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FROM CLINTON TO BUSH: THE WORST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS?

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Policy Drift

If one looks at where U.S. policy is today, it can be assessed as having gone almost overnight from over-commitment to virtually no commitment, from moralizing micro-management to unrealistic realism. There is no balance or continuity. What we need now is a realistic and balanced policy, a steady even-handed approach. We are left, as NY Times columnist Tom Friedman has recently written, with "the worst of all worlds" in that we are stuck with a policy we can't get rid of, but don't have the will to succeed in implementing. In other words, we are in a process of policy drift.

The net effect of this policy drift we see unfolding in Macedonia at this very moment. There, you have the spectacle of 40,000 NATO peacekeepers in Kosovo and up to several thousand within Macedonia itself unable to stop cross-border incursions by armed guerilla units across an international border supposedly guarded and protected by many of these 40,000 troops.

These recent events in Macedonia illustrate the consequences of U.S. policy drift. What we have are determined forces within Macedonia and Kosovo who are committed to creating a "Albanian space," if not an outright greater Albania, who are testing the waters and taking advantage of the reluctance of the U.S. and NATO to get directly involved. They know the Bush administration does not want to get further mired in the Balkans and they know that this administration, like the previous administration does not want casualties. Thus, they have been seeing how far they can get in carving out an Albanian-controlled entity on Macedonian soil, using the language of human rights to justify their actions, but in reality trying to change borders and the power situation on the ground.

As reporter Steven Erlanger in the *NY Times* has written recently, "the U.S. and NATO are

reaping what they sowed in the Balkans. The war against Milosevic, justified by humanitarian considerations, also justified their alliance with Albanian extremists who are now trying to do in Macedonia what they did to Serb authority in Kosovo." Stated another way, perhaps less elegantly, in trying to combat one evil -- the air war to defeat Milosevic and his regime in Kosovo -- we have ended up empowering another evil: armed and trained groups of Albanian hard men bent on creating an all-Albanian state which, if successful, could be even more destabilizing and damaging to regional security and U.S. interests than the original sin itself.

As a result, several questions emerge: "Is this why we bombed Yugoslav-Serb forces twice, in Bosnia in 1995 and Yugoslavia in 1999? Is this going to be the sum total of U.S. and western policy on the ground in the Balkans after nearly a decade – that having moved heaven and earth to prevent the creation of a greater Serbia and a greater Croatia we could be on the verge of facilitating a greater Albania?" One should also ask, "in what way, shape, or form is a greater Albania preferable to, more moral than, or more conducive to regional stability or U.S. interests than the other two?"

The major challenge for the new Bush administration, which inherited this mess, is not to make the situation worse through evasion and expect the Europeans to handle it. We need a middle ground. Currently, the Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo, as very likely many Serbs and Croats in Bosnia, are interpreting the U.S. desire to scale back and leave the Balkans as a message that they can eventually get away with carving out their own mono-ethnic states or attach themselves to one of the three "greaters." To facilitate such an outcome or allow it to happen would mark the total loss of U.S. and NATO credibility in this region and perhaps Europe in general.

In order to help prevent this dangerous policy drift, the U.S. needs to take note of past lessons learned or at least noted. This paper will focus on three of those lessons: the importance of history in the region, the dangers of over-engagement, and the necessity of keeping troops on the ground, though in a much more limited capacity. I will then posit my own suggestions for a future course of action in the region.

First Lesson: The Need for Historical Perspective

What has been largely missing from U.S. policy in the Balkans from the start of the Clinton administration is a good sense of historical perspective on the region. Our lack of historical perspective has caused the U.S. to possess unrealistic expectations of success and to set excessively optimistic time lines on when we can leave. For the most part, this attitude was adopted because there was the sense that if we could only get rid of a few evil men and their cohorts, we could then proceed in lock-step towards a rosy future. When Milosevic, Tudjman, and to a lesser extent Izetbegovic were gone we could then proceed quickly. Now they are all gone from power, but the situation is as messy as ever. The reality on the ground has been much more complex.

My argument in no way advocates the much maligned "ancient hatreds" argument, the convenient kicking-board of the moral absolutist school of thought. Rather, it emphasizes that we

need a better understanding of and appreciation for the roots of this multi-faceted conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Otherwise, we will never achieve a sustainable peace in the region. This understanding is far more complicated than blaming the current problems on the evil and mendacity of just a few powerful men in the wrong place at the wrong time and expecting that dragging them to the Hague will resolve the main problems.

History does matter in this part of the world, and it matters a lot. Just look at the course of the conflict in the four regions during the past decade and you will see that they follow well-defined, historic and ethnic fault lines, and mark regions where killings and mass murder have occurred in previous decades, and even centuries. Specific examples in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo illustrate this point.

During the war in Croatia from 1991-1992, the areas where some of the most vicious fighting and killing occurred just happened to parallel regions of the country where Serbs had been slaughtered en masse during WWII under conditions which by current day definitions would have to be called genocide. The policies of Milosevic fanned the flames of hatred, and Serbs committed grave crimes against Croatians, but there are definite historical antecedents to the war in Croatia. The Serb population of Croatia at that time scarcely needed propaganda from Belgrade to feel very uncomfortable, isolated and afraid in a brand-new Tudjman-led Croatia.

In Bosnia, for all the horrors of that war, the conflict cannot be understood properly and accurately if it is dismissed simply as a war of Serbian or Yugoslav aggression. Once again, the prospect of living in an independent Bosnia -- four decades earlier, the site of horrific killing grounds of Serbs and others -- left large segments of especially the rural Serb population feeling very isolated and very fearful.

While in no way trying to apologize for or exonerate the Serbs for their action during the Bosnian war, the fact remains that despite a post-WWII tradition of multi-culturalism and intermarriage, in rural areas especially where Serbs predominate, there was a deep-seeded fear of domination by Muslims and a collective memory of WWII killings and slaughters.

In this regard there is an excellent book that was published a few years ago by former *NY Times* correspondent Chuck Sudetic entitled “Blood and Vengeance” in which while tracing the course of the Bosnian war leading to the tragedy of Srebrenica, he shows how both the Serb and the Muslim communities in eastern Bosnia harbored these historically-motivated mutual fears and hatreds and that each was waiting for the opportunity to “do unto others.” He sets this out in a chapter called “Kad Tad, Kad Tad.”

In Kosovo, once again there is no defense for Serb actions in this region over the past decade, and especially not for the mass deportation and killing of Albanians begun as the NATO air war started in March 1999. But we must take a step back and remember that a good part of the reason Milosevic was swept to power in Yugoslavia in 1987-1988 was the perception by Serbs of inequities they had suffered in Kosovo during the final decades of Titoist Yugoslavia, when Kosovo was run

largely by and for Albanians. From an ethnic Albanian perspective, we must realize that they have viewed Albanian regions of Southern Serbia and Macedonia as historically part of an Albanian space - current-day borders notwithstanding.

These are uncomfortable facts that need to be recognized and factored into western and US policy as we approach the Balkans in the 21st century. If and when we really come to grips with these historical realities and determinants, then we will be better able to grasp that there have never been nor are there now any quick fixes to the problems in this region. Here, there is no simple good and evil or black and white.

Second Lesson: The Dangers of Over-involvement and Micro-management

There is also no escaping the reality that right now the U.S. and its NATO allies are heavily invested in the Balkans in terms of time, personnel, resources and money. We are involved in the Balkans in what looks to be an open-ended commitment, if one wants to view it as positively as possible, or a black hole, if one wants to look darkly. Although there is the clear, even justifiable temptation in the Bush administration to walk away or to diminish over time our involvement in the Balkans and put the onus on the Europeans, the reality is such that a move will not be as easy or as advisable as it may seem.

Why? First an foremost, we must recognize that from the perspective of NATO and the people in the region the whole framework for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular but also in Kosovo, is American built - a pax-Americana. Dayton and Rambouillet are and were primarily American plans into which the Europeans and the Russians were brought only in the later stages. If we leave the peacekeeping in the region mainly to them, we cannot expect them to have the same level of support for these frameworks that we have.

We also should consider that, with the exception of its military disengagement provisions, Dayton is a blueprint and a framework – not a bible or an international treaty. It is doubtful wheter its designers or signators ever seriously expected that all its provisions would or could be implemented to the letter, no matter how robust the enforcement. In this sense, all parties within Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslims, Croats and Serbs have problems with Dayton and they want revisions. Yet there is nothing now to replace Dayton, or for that matter the Kosovo peace plan, codified in UN Security Council document 1244, nor has the U.S. been interested in a revision given how deeply and inextricably we are identified with it.

In this context, it is important to illustrate a sense of the breadth and depth of U.S. and NATO involvement in the Balkans over the past six or seven years. Since 1995, the U.S. has spent tens of billions of dollars in humanitarian, economic and infrastructure assistance, as well as supporting peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and in Kosovo. Well over hundreds of thousands of U.S. servicemen have rotated in and out of the region during this time. We had in 1996 as many as 20,000 troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina, currently down to about 4,000. Now, we also have another 5,000 - 6,000 in

Kosovo and probably at least several hundred, if not several thousand, backing up the KFOR force in Macedonia.

Arguably, in the Clinton administration, the Balkan issue was the predominant foreign policy issue. It took more time and effort than any other region. This means Clinton spent more time on the Balkans than he did on Russia, China, the Middle East, or Latin America. The proliferation of special envoys and special coordinators for various Balkan activities just within the State Department itself is striking evidence of this deep involvement.

U.S. involvement, however, has been far deeper and more comprehensive than just the large scale investments of time, personnel, and resources. U.S. officials have been and still are at the center of most of the key peacekeeping institutions on the ground in Bosnia and Kosovo, and not just the military positions. Just to give a few examples:

- The chief official of the UN in Bosnia is a former U.S. general and diplomat (J. Klein).

- Until April 1, the chief OSCE Representative in Bosnia has been an American (Bob Barry), and his predecessor was an American.

- The U.S. officials were in complete charge of the arbitration process over the disposition of the critical Bosnian town of Brcko - the narrow link between the two halves of the Serb Republic in Bosnia and therefore the primary determinant of the fate of that entity.

- The number two official to both the EU High Representative for Bosnia and the UNMIK supervisor in Kosovo has been an American - perhaps by coincidence the same man (Jock Covey).

- The current U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina (Tom Miller) has been very active in forcing the leadership of the three communities to make Dayton work.

In fact, the U.S. and the international community have come to occupy the position of virtual viceroys in these regions. Professor Stephen Burg has said and written "the Office of the High Representative has accrued increasing and virtually dictatorial powers over the day-to-day operations of the entire territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, including each of the two entities as well as the Bosnian state itself." Here, it can also be added that the UNMIK Commissioner in Kosovo has similar powers.

Much of the success in building common Bosnia-wide functions - including the common currency, central bank, license plates, election reforms, passports, etc. - have all in the end been accomplished by the dictat of the High Representative. The fundamental dilemma of Dayton, as well

as in Kosovo, Burg has emphasized, is that the existence of this international high authority and the deep hands-on involvement of U.S. officials has freed the local parties of ever having to agree on anything meaningful. It has, in their view, freed them of the need for compromise and has freed local politicians of accountability and responsibility for the future of Bosnia and for Kosovo.

This is in part why despite positive features such as increased refugee returns and an improved economic picture, we see support for Dayton fraying along central political fault lines - Herzegovinian Croats have unilaterally declared they are forming their own state and some are defecting from the so-called Bosnian army. The Muslims want the entities dissolved and central authority enhanced, while the Serbs in the RS remain suspicious of all central Bosnian institutions.

The net effect of all this micro-management and over-management has been the over-identification of the U.S. with a potentially open-ended and very costly peace process, as well as the fraying of support for the peace process (both in the region and as a whole) and the growing sense that such over-bearing outside leadership simply cannot be sustained.

Third Lesson: The Need for Continued International Peacekeeping Troops On the Ground

Given all these problems, it is difficult now to say that we are disengaging, no matter how gradually. These have been our wars and our peace. The U.S. may draw down on the peacekeeping, but the situation in the region is largely one of our own making and therefore one for which we bear primary responsibility.

Unity in NATO and stability in the region are therefore still largely dependent on a strong U.S. role in the region. Secretary of State Powell has recognized this basic fact, and that is why he has made his now oft-quoted statement that despite campaign rumblings, the U.S. is not abandoning the region but will proceed together with our allies on the all-for-one, one-for-all principle of "in together, out together."

The fragile and incomplete peace in the region is still far from self-sustainable. Consequently, virtually every observer in and out of the Balkans can agree on one proposition -- there will be no lasting peace and stability in the region without U.S. and international troops on the ground to provide a sense of security and to keep the parties separated. If the international peacekeepers leave, the peace will not last more than a matter of a few weeks, perhaps days. On the issue of possibly drawing down all U.S. ground units, the alliance wants to avoid at all costs the experience of UNPROFOR in Bosnia where the U.S. was a non-participant while our NATO allies were bogged down on the ground for years. This is one reason why our Allies are so concerned with sharing risks and with the "in together, out together" principle.

If preserving unity in NATO remains a strategic U.S. concern, then no matter how much the U.S. wants to and tries, it will not be able to extricate itself easily or quickly from the Balkans.

What is a Realistic, Sustainable U.S. Policy in the Balkans?

U.S. policy in the Balkans, we have seen, has moved from deep commitment and involvement during the Clinton administration to an evolving policy under President George W. Bush looking to gradually disengage from the region. What is needed is some middle ground between the two, so that we can avoid the stark policy choice between remaining there heavily involved or leaving altogether.

Such a policy would consist of two separate and distinct elements. The first, a redeployment of our peacekeeping troops in such a manner that U.S. and Allied forces can remain on the ground in the Balkans, providing vital security, stability, and separation, while scaling back the intensive and intrusive "nation-building and peace-building" functions that the new Bush administration, the Congress, and presumably eventually the American people could soon oppose. The second element is tying this limited disengagement to a broader regional approach to the conflict by involving diplomatic, political and economic efforts, as well as significant disarmament and confidence-building measures.

Redeployment of Peacekeeping Troops Along Borders

Much of the opposition to the Balkan peacekeeping exercise, and the growing fear in the current administration and among the public that we are mired forever in the Balkans, stems from the perception that our forces on the ground are engaged in the daily business of building civil and political society, i.e. nation-building or state building.

In my view, opposition to keeping our troops on the ground could largely be dissipated if U.S. and Allied troops were not perceived to be engaged in such nation-building activities. Currently, they are deployed within Bosnia-Herzegovina and within Kosovo where they come into contact with the local populations and are potentially threatened by those who could oppose what we are trying to do.

A way to signal to the region that we are beginning to disengage from the nuts and bolts of building new societies, but yet sustaining assurances that we will remain on the ground in the region, is to redeploy our troops both in Bosnia and in Kosovo around the borders of those states or entities, but no longer within them, with the assurance that these troops will continue to provide this necessary buffer for a prolonged, indefinite period.

This would have the effect of keeping borders secure by providing more troops to prevent cross-border infiltrations of the sort we have recently seen in Macedonia and Serbia, and keeping the military forces of all the parties separated. In this view, peacekeepers within Kosovo would be redeployed between Kosovo and Serbia, between Kosovo and Macedonia, and between Kosovo and Albania, and the troops in Bosnia would be reinforced along the inter-ethnic boundary line between the two entities as well as along Bosnia's borders with Yugoslavia and Croatia. To some extent, this is already happening in Bosnia, where the number of peacekeeping troops has been cut by 2/3 since the original deployment.

In Bosnia, some will argue that such a redeployment along the borders or lines of separation will be tantamount to partition, but in reality this is only an acknowledgment of what is actually taking place on the ground. Such a peacekeeping configuration in Bosnia would be in a way like the Green Line in Cyprus that has divided that island. Yet, this Green Line has also kept the peace for 27 years.

It should also be emphasized that such a redeployment of peacekeeping forces is not intended to support a formal dismemberment of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The key elements of the Dayton Peace Process should be preserved - Bosnia should be kept unified as a single country and efforts must continue to keep the institutions of the Bosnian state functioning to the extent possible.

There is another advantage to such a redeployment from the U.S. perspective. If NATO and international troops are removed from hands-on nation-building tasks and not exposed within the entities and regions but deployed along clearly defined border lines, this could make it easier for the U.S. to gradually disengage ground force units and to hand over most of the responsibility to the Europeans who already make up approximately 75% or more of NATO's peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo. The Europeans, in turn, might find it more acceptable to inherit this task than if they were engaged in a more "robust enforcement" of the letter of Dayton or the peace in Kosovo.

The "nation-building" tasks, including the job of protecting minority refugee returns and other civil and political tasks, would be performed by re-trained local police working together with the international police task force in Bosnia and its equivalent in Kosovo. If matters really got out of hand, peacekeeping troops on the border could be called in for limited duty.

In Kosovo, we need to acknowledge that after nearly two years of peacekeeping there is virtually no chance to rebuild the so-called multi-ethnicity which largely never existed. There is no need after two years for the continued subdivision of Kosovo into five peacekeeping zones. There were probably, in 1999, good internal NATO reasons for this division of labor, but now it is time to move on. We must take these troops and deploy them along Kosovo's borders - to seal them off.

This will mean, regrettably, that the small Serb minority left in Kosovo will probably have to move into the north of Kosovo, controlled by Serbs, or into Serbia proper. But 40,000 peacekeepers cannot keep guarding a 50,000 minority indefinitely. Kosovo is probably lost to Yugoslavia, and all the international community can do now is regulate the disassociation. We do not need troops within Kosovo to do this. We need them to take charge of its international borders where the greatest destabilization of the whole Balkan region is now taking place, and is likely to do so in the future.

The Need for a Comprehensive, Regional Settlement Including Disarmament Measures

The second facet of this new U.S. policy would be support for an international effort led by the major European powers to solve the key, unresolved issues of the whole region in a comprehensive manner -- including Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro and other pending problems. This is not by any means an effort to create a fourth Yugoslavia, but would entail encouraging these new states to cooperate on humanitarian, economic, refugee and minority issues that are in the mutual interest of all sides. Ultimately the problems of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia cannot be resolved separately or in a vacuum. The solution of one problem and the way it is done will inevitably have a significant impact on the others. The international community needs to realize the inevitable linkage of these issues and start to deal with these problems in a comprehensive, not a piecemeal, manner. To some extent, the Southeast Europe Stability Pact coordinated by the EU is a good start in theory, but in practice not much has been done due to a lack of commitment of funds.

What is needed is a high-level, multi-lateral diplomatic conference involving all the countries of the region, under international auspices, to deal with all these issues together, including security issues, borders, sovereignty, economic cooperation, and the rights of minorities.

A special focus of such a regional conference would be arms control and disarmament efforts to reverse the current arms build-up, as well as to increase the sense of security and mutual trust through the adoption of a series of confidence-building measures. The Dayton Accords contain such arms reduction provisions, but they have been largely ignored recently. The last thing this region needs is more and better weapons. Rather, the focus must be on internationally-supervised disarmament. The re-deployment of international peacekeeping forces along borders and zones of separation for a prolonged period could provide the incentive and the sense of stability that could make these arms control efforts of the countries of the region - old and new - more effective.

Of course, the Bush administration, wanting to distance itself from the Balkans, might view such a large scale, probably protracted conference, negatively. But the promise of U.S. military and political backing for an overarching political, economic, and military solution to the problems of the former Yugoslavia created under European leadership could actually end up freeing the U.S. from the current deep, practically unilateral responsibility it has come to assume for Bosnia because of Dayton, and for Kosovo because of Rambouillet/Kumanovo. Such a regional settlement will require trans-European support and engagement. The days of the pax-Americana would recede, and for the U.S. this can only be good news.