

## FOREIGN POLICY

## Beat the Drum

by Scott McConnell

There are some foreign-policy questions that require all the wisdom America's leaders can summon—and some good luck as well. Responding to China's emergence as a military and economic power, for instance, may prove as difficult for the international system as coming to terms with Germany's rise was in the last century, with the consequences for getting it wrong even more severe.

But until the last few years, no sensible American would have considered the Balkans such a question, or indeed a major issue at all for the United States. The complexity of the ethnic configurations, the depth of their historic enmities—these were at least generally known to most American students of diplomacy and were captured in various aphorisms and historical vignettes: “Not worth the bones of a single healthy Pomeranian grenadier” (attributed to Otto von Bismarck); “An area which produces more history than it can consume locally” (attributed to Winston Churchill). Or my favorite, from Churchill's Balkan envoy Fitzroy Maclean's account of a 1944 conversation with the prime minister, when the two discussed the implications of the communist leanings of the Yugoslav partisans then receiving Allied aid.

“Do you intend,” [Churchill] asked, “to make Yugoslavia your home after the war?”

“No sir,” I replied.

“Neither do I,” he said. “And that being so, the less you and I worry about the form of Government they set up, the better.”

In short, even for Europe's major powers, the region was considered a strategic backwater whose capacity to destabilize the continent was directly proportional to how much outside attention those powers gave it. The United States, separated by half a continent and an ocean, had

even less reason to become immersed in Balkan tangles—a judgment held by most Americans until the late 1990's.

In little more than two years since then, pursuing policies that would confound any of the American statesmen who constructed the post-Cold War alliance system and be beyond the comprehension of any American leader of the 18th or 19th centuries, the United States, acting in consort with most of its NATO allies, launched two-and-a-half months of bombing raids against a Serbian nation that has never shown any hostility to the United States or its allies, while forming a *de facto* alliance with a nationalist guerrilla group (the Kosovo Liberation Army) whose ideological roots lay in Albanian Marxist-Leninism. The KLA's war aim, hardly a secret to those familiar with the Balkans, was the secession of Kosovo from Yugoslavia and its linkage to Albania—in other words, the kind of forcible changing of borders proscribed explicitly by the Helsinki Accords (to which the United States was a signatory) and by international law in general.

Two years after the bombing's “success” in driving Serbian forces out of Kosovo, the KLA had purged the province of most of its Serbian population and initiated a guerrilla campaign against Macedonia, another small state with a restive Albanian population. The Albanian “freedom fighters”—the toast of Beltway interventionists in 1999—were no longer perceived as such, and Washington began to ease its way toward security cooperation with the very Serb forces it had bombed two years before.

In the course of these acrobatics, American policies generated considerable rancor from Russia, a traditional ally of the Serbs, and China, whose embassy was bombed by U.S. planes. Washington's war thus ratcheted up tensions with its two most dangerous potential adversaries and even helped spur an unlikely rapprochement between them. The bombing left behind considerable environmental destruction (in part because of the massive use of “depleted uranium” shells), destroyed much of Serbia's economic infrastructure, helped to overthrow Serb strongman Slobodan Milosevic (a positive development that might well have occurred anyway), and planted the seeds for a new guerrilla war. As

British observer Simon Jenkins put it, “NATO's intervention will have partitioned the whole of Yugoslavia along ethnic lines. . . . Slobodan Milosevic was not the destabilizer of the region. The title belongs to NATO.”

Historians seeking to understand why Washington pursued such reckless policies will have to go beyond the official documents and memorandums.

Psychohistory may have a role in explaining whether Madeleine Albright's experience as a Czech diplomat's child in postwar Belgrade contributed to her seeming obsession with punishing the Serbs (and only the Serbs) for murderous nationalist policies engaged in at various times by all the Balkan factions as Yugoslavia collapsed.

Much will be gleaned from the broader climate of foreign-policy opinion in Washington in the late 1990's. On key questions this was remarkably homogeneous, due to the fact that the two principal weekly political magazines, the *New Republic* and the *Weekly Standard*—the first leaning Democratic, the second neo-conservative and pro-Republican—were in full bipartisan accord. Indeed, without such agreement, without the two journals' stereophonic drumbeat exhorting the United States to intervene against the Serbs and fight them to victorious conclusion, it is hard to imagine the war could have been initiated or pursued so far. Most of Washington's political class felt simply uncertain about the region—sorrowful about its unrelieved turmoil, grateful for America's strategic distance from it.

But the clarity of the interventionist line, the utter self-confidence with which it was espoused by the two magazines pushed many of those with reservations to the sidelines. In a debate in which one side knew what it wanted, and the other didn't see any reason to think about the issue very deeply, the former had a great advantage.

Kosovo first appeared on the Beltway radar screen in 1998. The horrific Bosnian war seemed to be dying down, after much killing on all sides and a U.S.-brokered peace agreement that led to *de facto* partition of the population along ethnic lines. In early 1998, KLA guerrillas began operations against Serbian targets in Kosovo. The *Weekly Standard* quickly

weighed in with a piece by Stephen Schwartz, a San Francisco-based writer who visited the region and presented a picture of Kosovo Albanian politics so sweetened that it called to mind the accounts of communist countries produced by the duped liberal political pilgrims of the Cold War era. Perhaps cognizant that it was not American policy to support armed separatist insurrections (and that an American envoy to the region had bluntly described the KLA as a terrorist group), Schwartz began by proclaiming that most Albanians were deeply committed to the nonviolent “principles of Martin Luther King.” They sought not independence and linkage to “Greater Albania”—this was widely understood as the KLA goal—but only “greater autonomy within a rump Yugoslavia.” When Serb forces uncovered a cache of mortars hidden in the houses of some Kosovo Albanian political leaders, Schwartz explained it wasn’t evidence of KLA guerrilla activity because “Albanian culture validates possession of firearms.” It is true that there had been a nonviolent Albanian campaign against the Serbs, practiced for several years in the early and mid-1990’s (overlying a longer history of the often-bloody ethnic conflict). But by the time the *Standard* published Schwartz’s piece, the KLA’s guerrilla campaign had begun in earnest. Schwartz dealt with this issue by asserting that many Albanians felt the Serbs had created the KLA as a pretext for repressing them, a view he deemed “plausible.”

Thus, according to the *Weekly Standard*, the KLA was possibly a Serb-created myth, while the true Albanian campaign against the Serbs in Kosovo was something like a lunch-counter sit-in.

Marty Peretz’s *New Republic*, a publication whose calendar seems strangely stuck on 1936, followed with a more comprehensive rationale for war against the Serbs. The Serbian counterinsurgency in Kosovo was a war against “an ethnicity” that represents a challenge to the “fascist, racist” foundation of Serbian rule. Milosevic was the “heir” to the 1930’s “monsters of Europe.” Unlike the *Standard*, the *New Republic* did not seek actually to cast doubt on the existence of the KLA, but grasped the bull by the horns and argued for Kosovo’s independence. The Kosovo Albanians were forging “a new nation” with its own banking system and Mother Teresa health clinics, and “lives are more sacred than borders.” (The *New Republic*, for some reason, is

not known for its support of ethnic independence for Turkey’s Kurds.) Some *New Republic* writers acknowledged that a victorious KLA would probably have designs on Macedonia, but Roy Gutman argued that “it is hardly a foregone conclusion that Kosovo’s independence would lead to the instant fracturing of Macedonia.” Albanian activists would leave for their children the task of establishing unity with Albania. Such a belief required ignoring the words of virtually all KLA leaders and spokesmen.

Linking the Serbs to Nazism was the *New Republic*’s signal contribution to the Balkans debate, repeated again and again. David Rieff, attending a rock concert in the Macedonian capital of Skopje, described pleasant-looking young men and women, families with children, and chants of “Peace in the Balkans.” Nevertheless, this reminded him of “Nuremberg, 1936.”

Once Washington began bombing, the magazine published a sinister cover story, “Milosevic’s Willing Executioners.” The title directly evoked Daniel Goldhagen’s then-current book alleging widespread German popular complicity in Nazi crimes. Of course, the piece covered itself in protective qualification: “Serbia is not Nazi Germany; Milosevic is not Hitler.” But the stain remained, carried by the inflammatory title. The piece dwelled on the paucity of “good Serbs” and made much of what writer Stacy Sullivan described as their “gratuitous sadism.”

The examples she gave were underwhelming, though of course there was no shortage of Serb brutalities in Kosovo. She mentioned Serb forces requiring captured Albanians to chant “this is Serbia” or undergo similar humiliations, a tactic found in most ethnic conflicts. The point is not that the ethnic wars of the Balkans were horrible—most readers knew that. The point was to locate the evil exclusively among the Serbs and to liken it to the worst horrors of the century.

Goldhagen himself weighed in the following week, claiming Serbia’s deeds differed from Nazi Germany’s “only in scale.” Admittedly, the Serbs had “suffered some injuries themselves” and lacked any apocalyptic ideology that would lead to the end of Western civilization. But dead Bosnians and Albanians “are just as dead as were the murdered Jews, Poles, Russians, gays and others during Hitler’s time.” Again, the point was not to inform or analyze but to

smear, to whip up the *New Republic*’s readers into a kind of anti-Nazi hysteria against a people that the magazine knew it could not defensibly claim were Nazi-like. Goldhagen advocated military occupation of Serbia, on the model of the occupation of Germany and Japan. The Serbs could be compelled to “remake themselves,” ridding themselves of “nationalist, militarist and dehumanizing beliefs.” Such a plan, though difficult, was “feasible and morally right.”

Secondary to the Serbs-as-Nazis refrain was the *New Republic*’s emphasis on eliminating respect for internationally recognized borders as a desirable aspect of the international system. Jacob Heilbrunn proposed a return to Wilsonian self-determination as a new principle. As NATO pounded the Serbs, he wrote, “the Clinton administration had a golden opportunity to relinquish the idea that borders must remain sacrosanct.” He thought the favorable global implications obvious:

the more splintered the world becomes, the less chance there is of a rival power emerging to check current American dominance. Should China or Russia succumb to their fissiparous tendencies, US pre-eminence would be sealed.

One wonders what a Russian or Chinese foreign-policy analyst would make of this.

Rupert Murdoch’s and William Kristol’s *Weekly Standard* was comparatively less imaginative than the *New Republic* in drumming up war spirit. While editor Kristol and foreign-policy analyst Robert Kagan regularly called upon the United States to exert itself to impose what they called “benevolent global hegemony,” most rank-and-file Republicans were more inclined to clamor for tax cuts, bash the Clintons, and otherwise enjoy the prosperous 1990’s.

Thus, the 78-day military campaign against Serbia emerged as the magazine’s most perilous moment since its inception. It gave full exposure to the depth of the chasm between the *Standard*’s neo-conservative editors and related television talking heads and the ordinary Republicans these media stars were supposedly representing.

The tensions showed. *Standard* editorials lapsed into near-hysterical name-calling—chastising “GOPeaceniks,” “McGovern Republicans,” and the “motley coalition of neo-isolationists . . . Clin-

ton despisers . . . and ultra-sophisticated 'realist' intellectuals who have divined that America has no interest in the Balkans." It was a more perilous moment than when it seemed that Pat Buchanan might grab the presidential nomination in 1996: most Republicans, after all, were not Buchananites. But in 1999, most Republicans were unenthusiastic about Clinton's bombing campaign. The editors pulled their hair out when congressional Republicans asked the President to consult Congress by invoking the War Powers Act. Kristol and Kagan argued that the congressional Republican party "hit bottom"—nothing can "cover up the shame of that vote . . . the Republicans defined themselves as the party of defeat."

During the spring of 1999, *Standard* readers got this message every week. A desperate hyper-Nietzscheanism ran through the magazine. "Win it." Use "All necessary force." We must overcome "self defeating preoccupation with casualties" which leads to "strategic paralysis." Unlike the *New Republic*, the *Standard* never took much interest in the actual politics or peoples of the Balkans. There was no fetishizing over the promise of "multicultural" Bosnia, little space given to local reporting from the region. The real struggle was over the hearts and minds of the American power elite. As the magazine put it:

The struggle in Kosovo today is about more than human suffering. It is about more even than European stability and Nato's credibility. At stake is the single overriding question of our time: will the United States and its allies have the will to shape the world in conformance with our interests and principles?

In this struggle, the enemy wasn't Milosevic or the paramilitarist ethnic cleanser Arkan, but Pat Buchanan, the Cato Institute, and the foreign-policy realists at the quarterly *National Interest*. The *Standard*'s great fear wasn't that Milosevic would get away with suppressing the Kosovo Albanians, but that all those Sunbelt Republicans whose ranks filled the House majority would wake up and decide that sending troops and conducting massive airstrikes in a part of the world that no one could find on the map six months before was a little weird and that they wanted no part of an ideology which advocated such overreach.

Both journals got the victory they sought over the Serbs, without the need for the ground invasion both claimed was necessary. The bombing forced Milosevic to withdraw his forces from Kosovo, which is now patrolled by NATO troops and substantially controlled by the Kosovo Liberation Army. Eighteen months after the ceasefire, the Serb strongman Milosevic lost an election and is now awaiting trial at The Hague. The absurdity of the two journals' contention that Milosevic and Serb nationalism were the only real obstacles to peace in the Balkans is evidenced by daily press reports. By the two-year anniversary of NATO's attack, the news from Kosovo was grim: Albanian violence has driven most Serbs out of the province; the KLA has not disarmed and disbanded as Washington had pretended it would; and after first beginning guerrilla operations in a buffer zone of southern Serbia, the KLA is now fomenting a civil war in Macedonia. That war, many observers argue, has more potential to spread and destabilize southeastern Europe than did Milosevic's suppression of the insurgency in Kosovo, and it would not have been possible without NATO's actions.

As of this writing, the *Weekly Standard* has been silent about this facet of the *après-guerre*. "Present Dangers," a collection of foreign-policy essays recently published by Kristol and Kagan, contains surprisingly little about the Kosovo war, considering what a dramatic departure it had been for NATO to give up its 50-year-old status as a defensive alliance. The magazine has since returned to its regular beat of castigating the Palestinians and urging more aggressive policies against Iraq and China.

The *New Republic* hasn't entirely dropped the subject, but where there was once self-righteous passion—1936 and all that—now reigns a resigned weariness with all those messy Balkan nationalities. Writing about Serbian President Vojislav Kostunica's electoral victory over Milosevic and the resulting peaceful transfer of power, Leon Wieseltier described his feelings of "joylessness of justice" and found the jubilant Serb crowds "strangely unintoxicating." This, after a free election leading to the fall of a government the magazine had only months before described as the heir to the Third Reich. The *New Republic* at least acknowledged that NATO's famous victory had brought neither peace nor stability. Taking note of the Albanian campaign against Mace-

donia, the editors opined:

It is a harsh irony that the instigation of ethnic conflict in Macedonia has been the work of the Albanians. Weren't the Albanians the victims just yesterday? But this is today, and Macedonia is not Kosovo.

Here, "harsh irony" is a phrase of distancing, designed to veil the fact that the magazine had engaged in years of shrill advocacy and ugly demonization, urging American bombing, invasion, and occupation of a region about which its editors understood very little. Things didn't work out like they had hoped, and it is "ironic." What now? The editors urge the Bush administration to make clear to the insurgent Albanians that it supports "democratic principles." That should do the trick.

Scott McConnell is a columnist for *Taki's Top Drawer*/New York Press.

## EDUCATION

### Who's Slave and Who's Massa?

by Robert Weissberg

Of all the strange bedfellows that politics attracts, one of the oddest is the enduring liaison between the black civil-rights establishment and white liberal academics. One partner—the academic auxiliary—is most dutiful. It is always there: demanding legislation, concocting dubious constitutional interpretations, justifying quotas, or consoling struggling minority students. Criticizing the civil-rights establishment's agenda invites the anger of a swarm of outraged white professors. By contrast, the civil-rights establishment takes academics for granted.

What explains this enduring bond, especially given its one-sided character? Imagine if white academics treated blacks as indifferently as they now treat labor unions. Racial-preference ideology would degenerate into simplistic demands for "a piece of the action." The entire elaborate legal edifice would al-