

THE CREATION OF THE STATE OF KOSOVO AND THE ROLE OF US FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Albanian-Serb ethnic conflict has had a direct influence in the overall security of the Balkans, or South East Europe, for the last 150 years. Thus, the international community has always given a relevance to this conflict, but had always fell short on creating a lasting solution to it. Both Albanians and Serbs have been in favor of settling the conflict somehow ever since 1920, especially the Serbian side was always proposing ideas and even demarcations on the ground to try to achieve some kind of lasting peace. Proposals from Belgrade included cantonization, partitioning of Kosovo, and redefining Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, while Prishtina proposals were in favor of international protectorate as an intermediary phase prior to full independence. All these proposals never gained international support nor were they sponsored by major global political and security factors or countries, therefore the stances where far and the situation escalated into large military conflict between Serbian police and military forces and organized Albanian armed resistance. NATO's military intervention ended all armed hostilities and by “Kumanovo Agreement” , signed in June 1999, all Serb military and police forces were forced to leave Kosovo to allow refugees to return to their homes. However, all analyses that deal with the creation of the state of Kosovo as an independent entity must take into consideration the engagement of main global actor today, the USA, and their clearly expressed wishes to create a new subject within international relations in turbulent Balkans. Explaining US stances one by one and explaining concrete moves they have taken, in regard to Kosovo, since the end of “Cold War” until the creation of the new state in the Balkans, one can clearly deduct that there always existed a form of interest for an independent Kosovo, an interest that was, depending on international developments, differently modified presented to the public opinion in every single phase. Being part of broader courses of US Foreign Policy, Kosovo was never isolated nor was set aside as a stand-by issue that can wait. To the contrary, events have proven that even in days of US strongest engagement, through NATO's military mechanisms, the situation in and around Kosovo was viewed in a wider regional and international context, even more as a part of new US entrance strategy into the international scene and future conflicts.

Keywords: US Foreign Policy, Kosovo's independence, new geopolitical reality in South East Europe.

INTRODUCTION

The end of Cold War in Europe and the political developments of in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, especially with the fall of Soviet Union 1991, created a new strategic framework for US Foreign Policy and then President George H. Bush. In this environment US administrations that followed were more and more preoccupied with East-West relations in general than specific problems.

For instance, they balanced pretty well the differences between Greece and Turkey throughout the years of Cold War, through mechanisms of NATO, but were without ideas on

how to deal with changed countries such as Romania and Bulgaria, and also Albania and Yugoslavia, that was decaying in civil war in 1991. So, in this context, the issue of Kosovo seemed less important and US foreign policy planners were looking for a way to address it¹. What is interesting for this study is the fact that every US administration has contributed to the creation of the State of Kosovo by changing its position from “Kosovo as an internal problem of Serbia” to “Operation Allied Force” and bombing of Republic of Yugoslavia on behalf of Kosovo Albanians.

Yugoslavia was going into civil war in 1991 and it was obvious that it will lead to the creation of several independent states at the end of the war. US administration aware of Serbian plans for police and military crackdown against Kosovo Albanians reacted directly. President George H. Bush issued what is known as a “Christmas Warning” to President Slobodan Milosevic and Army Chief of Staff Zivota Panic that any military action against Albanians in Kosovo will result in swift US reaction and use of US military force against Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia itself.²

This message, later reinforced by upcoming President Bill Clinton, was sent just three weeks before President Bush left the White House, was sent to Milosevic to warn him that he cannot repeat ethnic cleansing, similar to the one his forces committed in Eastern Bosnia, during the change of Presidents in the US.

New US administration had to deal more with Bosnian problem than with the issues of Kosovo since in Bosnia war was real while in Kosovo clash was imminent, but it will happen later. Under heavy political and military pressure parties at war in Bosnia met to discuss a solution. Kosovo and the demands of Kosovo Albanians were excluded from the negotiations.

Dayton was a real chance to solve all the problems of former Yugoslavia, but Kosovo was left out and that will backlash to US administration just a couple of years later. At the time, US planners were afraid that Dayton might fail if they insist on including Kosovo in the negotiations.³ US negotiators believed that lack of presence of Kosovo in Dayton will secure an agreement with the Serbs.⁴ Dayton Agreement was in fact an Agreement with Milosevic not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Eastern Slavonia, Croatia, but also an agreement that would ensure all points of Peaceful Agreement which included NATO forces to be deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, for as long as Milosevic was needed to US planners he was, in a way, allowed to pursue his violent politics against Kosovo Albanians. US took a decision to stop the fighting and killings in 1995 and bring peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina allowing Milosevic to survive only to face another crisis three years later in Kosovo.⁵

Kosovo Albanians led by President Ibrahim Rugova had chosen a pattern of non-violence to reach the independence of Kosovo without the use of force through political means and through an international conference. After Dayton this platform seemed to narrow for Kosovo

¹ Radovan Vukadinovic, *Americka Politika I stvaranje kosovske drzave*, (Medjunarodne Studije, god 8, br 1, 2008, Zagreb), page 5

² Z. Kovacevic, *Amerika I raspad Jugoslavije*, (Beograd 2007) pages 209-216

³ D. Halberstam, *War in the time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and Generals*, (London 2002) pg365

⁴ Derek Chollet, *The Road to Dayton Accords* : (New York: Palgrave MacMillan) 2005), page 190

⁵ Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War, Kosovo and Beyond*, (Metropolitan Books 2000) page, 49.

Albanians and armed groups started to attack police and army units in Kosovo, local Serbs that were brought to colonize Kosovo from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 1998 armed groups of Albanians appeared publicly under one name and one banner—"UÇK", Kosovo Liberation Army. The idea behind the attacks was in fact to include US and other Allies to get involved in Kosovo and find a solution. This was a period of a weak Russian influence in the region, unpreparedness of Europeans to deal with another conflict, which was an incentive for stronger US engagement in Kosovo in 1998. During 1998, especially at the end of this year clashes between KLA and Serb police and Yugoslav Army were severe causing at least 200,000 internally displaced persons. Contact Group, comprised of USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia, was assembled again to deal with events in Kosovo. The problem was made international even at the UN Security Council. Negotiations between Milosevic and Richard Holbrooke and long preparations of NATO to intervene militarily in Serbia were phases that allowed the KLA to get stronger on the field, but also showed the inability of Serbia to deal with Albanian demands in other way than with force.

An international conference was organized in Rambouillet, France to find a solution for Kosovo. Albanian delegation was dedicated to accept the results of the talks while Serbian side showed it was not ready for compromise thus opening the way to NATO for military action.⁶

After 78 days of bombing Serbia accepted "Kumanovo Agreement" which in fact was withdrawal of all Serbian police, military, and administration from Kosovo that would become "an international protectorate" under the auspices of the UN. Both President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the time stated the goal was not to create an independent Kosovo, but it was obvious that Kosovo was no longer "an internal matter of Republic of Yugoslavia".

Also, Clinton's reaction toward Milosevic was motivated by Milosevic's continuous breaches of agreements with Americans, his violent tactics with Kosovo Albanians, and his brutal dealings with Serbian opposition. Clinton did not ask for UN Security Council Resolution having in mind that Russia and China will oppose it, he did not have the support of the Congress, he got a very tight majority in US Senate for limited air strikes against Serbia, allies were divided (Greece and Italy opposed any action against Belgrade while Germany refused to offer ground forces). Although for Clinton's team Kosovo was set as a high vital US interest, the war against Belgrade was clearly a matter of punishing Belgrade, trying to bring them to negotiating table without US casualties.⁷

Humanitarian intervention had emboldened Clinton's reputation, highly damaged with the Lewinsky Affair, but it also helped the toppling of Milosevic regime in 2000 and stabilised Balkans. It was obvious that if the cards are played right Kosovo Albanians might get a shot at demanding independence after the end of international protectorate.

The following US President George W. Bush visited Kosovo in 2001, in his first European tour but the task was more to meet the US troops stationed in Kosovo than offer a solution for

⁶ Predrag Simic, *Put u Rambuje*, (Beograd, 2000)

⁷ D.E. Nuechterlein, *America Recommitted: A Superpower Assesses Its Role in the Turbulent World*, (Kentucky, 2001) pg 288-289

the future. Bush was against nationbuilding, his foreign agenda was set on Middle East and he believed that if US carried out the cost of bombing Serbia than Europeans should sort out Kosovo. But, his insistence in carrying out a military foreign policy spread US military so much that they needed to pull out from somewhere, and show it as a success. Kosovo seemed like a such opportunity, hence Undersecretary Nicholas Burns took it as a task to find a way to define a solution for Kosovo and get US forces out of the ground. This of course meant that Kosovo would be left to be governed by democratically institutions, may they be provisional, which was another step, or a change of US stance towards independence for Kosovo.

Six years after NATO's bombing of Serbia, UN's General Secretary Kofi Annan appointed former Finish President Marti Ahtisaari to start negotiations between authorities in Belgrade and Kosovo Albanians in order to find an acceptable solution for Kosovo. Of course, the stance where very opposed, to Belgrade Kosovo was part of Republic of Yugoslavia as referred to in Resolution 1244 while Kosovo Albanians were firm in their demand for full independence.

Negotiations lasted through 2006 and 2007 and produced no outcome acceptable for both sides, but Ahtisaari's proposal was that Kosovo should be granted "a supervised independence" for at least three years while minorities in Kosovo, especially Serbian, must be part of every Kosovo Government in the future. This position was strongly supported by the US, but at the the UN Security Council in 2008 six attempts to reach a Resolution for Kosovo failed because of Russian opposition. US Foreign Policy explained that independence for Kosovo is "sui generis" since Kosovo could not be given back to a country that has killed and expelled its own citizens, in this case Republic of Yugoslavia. But, they were aware that Russia and even China have similar provinces within their borders therefore Kosovo is not at all a unique case and that they would oppose granting independence to Kosovo through a UN Security Council Resolution.⁸

US Foreign Policy stated repeatedly that the special case of Kosovo is a result of dissolution of Yugoslavia, which was violent, and measures taken by UN Security Council (Resolution 1244) to stabilize the region by expelling all Serbian forces from Kosovo, which is not a case that was ever recorded in history therefore cannot be repeated as a solution in other conflicts.⁹

Javier Solana, head of foreign and security affairs at EU, and Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO's Secretary General, also shared the same opinion as US diplomats. Marti Ahtisaari supported the thesis that by Resolution 1244 Serbia's right to govern Kosovo was revoked putting Kosovo under international temporary protectorate of the UN, that cannot last forever, therefore a way is needed to find a lasting solution.¹⁰

After failing to reach a decision at the Security Council, Kosovo Assembly on February 17th 2008 declared its independence. This decision was not overruled by then UN Administrator Joachim Ruecker, and Kosovo was recognized immediately by US and its Allies in Europe and all other continents.

⁸ N.K.Gvosdev, *Kosovo and Its Discontents*, Foreign Affairs January/February edition 2006

⁹ Nicholas Burns and Rosemary Di Carlo cited at book by Islam Lauka, *Kosovo-a Universal Case of Sui Generis*, (Tirana, 2007) pg 29

¹⁰ Report of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General on Kosovo's Future Status, S/2007/168, page 2

When one analyzes US Foreign Policy towards Kosovo and moves that led to the creation of State of Kosovo in the future it will find it very interesting how it changed in public view. But, when analyzed strategically through Ministry of Defense of US, better to state analyze goals of the Secretary of State it is another perspective. Defense had an open idea to clinch Mediterranean Sea by approaching Albania to NATO while using Kosovo as a spark to unify its stance. Supporters of the policies of “power:” state that US could change its stance towards Kosovo since in a unipolar world they held the strongest cards. However, supporters of “liberal” views claim that Kosovo was the beginning and the end of a stable Balkans within EU, that is in the USA’s interest after all.

But, none can explain how rapidly the US Foreign Policy changed its stance from Kosovo being an internal matter of Republic of Yugoslavia to an international problem. There are many reasons for that, not to underestimate Milosevic’s stubborn policies at all and Serbian plan to ethnically cleanse Kosovo as they did in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and got away with it. But, none in US happens by chance.

Recent declassified documents, that can be found in the President Clinton’s Library especially one document from June 1998 explain that steps toward making Kosovo an international issue by all means was a deed of US Foreign Policy.

On June 19th 1998 a meeting of National Security Council¹¹ met to determine US Policy towards Kosovo from then on until the bombing of Republic of Yugoslavia. Present at the meeting were Samuel Berger, National Security Advisor of the President, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Strobe Talbot, Ambassador Robert Gelbard also as representative of the State Department, Secretary of Defense William Cohen and Bear Mc Donald from Secretary of Defense, US Ambassador to the UN William Richardson, General Hugh Shelton as Head of Joint Chiefs of Staff of US Military Forces, Jim Steinberg and Donald Carrick from the White House, and Jack Covey from National Security Council. After a long discussion a list of measures to be taken was made: 1. To restore the autonomy of Kosovo within Republic of Yugoslavia with its own Assembly, executive branch, police and court system and proportional representation at the Federal level. 2. To create links between Kosovo and Serbia through mutual bodies to treat issues such as economy, cultural and religious issues. 3. To provide guarantees to minorities in Kosovo. 4. To hold democratic elections in Kosovo and at the federal level. 5. To create defense mechanisms for Kosovo in case the federal level decides to propose and conduct measures that are opposed by Kosovars. 6. To give international guarantees to Republic of Yugoslavia for gradual lifting of economic and political sanctions that are linked to an agreement that ought to be reached, at the same time to apply heavier sanctions to all parties that obstruct a reached agreement that will be internationally monitored. All of the present at the meeting were in favor that US alongside Contact Group and other Allies must spearhead the engagement to reach a political decision, stop the hostilities on the ground, eliminate all checkpoints set up by Serbian security forces in Kosovo, demand the withdrawal of Yugoslav Army units from Kosovo, withdrawal of armed Albanian Groups (meaning UCK) at areas that can be internationally monitored. For both parties US has threats should they not obey what was to be delivered to them.

¹¹ Meeting of NSC Principals June 19th 1998-Summary of conclusions of Principals Committee Meeting on Kosovo, Declassified in part per E.O.13526, President Clinton’s Library (16.04.2014)

For Milosevic it would mean more and heavier sanctions if he is not obedient, or gradual lifting of sanctions and normalization of reports should he comply with US Policies. For Kosovo Albanians disobedience would mean no more protection in case of Serbian police and army attacks, disruption of financing of the UÇK, but should they accept terms then a place at the table of international negotiations for the future of Kosovo was guaranteed.

At this meeting it was also decided that an International Conference for the future of Kosovo will be held outside the borders of Republic of Yugoslavia. Participants agreed that there must be more cooperation with Russia and other member of the UN Security Council; in particular US wanted to use Chapter VII of the UN Charter to empower international monitors in Kosovo. Participants also agreed that contacts must intensify with Great Britain and France to create a legal basis within NATO to bomb Serbia even without specific UN Resolution. The process of preparation for air war with Serbia was to go on parallel with political efforts to solve the situation so that if this option fails than there is no vacuum for intervention¹².

From this meeting it was obvious that the strategy of US Foreign Policy was not to change the borders of Republic of Yugoslavia, but to advance the position of Kosovo and remove it from Serbia.

CONCLUSIONS

In retrospective, with Clinton replaced by new President Bush, questions arise why did US again change its stance and supported independent Kosovo? Well, one of the reasons was simple; Kosovo Albanians were persistent in their demand for independence because they felt that only this solution will bring solid peace to this part of the Balkans. They proved it three times that they can be a factor of stability and instability: in clashes in Southern Serbia with Serbian security forces immediately after Kosovo war, in interference in clashes with Macedonian security forces in 2001, and in uprising against Serbian minority and orthodox monuments in 2004.

So, for President Bush there were several options in favor of Albanian demands. Firstly, it was US that stopped the humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo and ousted Milosevic. Also in Kosovo they had a very sympathetic population connected with family ties in Albania and Macedonia that in the long run could prove useful for US interests and US Foreign and Defense Policies.

Secondly, at the time of Bush's second term Prishtina and Tirana where probably the only capitols of Muslim majority fully in favor of US Policies. US Senator Joe Biden mentioned it that if the US can push forward Kosovo's independence than it would convince or at least prove to other Muslim leaders in the world that "war against terror" is not war against Muslims.¹³

Thirdly, Bush's robust policy had to show to US Allies in Europe and rising Russia that Balkans is US sphere of interest and if it needs too it will link up with Kosovo Albanians as allies. In an ideal scenario Russia would benefit too since it would be involved in the state

¹² Meeting of NSC Principals June 19th 1998-Summary of conclusions of Principals Committee Meeting on Kosovo, Declassified in part per E.O.13526, President Clinton's Library (16.04.2014)

¹³ J.R. Biden, *Opening Statement, Hearing on Kosovo: A Way Forward*, 2005, pg3

building of Kosovo getting into the Albanian region again economically, even militarily. Having in mind the split that occurred within EU regarding Kosovo Russia could then use this opportunity to even promote its own agenda for the region. But, it chose not to do so and pull out completely militarily out of Kosovo in 2003.

Finally, US has built in Kosovo, and bought the land legally, the largest European US military base “Bondsteel” capable of receiving up to 20.000 US serviceman that could be then deployed elsewhere. In terms of military analysts, this was part of US military agenda of shifting forces from north to south, from Western and Northern Europe to Balkans Kosovo, Romania and Bulgaria. Some analysts even consider “Bondsteel” as exactly that- a base created to link Mediterranean theatre of operations with Middle Eastern Theatre of Operations.¹⁴

US military is present in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina so presence in Kosovo, which is incomparable with the above mentioned means that US planners do not foresee that Serbia will in the near future join NATO therefore they moved forward with Ukraine, and the fighting there is exclusively fighting pushed forward by US influence and NATO enlargement policies against Russian attempts to be again a global superpower. The result there will determine how much will Serbia resist joining NATO although it is already in the Partnership for Peace Program. If Ukraine and Georgia, at some point manage to join NATO than allies of Russia-Serbia, Montenegro, at to some degree Bosnia and Herzegovina will be surrounded by NATO members therefore their strategic capabilities will diminish.

Lastly, in all of the phases of the disintegration of Yugoslavia from 1991 until 2008 when Kosovo became independent formally US Foreign Policy has always had a soft spot for Kosovo Albanians and their demands in both Clinton’s and Bush’s administration. It is very interesting that US intelligence units have followed closely developments in Yugoslavia following Tito’s death. Kosovo Albanian violent demonstrations in 1981 and 1989 have proven to the Americans that Kosovo Albanians are not afraid of violent confrontations with serbian security forces.¹⁵ Long before Tito’s death US analysts had studied the road Yugoslavia might take afterwars.¹⁶ In the analyses report of 1979, US intelligence experts reiterated that ethnic tensions in Croatia and Kosovo, as well as Kosovo’s accusations tghat “Serbia is treating Kosovo as its own political and economical colony”, and that these are strategic elements that could ignite the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It is pointed out in this report that violent demonstrations by Kosovo Albanians have a strategic importance since they are linked and share a border with Albania. This was a joint CIA analyses dated 26 january 1983 and NSC analyses dated 14th of March 1984.¹⁷

¹⁴ Radovan Vukadinovic, , *Americka Politika I stvaranje kosovske drzave*, (Medjunarodne Studije, god 8, br 1, 2008, Zagreb), page 17

¹⁵ Sabrina P. Ramet *Balkan Babel-The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the death of Tito to the fall of Milosevic*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 44-46

¹⁶ Jordan Baev, *US Intelligence Community Estimates on Yugoslllavia*, (National Security and the Future 2000).

¹⁷ NSDD 133, March 14 “US policy Toward Yugoslavia”.

So in view of all of these documents one can conclude that nothing surrounding US Foreign Policy support for Kosovo's ambitions was not unfounded on solid intelligence gathering on the ground and of course it suited US interests in the region.

After Kosovo proclaimed its independence President Bush openly stated that this was a process that had lasted for US for nine years and that with the conclusion of it conditions to realizing peace and stability in the Balkans are created. This was an open statement and a direction of US Foreign Policy that handled the process of creation of a new country in the Balkans without intention of stopping regardless to the critics, warnings, concerns stated by Allies and Foes that the example of Kosovo could influence the stability of international relations. and could be used as a model to create new states in the world.

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