

A Story of Mitigated Ambitions: Kosova's Torturous Path to its Postwar Future

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In many ways, the present situation in Kosova speaks of a dramatic failure on the part of the international administration to grasp the local specifics of the last fifteen years of conflict in the Balkans. Even based on its own criteria, the international community's failure have been impossible to avoid. Among the more glaring examples is the more or less complete segregation of Kosova's population along the very Serb and non-Serb divide sought by Serb nationalists since the late 1980s. This segregation, along with any number of policies imposed by the international community in its administration of Kosova since 1999, has conceded to a kind of logic that reaffirms xenophobic conceptions that Albanians and Serbs cannot live together, exactly opposite what the administration in Kosova today publicly proclaims.

Although much has been written about Kosova during and after the NATO bombing campaign of 1999, most of the analysis has mirrored that failure to question long-held generalizations of the region. More specifically, authors have neglected the dynamics evolving inside the country itself, preferring the crude categories and schemas best analyzed by David Campbell several years ago.¹ Part of the problem is that much of the available evidence of activities on the ground inside Kosova during NATO intervention has been ignored in favor of reinforcing more media-friendly types of arguments. The failure of recent analysis of the events

is compounded by the subsequent inability to properly gauge the mistakes of these policies that precipitated the war in Kosova.

This inability to adopt a criteria that focuses on local conditions for maintaining a critical analysis of diplomatic practices has not only proven detrimental to academia. It has also left policy-makers ill prepared to deal with the consequences of NATO's action, especially when it pertains to Kosova's still contentious and uncertain future. The manner in which the international community has administered Kosova, asserted measures of control over its Albanian population and neglected fundamental state and society building issues have left the region in an uneasy state. The factors involved in this following critique are not unique to Kosova however. The lack of preparedness in both academic and diplomatic circles has also been exposed since 1999 in such places as Macedonia and the previously unacknowledged growth of so-called Islamic terrorist cells throughout Europe and North America.

In order to prevent future crisis in Kosova, the Balkans and the larger “Islamic” world, it is necessary to reexamine Western policy throughout the 1990s and use its failures in Kosova as a guide. This critique must start with the monumental failure by the Bush administration to adequately appreciate the historical changes taking place in 1989 and after. With the unexpected collapse of the Communist world, Western policy reacted with trepidation and confusion. Its subsequent answer to the surfacing of long simmering social and political problems was to develop strategies geared towards *containing* rather than *resolving* a multiple of crisis in, for instance, the Balkans and the quickly crumbling Soviet Union. An important consequence of this short-sited policy agenda, largely driven by opinion polls and notions of the West’s “immediate strategic interests,” was the counter-intuitive meeting of the minds of unrepresentative circles of power in the region. It was those political actors, largely remnants of

the totalitarian state infrastructure that crumbled in the early 1990s, whose ability to dictate the rhetoric of events on the ground strengthened their importance to otherwise excluded Western policy makers. I will use the case of the closely linked political fortunes of Serbian strongman and ex-Communist party member, Slobodan Milosevic and Ibrahim Rugova, “pacifist” leader of the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK) as my case study to demonstrate the pitfalls of an all-too-regular policy flaw of Western policy makers. By exploring this forgotten post-Communist political relationship, it will be demonstrated that external needs for local stability tended to favor unrepresentative forces and distorted the possible alternatives to the issues in Kosova, which proved far more complicated and deserved greater attention.

The West, by the 1989 crisis in socialist Europe, invested a great deal of its energies to containing the potential bloody consequences of the fall of the Soviet Empire. The apparent shift in the balance of power in the Balkans created a great deal of anxiety over the rise of instability in a region.² This instability was particularly worrisome to Western policy-makers as it had shown signs of trans-regional implications since the mid-1980s, especially with Bulgaria’s expulsion of tens of thousands of the country’s Turkish citizens and the rise of Serbian nationalism. It has largely been understood that nationalist policies in Yugoslavia, conveniently linked today to individuals such as Milosevic instead of society-wide mechanisms, led to the outbreak of war in Croatia and Slovenia. The immediate response to the conflict was the implementation of a number of stopgap efforts to restrain the war from spreading to Yugoslavia’s Muslim-populated regions.

While it is clear plans were being made for a full-scale occupation of Bosnia by Serbian and Croatian parties even before war began, the lack of a rapid military victory forced, in particular, Serbian leaders to pick and choose their moments as far as military adventurism was

concerned. Kosova, in which 90% of the population was Albanian and by and large nominally associated within this ‘Islamic matrix’ that threatened regional stability, was often identified as a diplomatic and military time bomb which needed to be avoided. Despite the clear populist cache Kosova carried for Serbian political figures who began their nationalist careers by using the Kosova issue, realities on the ground forced Belgrade to concentrate activist energies elsewhere. Militant nationalists in Belgrade soon realized that the military adventures in Croatia and soon in Bosnia were far more than the under-motivated Yugoslav National Army (JNA) could handle. For them, and conveniently the West as well, war in Kosova would have to be avoided at all costs.

Of course avoiding the spread of war into Kosova was not only a concern of Belgrade or Washington. A significant percentage of the Albanian political elite of Kosova, much of which were a product of the Tito-era reforms of the 1970s, filled with technocrats who had strong ties with Belgrade and had a particularistic understanding of Kosova’s future, equally resisted the war’s spread to Kosova. This strong, what ultimately would be identified as pacifist bent, translated into the creation of the LDK and the rise to political prominence of Ibrahim Rugova in 1991. What strengthened the power of both Belgrade and Rugova in the subsequent months of 1991-1992 was the unequivocal support Western powers immediately gave both parties in their effort to suppress a rising segment of Kosova’s society organizing for the termination of “70 years of Serbian occupation.” The mutual support among an important but still politically vulnerable Kosova elite and Belgrade for a ‘peaceful solution’, over time permitted Western leaders to diplomatically ignore Kosova. Over the course of the tumultuous years of political infighting and selective repression, the West handed over the stewardship of the resolution of this conflict to Rugova and Milosevic. This constituted a major mistake that delayed and

perhaps intensified the inevitable conflict that took place later in the decade. Unfortunately, not only do analysts fail to see the pre-Dayton period in this light, there seems to have been little learned from these policy blunders as it concerns Kosova and Macedonia today.

Tragically, the rapidly changing events in the Balkans, in particular with the ‘removal’ of Milosevic from Belgrade earlier in 2001 has pushed Western policy-makers back into this flawed mode of thinking. The remainder of the article studies the impact of this legacy of failure by first, briefly outlining the historical dimensions of Kosova's problems leading to the war in 1998-1999. It then proceeds to analyze the post-war period that has seen an unprecedented level of international intervention in the form of the United Nation's mission to Kosova (UNMIK) in order to specify the underlying and recurring mistakes of Western policies in Kosova.³

Containing Kosova: The Milosevic and Rugova Partnership

By the time the Berlin Wall crumbled Serb nationalists had taken over control of the Yugoslav military and federal police, mostly on the back of Slobodan Milosevic’s rise to power within the communist party.⁴ As most observers wish to point out, much of this took place after the death of Tito. While this is true, I insist that we cannot understand Kosova if we rigidly stick to this watershed in Balkan history. This is important when we begin to reflect on the *flaw of perception* Western diplomats had about the components to an effective Kosova policy. While the rest of the world considers the issue a question of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘regional stability’, no one bothered to consider why Kosovars themselves were resisting Serb rule. From an Albanian perspective, the issue for locals was not one of Serbian ‘sovereignty’ but decolonization.

Recognizing this or not, it is clear that by 1989, war spreading in Kosova represented the worst-case scenario for Western policy-makers. Unable to master the complexities of the conditions on the ground, both the Bush administration and its European allies made every effort

to freeze history. As Washington, London and Paris tried to preserve the crumbling socialist states--USSR and Yugoslavia--their 'status-quo at any costs' rhetoric sent off dangerous signals to the outside world, including Saddam Hussain in Iraq who would invade Kuwait in 1990.

Informatively, most Western policy-makers seemed relieved when the local dictator, Milosevic illegally rescinded Kosova's 'autonomous' status in 1989. By 'constitutionally' restraining Kosovars from declaring independence, many thought (or hoped) Kosovars would back down and accept their fate, thus returning the region's 'stability'. Milosevic's moves by themselves, however, would not hold unless Kosova's population could be restrained. There were serious fears that 'a conscious policy [by Serb nationalists] of trying to provoke a national rising' would lead to a deadly confrontation.⁵ That is precisely where the LDK (founded on 23 December 1989) and its figurehead, Ibrahim Rugova, proves vital to Kosova's quiet departure from the headlines in the 1990s.⁶

As the LDK began to consolidate its hold on Kosova's key political sections and restrained those wishing to reciprocate police violence, Western policy-makers subsequently ignored Kosova. Not only did they ignore it, most policy-makers in the West believed their own hype about Rugova and assumed his charismatic hold on the population was complete and airtight. What regional specialists in Western capitals failed to note was the fact that Kosovar politics in the 1990s, as it did throughout its modern history, reflected a demographic and sociological divide between urban and rural populations that was seething with animosity at the best of times. This divide reemerged after an initial period of LDK ascendancy, quickly producing factions that pitted Albanian against Albanian as much as Albanian against Serb on the ground. The initial 'unity' behind Rugova's cause soon translated into renewed tensions within Kosova's Albanian communities over how to win independence, a fact that was often

manipulated by Belgrade. This lack of unity paid huge dividends to Milosevic and the largely Yugoslav-educated leadership of the LDK during the early 1990s. Appreciating this will help us better understand events before and after the war. Milosevic and his growing array of administrators inside Kosova played a shrewd hand with Rugova, lending enough political space for his allies to prop up a near monolithic entity that both seemed to control Kosovars and to satiate Western needs for relative stability. Belgrade often publicly stated that it could 'work' with the moderate Rugova and tolerated his frequent trips abroad to promote his meaningless 'Government in Exile'.

But this image of manageable stability Milosevic and Rugova were selling to the West was not representative of events on the ground. The mechanics of on again, off again negotiations about Albanian language and educational rights between the LDK and Belgrade disguised the fact that low-scale warfare was almost perpetually taking place in the wooded region of Drenica in central Kosova. The elements leading this under-armed and politically naive insurgency eventually became known as the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA).

In light of what happened over the last ten years in the Balkans, and the changes in the world's geo-strategic configuration, policy makers should not return to this sort of dependency on personalities. Kosova's problem grew out of control because Western policies relied on individuals who were alienated from their own populations, rather than engage the components of conflict. That, unfortunately, is exactly what appears to be happening again as current Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica, Serb Prime Minister Djindjic and Rugova are promoted by Western policy-makers to resolve the inherently complex issues in Kosova today.

Proof of this lingering tendency exists once we examine how Belgrade and the Western capitals tried to put spin on the results of 'Rugova's victory' in the OSCE-organized municipal

elections of late October 2000. After claiming him the unequivocal victor, both Belgrade and UNMIK then promoted Rugova as the only person with whom a deal concerning Kosova's future could be made. Clearly, by linking a resurrected Rugova to any hope for Kosova's long-term security and prosperity, Belgrade and the West have actively sought to influence the outcome of 'parliamentary' elections held in Kosova in November of 2001, which failed to produce the overwhelming victory for which they were hoping. Again, while Rugova has been unanimously declared the victor by the outside world, his hold in the newly created governing institutions have been clearly thwarted by extensive opposition from Kosovar Albanian groups. Rugova has only been able to claim his seat as 'President' of Kosova's elected body under pressure from the international community. His influence has been marginal and the LDK has been opposed by the remnants of the Provisional Government of Kosova, which include members of the KLA and most of those who supported the armed struggle against Belgrade.⁷ Indeed, the subsequent reality of Kosovar political pluralism ultimately earned international condemnation, precisely because it greatly complicated the otherwise untenable political quagmire waiting to be addressed concerning Kosova's future status.

It is necessary to constantly point out the tendency of Western diplomacy to rely on individuals to manage conflicts and that this approach has a long history. As it concerns Kosova, a particularly large proportion of the blame in the 1990s should be directed at the US State Department's various Balkan policy schema. I wish to focus on those led by Richard Holbrooke and his subordinate, then ambassador to Macedonia, Christopher Hill in particular because they nurtured the Rugova/Milosevic formula for most of the 1990s and were directly responsible for the subsequent rehabilitation of Milosevic's regime after Dayton in 1995.

The apex of Holbrooke/Hill's influence was at the end of the Bosnian war. As the Dayton Peace Conference in 1995 outlined a vague Balkan-wide solution, Richard Holbrooke's strategy to engage Milosevic directly as 'a partner for peace' invariably determined the fate of Kosova. Knowing Rugova would not resist or change course due to any snub at Dayton, Kosova's exclusion from talks for Holbrooke was a short-term resolution to what was then a major policy concern: ending the Bosnian war. Unfortunately such an approach of exclusionary diplomacy has been repeated over and over as Belgrade (and Skopje), in their dealings with Western officials have successfully dictated with whom they will negotiate over the issues in Kosova, the Preshova Valley (and most recently the conflict in Macedonia). Caving in to Belgrade's and Skopje's demands to exclude those directly responsible for the instability in the region only delays and perhaps exasperates the problems in these troubled areas.

The effort by Belgrade and Western powers to 'contain' Kosova in the 1990s failed precisely because neither Milosevic (nor Rugova) permitted 'outsiders' from participating in the process. The 'outsiders' in the Kosova case were the people living in Kosova who were not represented by Rugova's LDK. While Western policy-makers wanted to believe this was but a small minority, the reality of how divided Kosovar society was became clear after the Dayton debacle. As a consequence of Dayton, the rural communities that networked beyond the LDK's largely Prishtina-based government began to strengthen links with the Kosovar diaspora. Be they in Turkey, Western Europe or North America, over the last fifty years these communities became important parts of the region's economy and thus political future. The Kosovar diaspora, which had been voluntarily paying a 3% tax to the Rugova-led parallel state to pay for clinics, schools and LDK salaries, began to openly question Rugova's tactics after Dayton. Once doubt crept in among the diaspora, members of formally secret groups who had been fighting Belgrade

continuously inside Kosova, suddenly found themselves publicly mobilizing people in Stockholm, Zurich, and New York for their anti-colonial war.⁸

At this stage, the most important result of Rugova's losing the faith of the Kosovar diaspora was that tens of millions of dollars were funneled into efforts to fight for an independent Kosova, outside Rugova's, Belgrade's or the West's control. Predictably the Western powers and Rugova denounced the 'peasants' taking increasingly visible actions against Serb forces as 'terrorists' and 'communists'. This short-sited public relations campaign unfortunately played into the hands of Milosevic's neo-fascist allies who had gained control of important segments of the Serb military and influenced much of Serbia's political debate. As far as Belgrade was concerned, they had the West's implicit approval to eliminate Kosova's 'destablizing' insurgency.

At this point, it is clear Western diplomats turned a blind eye to an escalating war in the hope that Serbian military oppression could keep a lid on the Balkan 'powder keg'. By the fall of 1998, however, Milosevic's promise to silence Kosova was not being fulfilled. The thinly veiled 'green light' Western nations awarded Milosevic to eliminate the 'narco-terrorists' failed to take into consideration that Kosovars would not give in to military repression. As a Balkan winter loomed, the realities that the Milosevic/Rugova tandem was loosing control and the embarrassing spectacle of hundreds of thousands of new Balkan victims of Serbian aggression receiving wide media attention forced some in the West to consider shifting gears.

It is at this point where I strongly disagree with conventional wisdom about what transpired. Most believe that the desire to stop a possible humanitarian catastrophe was the reason for increased Western pressure in October 1998. While this was partially at play, I suggest we also consider that Milosevic, again seen by many in the West to be the man who

could keep the Balkans 'stable', was in danger of losing support of his army. According to insiders, the KLA was actively targeting middle level officers of the Serbian army over the period of 1996-1998, a tactic that by late autumn was creating a serious command issue for Serb ground forces. These classic guerrilla tactics created such confusion among units that inexperienced soldiers had to fight at times their motivated adversaries with no real command structure. The news of one particularly costly defeat in early October in which eight tanks were lost in a single battle sent shock waves in Belgrade and Washington. Fear of Milosevic losing control of his military led to the well-known 'stand down' agreement Holbrooke signed with Milosevic on October 12 1998, an agreement that introduced OSCE-led observers and a return of Serb troops to barracks inside Serbia. While the Serb army used this time to reorganize, (Milosevic fired a number of generals who proved unsympathetic to an increasingly unpopular 'cause') the West increasingly felt something else had to be done, dependency on Milosevic and Rugova was no longer sufficient.

This all culminated at Rambouillet, where the US, clearly driving Western policy by now, was eager to resolve the issue in a way that could better contain Milosevic, finally recognized as the central problem. A series of massacres and increasing evidence that a Spring campaign was being planned by the revived Serb military forced the hand of Western governments. It was also important that the political players had changed in Europe. A combination of new leaders in France, Germany and Britain and increasing public pressure to not repeat Bosnia and Rwanda resulted in demands to put credible pressure on Milosevic.

NATO's Campaign and Milosevic's March Surprise

While this was taking place in France, the most radical of Serbs nationalists were drawing up elaborate plans that would take the world by surprise. What most analysts fail to

recognize is that there were many in Serbia (and in most Western diplomatic circles) who did not believe events would lead to 72 days of bombing. Many in Belgrade calculated that there was too much opposition to the rapid shift in US policy in Europe to give any credibility to threats, which had been made on and off for years.

The Milosevic government treated Rambouillet accordingly. Milosevic himself was skillfully exposing divisions inside the West, enticing those so inclined (Greece, France, the Holbrooke faction in the US State Department and Italy) with the promise to reintroduce the old tandem of Milosevic and Rugova if only his special forces were allowed to crush the insurgency. Unfortunately, Western 'experts' once again missed the boat when they completely ignored the fact that Serb nationalists, who, with Milosevic's approval, took over military and paramilitary structures in Serbia, had different plans for Kosova. Again, the Serb nationalists clearly believed that a lack of Western resolve and a sense that the West wanted a permanent solution to Kosova's problem, gave their forces a green light.

News from Kosova at least ten days before OSCE observers left Kosova on March 20 demonstrate that Serb military and paramilitary forces were already conducting full-scale operations in western regions of Kosova. By the time Richard Holbrooke flew to Belgrade on March 21 to give Milosevic, 'one last chance,' the border regions of Podujeva were cleaned of its Albanian inhabitants, tens of thousands of destitute expellees poured into Prishtina and Mitrovica. As in Western Kosova, the key district of Skenderaj in Drenica was more or less empty of its 70,000 inhabitants by the time Holbrooke left Belgrade two nights later. Holbrooke's intervention, intentionally or not, delayed NATO bombing for three days, giving Milosevic the 'ten days' he, over the winter, said he needed to eliminate the insurgency. I submit that this delay tactic was Holbrooke's (and other elements in the Western policy-making elite)

last attempt to help finalize the Kosova problem, one which many in the West privately had hoped would happen since the emergence of the KLA in 1995. Little did poorly informed policy-makers in the West realize that Serb nationalists were actually embarking on a program far more comprehensive than simply eliminating Albanian freedom fighters.

As the chronology above suggests, the acts that took place in Kosova had been well prepared and began at least two weeks before a single NATO bomb fell over the Balkans. While many argue NATO bombing provided the pretext for the ethnic cleansing that took place in 1999, it is important to stress that during the lull in fighting over the winter of 1998-1999, paramilitary groups such as Arkan's 'Tigers' and 'Fenki's Boys' set up operations in Kosova and had been well placed to begin their orgy of murder, rape and plunder. Hundreds of 'volunteers' from Russia and elsewhere, many of whom were actively recruited over Russian television starting back in 1998, had been trained in camps outside Belgrade. An armada of buses and train carriages were also prepared for the lightning quick cleansing of Kosova's 2 plus million Albanians.

It is clear Western nations were not prepared for the million plus deportees who were dumped at Kosova's borders in less than a month. Contingency plans had not even considered Serbia's 'final solution'. Ground troops had not been prepared, relief agencies were caught off-guard and the ever important 'public' was led to believe that NATO's 'limited' air strikes would end in a matter of days. This had important consequences for how the war would be fought, both for the KLA and Serb forces on the ground and NATO forces in the air.

Clearly those Serb nationalists who organized 'operation horseshoe' as it is sometimes called, felt confident that NATO 'air raids' would not impede the campaign. This bombing campaign, it may be suggested, was initially intended only to be a face-saving gesture, to allow

Milosevic to return to the table and negotiate a deal with Rugova. I would suggest the paucity of the first few weeks of night bombing was also meant to allow Serb forces to eliminate the KLA. While Serb daytime operations inside Kosova were not immediately threatened by NATO's nighttime bombing, Serbia's neo-fascists nevertheless miscalculated. First, they did not properly gauge what an impact the eventual deportation of over one and a half million to Albania would have on international opinion. The spectacle alone forced the hand of an otherwise sympathetic international community. It may also be said that as usual, both the West and Belgrade miscalculated the Kosovars' resolve to fight for their homes, family and independence. This was where the real problem to NATO strategy lay, the KLA just did not go away.

When the expected results did not materialize quickly enough, the Serb military and population began showing signs of panic. Milosevic, sensing the tide was turning against him began to seek a way out. Often forgotten, Milosevic openly offered to partition Kosova during the bombing which Russian negotiators were especially keen on pursuing this concession. This desire to 'take Mitrovica, the Trepca mines, and Pec' is key to understanding the future of Kosova for as Serb uniformed forces pulled out in June 1999, Serb agents mobilized an exodus of Kosovar Serbs, directing them into strategically placed enclaves North of Mitrovica and around Gracanica/Prishtina.

While most outsiders will consider this last statement fanciful, it is important to consider a few key points. The moving of the Serb population into a compact area along the Serbian border was meant to engender a final solution that Milosevic publicly proposed over the preceding month and a half. The final solution here would permit Serbia to control the region's vital economic assets in the mines of Trepca North of the Ibar River and, as far as nationalists which include Kostunica were concerned, set a precedent to incorporate Serb areas of Bosnia

later on. Such a dividing of populations would also find a great deal of support among Western policy makers who, given this fait accompli, could then justify settling for Milosevic's cruel brinkmanship, as done at Dayton.⁹ This same tactic, it must be remembered, was used in Bosnia after Dayton and was more or less sanctioned by many in the West.¹⁰

There is evidence that such an approach was actively pursued by some Western powers in the negotiations to end NATO bombing over Serbia. Having learned much of French duplicity when it concerns Serbia during the Bosnian war, it comes to no surprise, therefore, that France and Russia would play a major role in the period immediately following the war. Brzezinski rightfully suggests that French and Russian interests lay in controlling strategic points of Kosova.¹¹ A largely outclassed US policy team participating in the allied discussions over military zones of influence in Helsinki naively conceded spheres of influence to a French and Russian plan to secure a partitioned Kosova for that final diplomatic solution.¹²

The only question then was what shape that partitioned territory would take. I suggest we can read much into the decision by Serb agents to push Kosovar Serbs into 'enclaves' strategically close to the Prishtina airport, Prishtina itself and areas contiguous to what is now exclusively Serb populated North Mitrovica. Let us not forget that Russian troops from Bosnia stormed into Kosova ahead of NATO troops, securing the airport and parading through Prishtina, which was virtually cleaned of Albanians. The Clinton administration in particular was furious about being duped and demanded that Russian troops abandon Prishtina as agreed in the Kumanova and Helsinki protocols signed only days before. Despite this pressure, if it were not for Romania and Bulgaria blocking Russian transport aircraft from sending reinforcements through their airspace, Prishtina today would most likely be part of Serb-controlled Kosova. Once the Russians left Prishtina, Kosovar Serbs followed.

The UN's Invasion and its Impact on Kosova's Future

In such a diplomatic environment where the biggest players in Kosova were clearly opposed to Kosova's independence and its territorial integrity, UNMIK/OSCE policies were bound to be influenced. The central problem for all outside parties involved was the fact that Kosova's returning population was demanding freedoms and rights the international community was not prepared to grant. Paradoxically, the Kosovar's organizational capacities, largely praised in the 1990s as 'grassroots democracy' meant they could quickly install a government. This organizational mechanism, manifested in a multiethnic Provisional Government of Kosova (PGK) created during Rambouillet immediately made claims to legitimacy in post-war Kosova by setting up town councils, a police force and organizing Kosova's reconstruction. As a response, the UN administration, under the mandate of UNSCR 1244, laid exclusive claim to administrative, judicial, economic and security powers in Kosova and went about enforcing that claim by calling the PGK 'illegal'.

To deal with this serious challenge to the UN's mandate, which was devised to specifically deny what over 90% of the population wanted, independence, UNMIK initiated a public relations campaign. The international community actively sought to discredit, vilify and ultimately destroy this clear challenge to international authority. The tactics used were full of innuendo, unsubstantiated accusations and political, economic and physical intimidation of Kosova's civilian and military leaders.

The KLA in particular faced a media campaign that began to change how the world characterized it. Instead of calling the KLA heroes fighting for freedom, they were being transformed into Kosova's villains. To substantiate the dramatic shift in sympathies the world was expected to entertain, the organized flight of Serbs that took place before Kosovar Albanians

could return was retroactively blamed on members of the KLA. Although this was often contradicted in the same press conference by UNHCR representative Ron Redmond who reiterated that the overwhelming majority of Serbs left with the Serb army, the media, driven by the logic of 'primordial hatreds' in the Balkans ignored this detail and bought UNMIK's line.

Not only was the Serb exodus blamed on Albanians in order to weaken Albanian political legitimacy, crime in general has been until today profiled along ethnic lines. UNMIK and KFOR spokespersons, upon reporting the death of a 'Serb' in its daily news conference will routinely call the death an 'ethnically motivated' crime before knowing any of the details. By keeping up the rhetoric of 'ethnic' crimes committed by Albanians, which in any US or European context would be condemned as racist, I suggest UNMIK hopes to create an atmosphere that only permits space for a subservient and outwardly 'cooperative' public figure to represent 95% of the population. It should come to no surprise that in this context, Rugova is considered the only acceptable solution to an otherwise unsolvable situation.

That 'Albanians' are vilified publicly has dramatic long-term effects on the region that many policy makers simply do not realize. Over the last two years, as a result of such stereotypes, the Kosovar Albanian diaspora in Europe is systematically being targeted for deportation back to Kosova. The xenophobic policy to deport third generation Kosovars from Europe eliminates important sources of cash for mostly rural families whose futures are now in question. A second socioeconomic consequence of this reversal of sympathies in Europe has UNMIK, ironically enough, particularly concerned. As tens of thousands are forced to return, there are no jobs or often, homes waiting for them. A severe shortage of, in particular, rural housing has subsequently created a dramatic rise in migration to Prishtina, Kosova's capital.

Already by late 2000, UNMIK was beginning to lament the smear campaign it started because the international community had lost its interest in paying for Kosova's growing needs.

Exasperating these problems is UNMIK's own economic policy. All trade passing through Kosova's borders are taxed and registered in Prishtina in a manner that is unprecedented for the Balkans and has proven detrimental to Kosova's development. Unfortunately, it is only the Albanian populated areas that are regulated; UNMIK and KFOR have refused to maintain a similar customs regime along borders shared with Serbia after violent protests organized by Serb radicals. The result is a lucrative black market where Serb, Russian, Turkish and Albanian mafias work together to smuggle in everything of need for Kosova's economy. UNMIK, by trying to 'rationalize' parts of Kosova's economy has unwittingly intensified the strength of the criminal element in the region and has made formal trade in Kosova the most expensive in the Balkans.

It is also the sense of being denied justice that is a consistent source of concern among Kosovars. The more than 530 clearly marked mass graves dotting Kosova's country side is a day-to-day reminder of what happened in 1999. For Kosovars, it is an outrage that less than half of these identified mass graves was ever inspected. Even more damning is the fact that the UN administration has, against the request of War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, decided to have war crimes suspects tried locally, ostensibly, many feel, so UNMIK could prove itself capable of creating a viable court system. This has led to a fiasco in justice that has especially poisoned the relationship between UNMIK and the hundreds of thousands directly affected by the war.

To my knowledge only one individual accused of war crimes has even begun the process of a trial. Worse yet, more than a dozen of the worst criminals 'escaped' from a KFOR prison in French-held North Mitrovica, fleeing into Serbia.¹³ This delay in trying war criminals and even

the failure to keep them in custody has largely been caused by the fact Serbs refuse to be judged by Albanian judges. Serb radicals have been able to block any effort to find justice by vetoing all UNMIK efforts to address Kosovar Albanian needs and at the same time refuse to hand over criminals identified by UNMIK. This policy to cave to Serb demands has resulted in a pattern of interaction between Serb representatives (who have direct links to the Serb secret services) and UNMIK that has created two separate Kosovos. Mitrovica's own Oliver Ivanovic, the most prominent of these Serb representatives and is not sought by KFOR/UNMIK police, basically dictates the terms of justice in Northern Kosova. It is Ivanovic who determines the amount of people permitted to cross into 'Serb' Mitrovica and, when he so desires, whether or not UNMIK can maintain a presence in that part of Kosova. Ivanovic's recent labeling as a problem comes after three years of working directly with him in search of finding stability in the volatile north of Kosova. Once again, the West's need for a strong man has created a regional thug who will go to any lengths to resist reform and the implementation of a just, long-lasting solution. On the other hand, the recent arrests of more than 60 former members of the KLA, including prominent community leaders has many in Kosova accusing UNMIK of double-standards and politically trying to shape the upcoming municipal elections to be held in October 2002.

As noted earlier, one of the UNMIK's goals from the start was to dilute the power of the PGK and resurrect through divide-and-rule tactics the moderate Rugova. UNMIK did this successfully by permitting the creation of political parties, requiring only 50 signatures in order to receive 'start-up' funding from the OSCE. This effectively dispersed loyalty within the PGK as individuals with strong regional support decided to break from the alliance and seek their fortunes alone. Most importantly, the moves strengthened a well-funded and experienced LDK

that proved it could organize a country-wide election on short notice and is keen on taking over local political relations with the outside world in the next year.

Despite all this, the local elections held on October 27, 2000 did not in result in political clarity in Kosova. The results of the elections, in which 40% of those individuals elected were not members of the LDK, bear no real consequence to the day-to-day governance of the country. What is happening is traditional resources of problem-solving made famous in the 1990s are now being appropriated by Prishtina and distributed to pliable 'partners' a pattern that is likely to continue even after a new round of elections in November of 2002.¹⁴

The society that the chief UN administrator Michael Steiner has inherited is heavily managed from a media (all radio programs must go through a licensing regime that basically shuts out politically-threatening programming) that focuses on promoting UNMIK positions, to a political environment fragmented and contentious. Combine this with growing pressure from Serbia to reach a solution that is completely unacceptable to Kosovars themselves, a low-level war in Macedonia which is directly involving Kosova's population and increasing economic disparities between the rural population and Kosova's Prishtina elite, there is the makings of more violence.

Kosova's Future

Kosova will ultimately have to be partitioned. Such a solution has rarely been considered until today, largely because the Clinton administration was still reluctant to abandon Bosnia and the Dayton accords (the administration's mark on history). Dayton today is vulnerable to modification with the unilateralism evident in President Bush's qualified isolationism (hence challenged by the events of 11 September 2001). Such a solution, while having consequences on Bosnia that most politicians privately support will have to come to the surface only after the

return of violence in Kosova. The threat of violence, remains since Rugova's popularity is far from secure and he does not command the kind of authority many in Belgrade and the West would like to think. With the victory of Kostunica as President of Yugoslavia, it is possible that Belgrade will increase its pressure that will specifically begin the process of partition.¹⁵

Among the many ways Belgrade may choose to expedite the process is by pressuring the Bush administration through the instigation of strategically placed events. To date, the violence in the Preshova Valley and now in Macedonia, have been key negotiating tools for Belgrade and Skopje. 'Albanian irredentism' is the *bête noire* of Western diplomats and their desired elimination gives Kostunica a great deal of leverage, as it did with Milosevic concerning the KLA in the late 1990s. As far as relations between Serbia and Kosova is concerned, the fact that known nationalists, including indicted war criminals, are still powerful figures in Serb domestic politics creates endless tensions. The recent 'discovery' of mass graves inside Serbia itself, containing hundreds of Albanian men, women and children, and the testimony of Serb witnesses at the War Crimes Tribunal in Den Haag, revealing again the nature of state terror during the 1998-1999 war only intensifies the sense among Kosovar Albanians of continued injustice.

Conclusion

The recent war in Kosova raises questions about how international organizations, powerful nations and their leaders understand social, economic and political exchanges between human beings. The 1998-1999 war in Kosova and its subsequent administration by the international community demonstrates an alarming ignorance of the fundamental elements to Kosovar society (its strong urban/rural divide and its will to go to extraordinary lengths to win its freedom) and a mode of interpretation that constantly repeats itself. The ultimate lesson to be learned from Kosova, therefore, is that there is a crying need to develop a more sensitive

methodological approach to diplomacy, in particular in the intelligence-gathering field, if the international community, in all its contradictory forms, ever hopes to contain future conflicts in the Balkans.

Unfortunately, the way some in the international community are positioning Kostunica and attempting to resurrect Rugova clearly suggests past experiences have not taught the necessary lessons. The need is not to find men, with whom meaningless cease-fires and protocols can be signed, but actions and gestures that have meaning for the population in question. As long the West and their counterparts in the Balkans will seek to avoid dealing with the tough issues by dismissing “terrorists” from the process, a simple police issue will always pose the threat of igniting that proverbial powder keg.

The current and future problems are not intractable but are results of a number of factors, often well within the reach of the powers-that-be to change for the better. Kosova itself, after being partitioned, may have to settle for indefinite administration with enough uncertainty and dependency on outside aid to render it a permanent economic and cultural backwater, forgotten by the rest of the world. This will lead Kosova’s population, which, as suggested above, has been mistreated and abandoned by the international community in a similar fashion before, to bring the region back to the brink of war. The way Macedonia had threatened to spiral out of control over the course of 2001 may be one manifestation of local frustration that will repeat itself over and over again until the West finally gets it right.

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Notes

¹David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

²For a recent and insightful study of Western failures in the region, see Tom Gallagher, *Outcast Europe: The Balkans, 1789-1989*. (London, 2001).

³On the basis of UNSCR 1244 the UN has set up an administrative mechanism, (henceforth UNMIK) to develop institutions that would retain Serbia's sovereignty but give Kosovars a "high-degree" of autonomy. For a full text of all relevant mandates see www.un.org/peace/kosovo/pages/kosovo12.htm.

⁴For an excellent summary of the events see Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 46-66.

⁵Branko Magas, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia* (London: Verso, 1993), 246-247.

⁶For Rugova's perspective see Ibrahim Rugova, *La Question du Kosovo: Entretiens réalisés par Marie-Françoise Alain et Xavier Galmiche* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

⁷While there are more than 15 political parties registered today, among the Albanian parties, only the LDK, the Democratic Party of Kosova (PDK) run by Hashim Thaci and Bajram Rexhepi, the current Prime Minister of the provisional government set up by UNMIK and the Alliance for the Future of Kosova, AAK are of any significance.

⁸For a well-informed journalistic outline of this process, see Tim Judah, 'The Kosovo Liberation Army', *Perceptions* (Sept-Nov, 2000): 61-77.

⁹It was clear to some critics that the combination of rhetorical rigidities and Serbian appreciation for Western desires to find a lasting solution based on those rigidities helped solidify the goals of Serb nationalist goals in Bosnia. See David Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, 17-155. For an example of an academic advocating population exchanges, see Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20 (1996): 138-175.

¹⁰See "20,000 Bosnians Serbs May Have Left Sarajevo," *OMRI Special Report: Pursuing Balkan Peace* 1:4 (30 January 1996).

¹¹Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Kosovo, histoire d'un stratagème raté," *Le Monde*, September 14, 1999.

¹²See the powerfully argued critique of how UNMIK reinforced "Serb" goals in Mitrovica, Sylvain Cypel, "Une dégradation prévisible, liée à l'ambiguïté du mandat onusien," *Le Monde* February 15, 2000. Comments made by EU/UN envoy Ahtissari's during negotiations in Belgrade to stop the war substantiate these objections by noting that Victor Chernomyrdin, Russian negotiator in Belgrade, openly promised Milosevic that Kosova would be favorably partitioned after the war.

¹³http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/ap/20000903/wl/kosovo_escape_1.html

¹⁴See www.un.org/peace/kosovo/pages/regulations/regs.html

¹⁵The early signs of this was the long period of Belgrade's lack of cooperation in the OSCE's attempt to register Serb residents of Kosova for the November elections. See "Belgrade and OSCE end dispute over Kosovo voter registration." August 1, 2001 (AFP). <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/010801/1/1a15n.html>.