



New Balkan Policy Needed

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In the aftermath of the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, instability has continued to plague the Balkan region. All the areas of the former Yugoslavia, except Serbia (having recently experienced a democratic political transition), face increasing instability.

Kosovo

In the first months after the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) entered Kosovo in June 1999 and the Kosovar Albanian refugees returned to their homes, the minority Serbs and Gypsies became the victims of Albanian revenge attacks. The few Serbs who have remained in Kosovo live in scattered enclaves under the protection of KFOR troops. Nevertheless, sporadic violence has continued to erupt, including the bus bombing in February 2001 killing Serbs heading to a religious event. KFOR has been unable to stop the violence from spilling over Kosovo's borders to Macedonia and to Serbia's Presevo Valley region, which has a sizable ethnic Albanian minority.

Meanwhile, Macedonia has closed its border with Kosovo, raising the likelihood of a serious economic crisis in Kosovo that could induce further instability there.

Macedonia

The hostilities in Macedonia began in February 2001 when ethnic Albanians began fighting Macedonian forces along the Kosovo-Macedonia border. The Albanian fighters belong to the newly formed National Liberation Army (NLA),

which has sought to "liberate" the Albanian minority in Macedonia through armed struggle. Members of the NLA include extremist ethnic Albanians from both Macedonia and Kosovo, who can infiltrate Macedonian border villages (such as Tanuvsecti and Brest) by either slipping through KFOR lines in Kosovo or traversing a 3-mile buffer zone in the Presevo Valley between Kosovo and Serbia proper. In early March 2001, fighting quickly spread from the border region to the area around Tetovo, the main ethnic Albanian town in Macedonia. Bulgaria has offered Macedonia military technical assistance, and German KFOR troops in barracks near Tetovo have reinforced their positions with tanks, warning the NLA not to shoot at the German positions. The Greek foreign minister has expressed full Greek support for the Macedonian government, and NATO has recently allowed the Yugoslav Army to return to the buffer zone on Kosovo's border to help stem the flow of armed militants and weapons into northern Macedonia.

Montenegro

Border changes seem increasingly likely in the neighboring province of Montenegro, where the Montenegrin leader has spoken openly of independence or a loose confederation with Serbia. Such a development is yet another potentially destabilizing factor in the Balkans. Like Macedonia, Montenegro has an ethnic Albanian minority, and Albanian extremists could potentially take advantage of the instability in Montenegro to launch attacks against the Montenegrin authorities. In March 2001, NATO allowed Yugoslav Army troops into the Montenegrin section of the buffer zone bordering on Kosovo. This move was widely criticized by Montenegrin government officials, who over the past few years have considered the Yugoslav army to be a threat to Montenegrin autonomy. Despite Slobodan Milosevic's ouster in October 2000 and his arrest in April 2001, the Montenegrins have continued to move closer to secession from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and will be holding a referendum on secession in June 2001.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

In February 2001, Yugoslavia and the Republika Srpska (a Serb entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina) signed an agreement establishing special relations. Simultaneously, the Bosnian Croats have sought to revisit the Dayton Accords and establish their own entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. These developments will affect Bosnia's future constitutional status and the viability of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a truly multiethnic state. Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat policies may indicate movement toward integration with Croatia and Serbia, respectively. The demand for border changes in Bosnia also raises the potential for a return to ethnic conflict.

Given all these escalating tensions and conflicts, it is imperative for the U.S. administration to articulate a firm and comprehensive Balkan policy. Otherwise, sub-regional conflicts, such as the violence in Macedonia, could lead to wider war in the Balkans.

Key Points

- Recent fighting in Macedonia could represent a dangerous slide into a new Balkan conflict.
- Uncertainty over Kosovo's future remains a destabilizing factor in the Balkans.
- The potential for instability in Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina is growing.



Problems with Current U.S. Policy

Escalating tensions in the Balkans have come at an inopportune time for the new U.S. administration, which has barely had time to review its Balkan policy. During the 2000 presidential campaign, Bush ill-advisedly suggested that the U.S. might consider withdrawing troops from the Balkans, thus giving the impression to the rival ethnic groups that the U.S. would be taking a back seat in Balkan affairs.

Relegating responsibility for Balkan affairs primarily to Western European governments was the prevailing Balkan policy under the senior President Bush and during President Clinton's first term. It would be a mistake for the present Bush administration to return to such a disengaged policy. The European Union has not yet created its rapid reaction force, nor has it established criteria for when such a force should be used.

The outbreak of fighting in Macedonia represents a major threat both to European stability and to the interests of the NATO alliance. It could spark regional warfare and, should KFOR troops become involved, could lead to wider international conflict. The U.S. State Department has dutifully expressed its concern over the situation, while the U.S. ambassador to Macedonia has openly declared Washington's support for the Macedonian government. Higher officials in the Bush administration have also echoed these sentiments. Nevertheless, Secretary of State Colin Powell has not yet visited the region and seems to be relegating primary responsibilities to the Europeans and to NATO's commander, George Robertson of Britain.

The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1354 in March 2001, expressing unanimous support for Macedonia's democratically elected, multiethnic coalition government. The present government came to power in 1998 and consists of two primary coalition partners: the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Party for Democratic Unity of Macedonia (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Democratic Party of Albanians. Macedonian voters had ousted the previous government, which had similarly consisted of a coalition of an ethnic Macedonian and an ethnic Albanian party.

The present coalition government has moved slowly to address concerns of Macedonia's Albanian community. One of its accomplishments has been the forging of a compromise agreement to open an Albanian-language university in Tetovo. This agreement to establish the South East European University was reached in April 2000, alleviating a major source of resentment among Macedonia's ethnic Albanian population, which has been denied access to an Albanian-language university—a situation that sparked violent demonstrations since 1994 in Tetovo. The new government, however, has not made progress on other Albanian demands, such as changes in the constitutional status of the Albanians and the official recognition of Albanian as a second language in Macedonia.

The Bush administration has also been slow in reacting to the other potential flashpoints in the Balkans, such as the rise in tensions within Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Montenegro. Furthermore, Bush and Congress may be jeopardizing newly established U.S. relations with

Yugoslav President Kostunica over the issue of Belgrade's compliance with the demands of the UN's International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague.

Congress threatened to cut off aid to Yugoslavia, should the Belgrade government not hand over Milosevic and other indicted war criminals to the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague. The U.S. did release economic aid to the Kostunica government following the arrest of Milosevic by Serbian troops. But Secretary of State Colin Powell insisted that Yugoslavia must "cooperate fully" with the international war crimes tribunal if it were to receive additional international economic aid. Such an ultimatum is counterproductive; the Kostunica government needs much more time to establish its complete control in Serbia and to dismantle the Milosevic political machine, which had controlled the country so completely for over 13 years. Rather than conditioning good relations on Yugoslavia's addressing the past wrongdoings of its indicted war criminals, Washington needs to give priority attention to the current crises.

Instead of helping to stabilize the Balkans, the U.S. and NATO have heightened tensions by forming a quasi-alliance with the Yugoslav army in the buffer zone around Kosovo. Such a move reflects poorly on KFOR's ability to maintain peace and stability in and around Kosovo. By inviting back to Kosovo's borders the very troops Kosovar Albanians mistrust the most, NATO and KFOR risk further alienating and radicalizing Kosovo's ethnic Albanian population. Such militarization has also created the potential for heightened clashes between Yugoslav troops and Albanian paramilitary groups eager to operate in southern Serbia and northern Macedonia.

In addition to establishing links with the Yugoslav army through the peacekeeping forces based in Kosovo, the U.S. has a history of indirect military links with both the ethnic Albanian guerrillas in Kosovo and the Macedonian army, both of which have received training through U.S.-sponsored private military contractors.

The failure of the U.S. policy in the Balkans is manifest in Macedonia. Although voicing strong support for the democratically elected government in Skopje (capital of Macedonia), neither the U.S. nor other leading members of the international community have provided the type of economic support that Macedonia's government now urgently needs. Macedonia has taken commendable steps to maintain stability and tolerance among its diverse ethnic groups. Over the past few years, however, the economic situation in Macedonia has continued to deteriorate and the U.S. has done little to provide much-needed aid to alleviate the crisis.

Key Problems

- The Bush administration has not taken an active role to help contain the dangerous escalation of violence in Macedonia.
 - The Bush administration has not yet clearly articulated its overall Balkan policy, especially with regard to the presence of U.S. troops in Bosnia and Kosovo.
 - U.S. verbal support for Macedonia has not been manifested in emergency material or financial support.
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Toward a New Foreign Policy

Responding adequately to the demands of the competing nationalisms in the Balkans is no easy task. For starters, the U.S. together with NATO and the European Union should articulate a firm and consistent policy regarding the upsurge of extremism and nationalism in the Balkans. At such a critical time, it would be wise for Washington to maintain open communication lines with all parties in the Balkans—the Croats, the Muslims, the Serbs, the Albanians, and the Macedonians.

Clearly, however, the good guy/bad guy policy framework only compounds the regional crisis. During the Milosevic regime, the Serbs were viewed as the bad guys.

Now that they have unseated Milosevic, they have become good guys. The U.S. came to the aid of the Kosovar Albanians in 1999 but have since condemned the Albanian extremists, who have spread the conflict to the Presevo Valley and Macedonia, perhaps with the hope of creating a Greater Kosovo.

As is proper, the world powers and the UN Security Council have expressed solid verbal support for the Macedonian

government in its conflict with the Albanian paramilitaries. This rhetorical support, however, should be immediately translated into financial and military aid. The Macedonian forces are poorly equipped to deal with a broader insurgency, and without aid, the fragile Macedonian government could collapse. The longer that Macedonian forces fight Albanian rebels, the greater the chance for a complete breakdown in interethnic relations in the country. A civil war in Macedonia could easily escalate into a broader regional conflict. Immediate action is required to prevent such a potentially devastating deterioration.

The U.S. should exert political and military pressure on the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia to try to prevent the strengthening of the NLA guerrilla forces. The U.S. and NATO should seek a mandate to increase KFOR's strength in Kosovo and should transfer more KFOR troops to the Macedonian border region. The international community should have zero tolerance for the violence in Macedonia and should consider cutting off economic and military aid to the Kosovar Albanians. Such a stance would send a clear message to the extremists of the ethnic Albanian population that the international community will not tolerate further ethnic warfare in the Balkans.

Simultaneously, the U.S. and NATO must insist that any negotiations on the future of the Albanian community in Macedonia should only be held once the rebel army is disbanded and renounces its intentions of achieving political ends through violence. There should

be no negotiations with the NLA without a cease-fire, and the U.S. should only negotiate with the NLA's political arm.

The U.S. together with the European Union should facilitate talks aimed at improving the plight of Macedonia's Albanian community. These talks should be held in the form of a regional conference to solve the overall Albanian question in the former Yugoslavia. A solution for the Macedonian Albanians should be closely linked with resolving the situations of Albanians in Kosovo, southern Serbia, and Montenegro. Without a more comprehensive approach to solving the Albanian question, instability in the southern Balkans is likely to continue and intensify.

The U.S. must take a clear stance regarding the potential for future border changes in the Balkans. Any border changes should only be agreed upon through a Balkans peace summit with the consent of all sides involved. In the meantime, the U.S. must stand firm against the creation of new borders through military force.

Washington should recognize that the main threat to Balkan stability currently rests with the extreme nationalist Albanians, who seek to carve out either a Greater Albania or a Greater Kosovo. Just as the U.S. stood firmly against a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia, it needs to remain consistent and strongly oppose any attempts to create a Greater Albania or a Greater Kosovo.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the U.S. and NATO should oppose Bosnian Croat attempts to unilaterally declare a third entity in Bosnia. Any changes in the constitutional status of a sovereign state—be it in Bosnia-Herzegovina or in Yugoslavia—need to be achieved through the consent of all parties within the state, through political negotiations, and in an atmosphere of tolerance.

With regard to the new Yugoslav government, the UN and the Hague prosecutors should negotiate a timetable for Yugoslav compliance with human rights measures—most prominently, the arrest and prosecution of war criminals. The politics of threats and ultimatums is unnecessary and counterproductive given the new political realities in Serbia.

The U.S. government, which played a leading role in the Balkans until the end of the Clinton administration, should continue to assist and coordinate in achieving a consistent Balkan policy. Such a policy should avoid the mistakes of the past while working toward bringing all sides to the negotiating table to avoid further warfare—a prospect that would directly threaten U.S., NATO, and European interests in southeastern Europe.

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Key Recommendations

- The U.S. should provide emergency military and financial assistance to Macedonia.
- Washington should put intense pressure on rebellious Kosovar and Macedonian Albanians by increasing KFOR's strength and border patrols.
- The U.S. needs to take a firm stand regarding potential border changes in the Balkans.

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