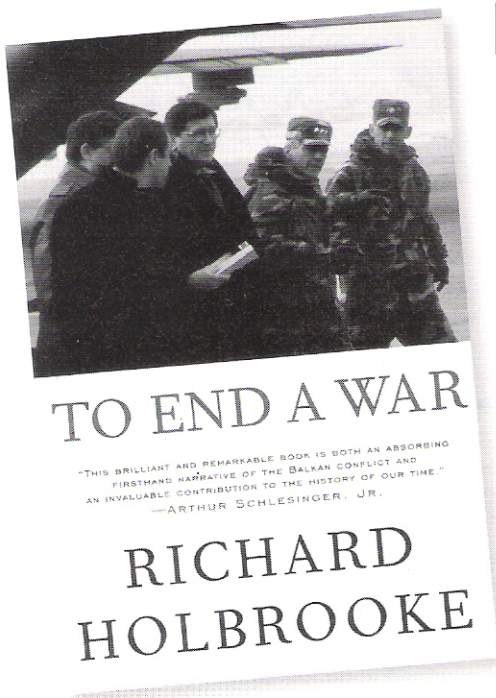
There is great relief that the 11th hour settlement in Belgrade has seemingly averted the necessity for NATO air strikes against Serbia. However the solution reached between US envoy Richard Holbrooke and Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic contains the seeds of its own undoing. Agreement has been reached with Milosevic, but his good faith in honouring commitments can hardly be assumed. And Kosovo's majority Albanian population is far from reconciled to the prospect of 'autonomy' within Serbia.

THE PARALLELS WITH THE SUCCESSION OF TORTURED, ambiguous and repeatedly violated understandings that the United Nations reached with Serbs during the Bosnian war are the most disturbing elements of the arrangements for Kosovo. To their credit, the NATO powers are aware of these dangerous precedents;

they have mustered impressive unity behind the threat of military force, and have made clear that the threat still stands. Milosevic, moreover, in accepting the dispatch of 2,000 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors to Kosovo, has made a critical concession: Kosovo province has been, in effect, 'internationalised', something that the Albanians have long demanded. It may not yet be a Western protectorate; yet it is hard to imagine the West walking away from the problem now.

However, those 2,000 'verifiers' are also potential hostages – an obvious source of blackmail that Belgrade can wield against NATO the next time the subject of air-strikes comes up. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) precedent in Bosnia is disturbing indeed.

Analogies can be misleading of course. Yet there are other important ways in which Kosovo is like Bosnia. First, it is part of the same problem – the violent break-up of Yugoslavia. At the heart of that problem, in both cases, is the same Slobodan Milosevic. This does not mean that Milosevic can be considered responsible for the whole immense tragedy, but he is more responsible than anyone else. And he has enjoyed a permanent advantage in his dealings with the West. Western hope springs eternal that a 'new Milosevic' will finally keep his promises. Milosevic, on the other hand, suspects that he is dealing with the same old West. NATO now has to prove him wrong.



To End a War
By Richard Holbrooke

Published by Random House, New York
1998. US \$27-95 hbk. 408 pages.

Reviewed by James Pettifer

BOSNIA AND ME

THIS IMPORTANT BOOK by the chief Balkan negotiator of the Dayton Accords, has been rejected by sixteen British publishers so far. It will be compared to David Owen's *Balkan Odyssey* but *To End a War* is a fanfare for the triumph of Holbrooke's personal diplomacy.

It is a stimulating but very selective account of a critical period of the prolonged Balkan crisis, focussed on 1994-95 when the author was central to events.

Like many similar memoirs, from those of Julius Caesar onwards, it is very much a 'Me' book, and Mr Holbrooke is never slow to point out the faults of others. The British do not come out of it at all well. Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind is an amiable shadow, his predecessor Douglas Hurd rates only one passing mention.

CHAUVINISTIC

Although ostensibly about a crusade to protect multiculturalism and the unity of the Bosnian state, it is sometimes a rather

chauvinist book. Still haunted by Vietnam, like many US diplomats of his generation, Holbrooke wishes to prove, in Ronald Reagan's words, that 'America is back'.

But however desirable US military muscle and political commitment were, others were also striving for peace. You would never know it from some parts of this book. The genuine difficulties of many UN and European actors are sometimes distorted or obscured. Holbrooke has a Nietzschean view of politics and international relations: US will-power can shatter obstacles others find daunting.

PRIMITIVES

He is a good writer and adept at acid one-liners. Thus the former British ambassador to Belgrade, Ivor Roberts, is 'erudite and charming but excessively pro-Serb'. This is close to implying that Roberts was very near the heart of darkness, as Holbrooke holds views of many Balkan people and their cultures that would probably be banned as politically incorrect if expressed in US universities. They are simply primitives, often 'skunks', living in

KOSOVO

TAKING SIDES

There is a further parallel. Both the earlier war in Bosnia and the current one in Kosovo have confronted NATO with the immense difficulty of intervening – militarily or diplomatically – to end a war *without* taking sides in that war. In the case of Bosnia this was more of a problem than it should have been. Bosnia was a recognised member of the United Nations, and the major outside powers – particularly the US, Britain and France – could have helped it to defend its sovereignty earlier and more effectively than they did.

In the end, it was only by the US ‘taking sides’ – helping to create a Muslim-Croat alliance and helping with the training of its forces, looking the other way as weapons from Iran and elsewhere slipped through the UN embargo, and backing the Muslim-Croat advance with air and artillery power – that the war was brought to a conclusion.

Conceptually, Kosovo is a more difficult problem for the West, because the West wants to help the Albanians, but actively opposes their fundamental goal of independence. This poses a dilemma: how to help the Kosovo Albanians without helping the Kosovo Albanians.

The reasons for opposing Kosovo independence are compelling. There is little to recommend the idea of dismantling another state in

Europe. Independence would no doubt be cited as a precedent by Serb and Croat secessionists in Bosnia, who still expect to remove *Republika Srpska* and *Herceg Bosna* from the frail republic of Dayton Bosnia.

Moreover, the Albanian minority in Macedonia might also be inspired by the example of Kosovo independence to seek the independence of Macedonia’s western districts. Skopje itself shows increasing signs of segregation between Slav Macedonians and Albanians. There is also a considerable risk that the Serb minority in an independent Kosovo would be ‘encouraged’ to leave. All of these concerns underscore why the West is right to *discourage* Kosovo secession.

THREATS TO STABILITY

Yet independence may be inevitable, and the West should not oppose it at all costs. While independence may be bad for the region, an interminable smouldering conflict would be even worse. Conversely, even a less-than-perfect resolution of the Kosovo crisis would bring a number of benefits. The reopening of Pristina’s Albanian-language university would help defuse the crisis over demands for a similar university in Macedonia. An end to the fighting, to the burning of homes, the shelling of Albanian civilians and the creation of refugees, would remove one source of Albanian radicalism in both Macedonia and Albania proper. ▶

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‘Indian country’. Europeans are mostly pale reflections of Americans – if they are the lucky minority Mr Holbrooke approves of.

Many are not. British Dayton negotiator Pauline Neville Jones is portrayed as an entrenched and often bad tempered bureaucrat, obsessed with formal procedures. As Mr Holbrooke describes some of his own angry outbursts, it seems that the pot is calling the kettle black.

European journalists come off as badly as European diplomats. Although there are frequent and approving references to US reporting of Bosnia, particularly CNN, there is no mention of brave European correspondents like Martin Bell who did at least as much to bring the tragedy of Sarajevo to world attention.

The book is, and intends to be, a deafening blast against those who question US world leadership. The Americans are the people who matter in a post-Cold War world where their willingness and capacity to use force is essential to international order.

GOOD YARN

Mr Holbrooke kept a good diary and the strongest parts of the book, a gold mine for historians, are those concerned with his relationship with Bill Clinton and his eminent

predecessors in the State Department.

He tells a rattlingly good yarn, with occasional quotations from his personal record. There is a wonderful candid sense of events unfolding, and the appalling personal pressures that involvement in the Balkan imbroglio brings.

Reading between the lines, he seems to get on much better with men than women, and the whole Dayton negotiating team was a tribute to ‘buddy culture’. He is anti-French, although he likes President Chirac. If US leadership is absent, he seems to see Europe as likely to be dominated by a Russian-French consensus.

But it is as a record of Balkan history that the book will be judged and here, there are serious problems. He rails against ‘bad history’, as in Robert Kaplan’s influential work *Balkan Ghosts*, and most of all Rebecca West, who he thinks has addled the brains of generations in the British Foreign Office in a pro-Serb direction. But his own account of vital events is highly selective.

The worst examples concern the covert and not so covert US military aid to Croatia that led to the largest ethnic cleansing in the war, when ‘Operation Storm’ ended centuries of Serb domicile in part of Croatia. This was

orchestrated from the Pentagon and National Security Council, and Holbrooke must have known about this, but the reader is never told. The threatened US veto of a Security Council resolution condemning Croatian ethnic cleansing is also omitted.

Another problem is Kosovo, and its centrality to Milosevic’s rise to power. This reality, so crucial to what has followed, is evaded. Kosovan Albanians are referred to as ‘Muslims’ which is very inaccurate stereotyping. The accounts of the siege of Sarajevo are highly ‘spun’, with no mention of the Muslim infantry attacks that the Serb gunners had to respond to. The question of Clinton’s responsibility for the collapse of the Vance-Owen plan is totally evaded.

This is Caesarist history, with all its strengths and weaknesses. It will no doubt benefit Mr Holbrooke in the US. He is President Clinton’s nominee as permanent representative to the UN. In Kosovo it may well undermine moderates taught to trust US diplomacy; Mr Holbrooke, in the end, is Faustus to Mr Milosevic’s Mephistopheles. 🌐

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