



Keys to Stability in the Balkans

By Robert D. Greenberg, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

In the aftermath of the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, instability has continued to plague the Balkan region. Inter-ethnic violence persists in Kosovo, and a prominent Yugoslav Army general has warned that Yugoslav troops could be sent back into

Kosovo to defend the Serb minority. At the same time, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)—reluctant to disarm—has virtually seized power in the province and is determined to maintain its dominance. Although NATO has achieved its short-term goals, including the return of the Kosovar Albanian refugees to their homes, the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo, and the deployment of a multinational force with

shadow government. As Chris Hedges has reported in the *New York Times*, this self-declared provisional government has confiscated property and extorted money from business owners in Kosovo's urban centers. The KLA has had a poor record in complying with NATO's provisions for demilitarization. Reports suggest, for example, that KLA forces have concealed heavy weapons that were supposed to be placed under KFOR control in July 1999. In the meantime, Hashim Thaci, the self-declared KLA provisional government's prime minister, has appointed friends and relatives to key government posts and has vowed to stay in power until elections are held. Increasingly, Kosovar Albanians are complaining of human rights abuses by the KLA and have felt intimidated by the overwhelming presence of armed KLA soldiers. The KLA continues to advocate for an independent Kosovo, but such a position has no support among the NATO allies. It is unlikely the KLA will give up this basic demand, and there are fears that a KLA-KFOR confrontation could result.

Since the end of the NATO bombing campaign, Serbia remains solidly under President Slobodan Milosevic's control. The opposition has continued to show signs of weakness, including internal squabbles and a lack of clear leadership. The U.S. has vowed not to rebuild Serbia unless Milosevic is removed from power. Yet, it is unrealistic to expect that the Serbian people, exhausted by war and economic collapse, can now overthrow him in a popular revolution. Moreover, even when and if Milosevic is removed from power, there is no guarantee that his successor will pursue a different Kosovo policy. A weak and unstable Serbia will promote, rather than diminish, instability in the Balkans.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia faces instability on another front as well. The Montenegrin government has submitted a proposal for broader political autonomy within Yugoslavia. Milo Djukanovic, the Montenegrin president, has threatened to call for a referendum on independence if Serbia fails to agree to this plan. There are approximately 30,000 Yugoslav Army troops stationed in Montenegro, and it is possible that a Montenegrin declaration of independence could result in a military confrontation similar to what occurred when Slovenia and Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia in 1991. Montenegro is strategically even more important to Serbia than Kosovo, because it serves as Serbia's sole outlet to the Adriatic. It is unlikely that a Belgrade regime would readily accept an independent Montenegrin state. A confrontation there could potentially spill over to neighboring Croatia and Bosnia and could jeopardize the status of the ethnic Albanian minority in Montenegro.

Key Points

- The KLA has solidified its control in Kosovo.
- Milosevic remains entrenched as the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
- The province of Montenegro is closer than ever to declaring its independence from Yugoslavia.

NATO at its core, no progress has been made in achieving ethnic reconciliation. Clinton administration officials have condemned the continuing violence in Kosovo and the revenge attacks against Serbs. Nevertheless, NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) appears to be unable and unwilling to prevent further violence against Serb civilians. A radical shift in policy would be necessary to bring about a lasting peace in the region.

The KLA has made no secret of its intentions to maintain political control over the province and has set up a



In an August 1999 news conference held in Kosovo, Senator Joseph Biden (D-DL) and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke reiterated the U.S. policy of promoting a multiethnic society in Kosovo for all of Kosovo's citizens, no matter what their ethnic origin or religion. Biden warned that failure on the part of the KLA and the Albanian population to guarantee the rights of the Serb minority would result in immediate action by the U.S. Congress to cut off financial assistance for rebuilding Kosovo. Such pronouncements have had little effect on the behavior of either the KLA or Albanians seeking revenge. Three months after the ending of the bombing campaign, there were still daily attacks against the Serb minority; over 160,000 Kosovo Serbs have fled the province, i.e., more than 85% of the prewar Serbian population.

During the bombing campaign, the KLA was used as NATO's ground force and was given open U.S. support for its military actions. This policy was implied in President Clinton's May 23rd *New York Times* opinion piece, in which he declared that although Milosevic "has driven hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians from their homes, [he] . . . has not eliminated the Kosovo Liberation Army. Indeed, its ranks are swelling, and it has begun to go on the offensive against Serb forces hunkered down to hide from air strikes." When the Serbs withdrew from Kosovo, the KLA rushed into the province and took over key towns and villages. NATO has been reluctant to challenge the KLA, as such a move could jeopardize relations with Kosovo's Albanian population.

The KLA's leadership, emboldened by NATO support during the bombing campaign, is determined to establish an independent Kosovo. Such an agenda contradicts the stated U.S., UN, and NATO policy of preserving the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. However, the current arrangement has stripped Yugoslavia of its authority over Kosovo and constitutes a de facto detachment of Kosovo from Yugoslavia. The Kosovar Albanians and the KLA are closer than ever to achieving their goal of an independent Kosovo. As Steven Burg of the Woodrow Wilson Center has suggested, a KLA-controlled Kosovo would have a destabilizing effect on the entire region. It may attempt to create an expanded Albanian state or to foment unrest among Albanians in neighboring Macedonia, where relations between an Albanian minority (estimated at 30-35%) and a Slavic majority have been strained. The U.S. and the Western alliance have been slow in responding to this new crisis.

Since the end of the bombing campaign, U.S. policymakers have offered no concrete framework for

achieving a lasting peace in the Balkan region. The cease-fire agreement that resulted in the withdrawal of Serbian and Yugoslav forces from Kosovo has not been followed by a diplomatic initiative to provide for long-term resolution of outstanding problems in the Balkans. The major questions remain unsolved, especially the future status of Kosovo, the tension among Macedonia's ethnic groups, the prospect of Montenegrin independence, and the potential for recurrence of ethnic conflicts in Bosnia.

The Clinton administration, wanting to encourage cooperation among Balkan states, convened a meeting of Balkan leaders in Sarajevo in July 1999 with the aim of activating the newly established Balkan Stability Pact, signed on June 10, 1999, by foreign ministers of the European Union, the U.S., Russia, Canada, Japan, and all Balkan states except the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This pact was initiated in order to promote long-term stability and prosperity in southeastern Europe through the encouragement of foreign investment and economic aid to the Balkan region. However, such a pact needs to be accompanied by a comprehensive peace arrangement that can address the complex issues of borders and security concerns for the Balkan states.

Foreign investment will not begin to flow into the region without the necessary stable political arrangements to ensure the permanent cessation of violence. Moreover, the Balkan Stability Pact is premature, since it does not include the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Western leaders have considered including Montenegro in the pact, but such a move would only encourage Montenegrin separatism, sparking potential hostilities between Serbia and Montenegro. Direct or indirect support of Montenegrin secessionism is risky, as it could result in an overthrow of the Montenegrin government or an ethnic conflict in Montenegro that could embroil NATO and neighboring countries.

The U.S. has ostracized Milosevic and his government and has explicitly advocated for Milosevic's ouster and his trial for war crimes. Some experts have predicted that, given such a policy, Milosevic will be out of power within a year. However, little consideration has been given to the alternate scenario whereby Milosevic clings to power for the foreseeable future. Without Serbia's participation, an overall peace arrangement is unlikely in the region.

Key Problems

- The U.S. and NATO have looked the other way, as the KLA has essentially seized control in Kosovo.
 - The U.S. has ceased negotiations for a peace settlement in the Balkans.
 - The U.S. has refused to maintain direct or indirect contacts with Serbia.
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The U.S. needs to pursue creative alternatives in order to minimize the potential for civil strife in Yugoslavia and the possible spread of the conflict to neighboring states. It is no easy task to satisfy the demands of the competing nationalisms in the Balkans. Thus far, the U.S. has taken an anti-Serbian stance in all the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. It is time for the U.S. and the

Key Recommendations

- A Balkan peace conference should be convened under the auspices of the United Nations.
- A plan should be crafted requiring Milosevic to step down in Yugoslavia in exchange for the dropping of the war crimes indictment against him.
- Washington should toughen its stance toward the KLA and send a clear signal that the U.S. will not tolerate unilateral changes either in boundaries or in the political status of regions and entities such as Kosovo.

Western allies to recognize that compromise with Serbia, rather than ultimatums, is needed to diffuse Balkan tensions. Moreover, given the increased potential for a KFOR-KLA confrontation in Kosovo and serious upheaval in Serbia and Montenegro, U.S. policymakers must act quickly and boldly to prevent further Balkan tragedies.

The U. S. should work toward the convening of a Balkan peace conference under the auspices of the United Nations—and with the participation of all Balkan leaders—

to determine the future status of ethnic minorities in the Balkan states. The first task of the conference should be the settlement of the Kosovo issue. Western governments recognized the importance of settling the Kosovo crisis when they formulated the Balkan Stability Pact. Article 4 specifies that “a settlement of the Kosovo conflict is critical to our ability to fully reach the objectives of the stability pact and to work toward permanent, long-term measures for a future of peace and interethnic harmony without fear of the resurgence of war.” U.S. policymakers should strive toward this goal through a sustained effort to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. As violence persists in Kosovo and threatens to erupt in other regions (Montenegro and Macedonia), a diplomatic initiative should be launched before the onset of a new crisis.

Given that the Clinton administration refuses to negotiate directly with Milosevic, the U.S. should enlist the United Nations and Russia as intermediaries to hammer out an agreement with Milosevic regarding the Yugoslav leader’s political future. A formula that would include Milosevic’s removal from power in exchange for the dropping of the war crimes indictment against him could be part of an overall peace arrangement for the Balkans. In 1995, when the Dayton Peace Accords were negotiated, the U. S. similarly refused to negotiate with the Bosnian Serbs and required the removal of Bosnian-Serb leader Radovan Karadzic as a precondition for implementing the accords. Having vowed never again to engage in negotiations with Milosevic, the U.S. now needs to find indirect methods for maintaining communication links with the Yugoslav government. Failure to do so will hinder prospects for stability in the entire region.

The U.S. and NATO allies need to insist that the KLA disband its provisional government. The UN should supervise the establishment of a transitional coalition

government that would include representatives from all ethnic communities in Kosovo. Such a government would also replace the local authority established in June 1999, consisting of Albanians and Serbs, which has proven to be ineffectual. In late September 1999, the Serbs resigned from this authority to protest the compromise agreement between the KFOR commander Michael Jackson and the KLA. In this compromise, the KLA has been maintained as a quasi-military force in Kosovo. The U.S. needs to clarify to the KLA that it will no longer tolerate revenge attacks against the Serbian population and will withdraw its support from the Kosovar Albanians should the KLA continue to carve out an independent Kosovo. Washington’s support of the establishment of a credible coalition government—including political leaders of all the various ethnic communities—would represent a clear signal that the U.S. is sincerely interested in establishing a multi-ethnic Kosovo.

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Sources for More Information

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