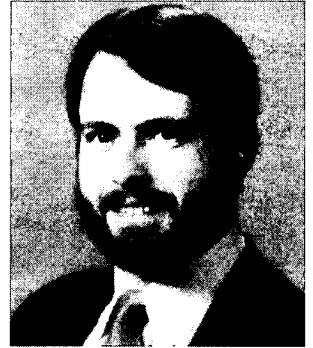


Balkan Stupidities



NATO officials are shocked—shocked!—to find ethnic Albanian guerrillas on the march against Serbia and Macedonia. The alliance is considering military action against insurgents who want a greater Albania. Washington should cut and run.

In 1998 ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were pressing a brutal campaign for independence against Serbia. U.S. Ambassador Robert Gelbard labeled the insurgents “terrorists.”

But by early 1999 Washington had decided that they were freedom fighters. Normally unconcerned about mass violence abroad, at least when committed by U.S. allies (Turkey versus Kurds, Croatia versus Serbs) or significant powers (India in Kashmir, Russia in Chechnya), Washington decided to combat ethnic cleansing.

It attempted to impose an unrealistic *diktat* on Yugoslavia; when that failed, Washington, with NATO in tow, lent the Kosovo Liberation Army its air force. But, explained Western diplomats, they only supported Kosovo’s autonomy within Serbia. And they expected the Kosovars to make up with the Serbs.

No such luck. Ethnic Albanians kicked out most of the Serbs. They felt they had won and, notes *Toronto Sun* columnist George Jonas: “Not unreasonably, they want to claim the fruits of their victory, which they don’t see as running for office in UN-supervised elections. They see it as ruling over an independent Kosovo.”

So the violence continues. Reports the *Washington Post*: despite NATO’s efforts, “Albanians manage regularly to terrorize Serbs.” In February Albanians blew up a bus of Serbs visiting family graves, killing seven.

The problem is not just Kosovo. Although the KLA has formally disbanded, the Liberation Army of Presovo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac (UCPMB) has sprung up in Serbia north of Kosovo. Since the buffer zone imposed on Yugoslavia by NATO bars the Yugoslav military, it acts as a sanctuary for UCPMB guerrillas.

Trouble in Macedonia

Ethnic Albanian insurgents also are active in western Macedonia, forcing Skopje to call up reserves and move tanks into threatened areas. “The danger of civil war is there; we are very close to a major conflict,” warns Carlo Ungaro, a representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

NATO officials don’t get it. One German military officer complained, “Betrayal does not come close. They have spat in our faces.” One diplomat blames the West, which “has never made it clear enough to the Albanians that we are not there to ensure Albanian independence and promote Albanian interests, but we’re there to promote our interests, which are a stable Balkans.”

Why, however, should Albanians care that NATO wants stability? They want Kosovo’s independence.

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That was always evident to anyone who knew anything about the Balkans, unlike former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, for instance. Now NATO faces potential disaster. Carl Bildt, the U.N.'s envoy to the Balkans, admits, "I am very alarmed. This is one of the worse pieces of news to come out of the Balkans for many years."

The NATO ambassadors agreed that more troops should be sent to Kosovo, but member states refused to commit more troops. NATO did decide to shrink the buffer zone outside of Kosovo and cooperate with Serb forces.

Even this is a prescription for war, however. Lt. Brandon Griffin of the 82nd Airborne told the *Washington Post*, "As the [buffer zone] gets smaller and there's less room for them to maneuver, I think it'll get hotter."

The Bush administration also moved 150 soldiers closer to the Kosovo-Macedonia border. Secretary of State Colin Powell told a congressional hearing that "[we] are doing what we can, short of becoming one of the major belligerents in the contest." But already American forces have gotten into a gunfight with rebels.

Some enthusiasts of the earlier war with the Albanians now want to go to war against them. Opines *USA Today*: "A strong, swift U.S. response is needed, not just in Macedonia but against ethnic-Albanian aggression generally."

Ethnic Albanian aggression? Which differs from the KLA's activities in 1999 precisely how?

The *Wall Street Journal* observes that Slobodan Milosevic is gone. True, but the Albanians aren't impressed. They are nationalists, and their ethnic identity transcends Yugoslavian or Macedonian citizenship, Milosevic or not. A former KLA leader in Kosovo explains: "We will remain a threat to stability because for us the status quo is unfair."

Macedonian rebels cite grievances—a desire for education in Albanian, for instance—that seem important enough for them to take up arms. One of them told the *New York Times*: "I am fighting for the liberation of my territory."

Still, "We should not allow borders to be redrawn by force," says German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. Charming sentiments, but that is precisely what NATO did in 1999.

It employed overwhelming military force against a state that had neither attacked nor threatened to attack any member, effectively detaching Kosovo from Serbia.

The *Journal* also says the insurgents are bad guys: "as has been recently reported, the [KLA] is responsible for the murders of ethnic Albanians whose politics are less radical than its own. This is a tactic employed by other terrorist groups."

Including the KLA in 1999. And it is the same tactic now used by former KLA members fighting for political power and control of Kosovo's rich criminal enterprises.

"It has to be said that force may be the only language the Albanian extremists understand," one British officer told the *London Times*. That is what the Serbs believed—for which the West punished them.

Getting further involved would be disastrous. So far NATO is play-acting. The alliance will have to do far more than move a few soldiers closer to the border. As one Western diplomat admitted to the *New York Times*: "Confronting Albanian extremists could cost lives, which is the Pentagon's nightmare, and it could make NATO forces a target in Kosovo itself."

The United States has nothing at stake that warrants such a risk. When meeting British Defense Minister Geoffrey Hoon, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld correctly declined to call the Balkans "vital." He did, however, say that "Certainly the region is important or we would not have forces in the region."

But it isn't even important, especially to America. The Balkans are peripheral, a backwater far from the western European states. Still, the administration worries about alliance solidarity. As Powell declared, when pressed by Lord Robertson, NATO's Secretary General, "We went in together, and we will come out together."

If the Albanian Kosovars "ever expect to rule themselves, much less be independent, they should show some responsibility," exclaimed one British military officer. But it's a little late to expect NATO's allies to learn better manners. The West sowed the wind; it is now reaping the whirlwind.

America should bring its troops home. □

Drastic Measures: The Metric Assault on American Standards

by Peter Seymour

Nothing is more contrary to the organization of the mind, of the memory, and of the imagination. . . . The new system of weights and measures will be a stumbling block for several generations. . . . It's just tormenting the people with trivia."

Such was the opinion of Napoleon about a novelty concocted by the Paris Academy of Sciences in the midst of revolutionary fervor: the metric system of measurement.

But that tormenting system, which France's emperor refused to inflict, has been forced on British citizens by their own legislators, yielding yet again to pressure from European Union bureaucrats. With the British bulldog rolling over to this cultural intrusion, one wonders if the United States will go the extra mile to defend the yardstick.

Since America's infancy, metric missionaries have been frustrated by our steadfast resistance to being converted. They've blamed public ignorance, apathy and stubbornness, unenlightened industry, meager government funding, and more. But beneath the surface, our enduring allegiance to the U.S. Customary System of Weights and Measures is rooted in a commonsense, even if largely intuitive, preference for this finely honed system of inches, pounds, quarts, and degrees Fahrenheit.

Most Americans can remember, from the late 1970s, when U.S. metrication (metric

conversion) was proceeding like a five-year plan commanded by the Kremlin. Wall charts and study guides in grade schools indoctrinated students like me about the "superior" and "more scientific" SI (Le Système International d'Unités: the *new* and *improved* version of metric). Although belittled as a hodgepodge of historical oddities, our customary measurement system withstood insults and assaults from the "inevitably global standard," the most visible vestiges of which are the "kph" markings on speedometers, the FDA-required nutrition labeling on packaged goods, and the liter-based soft drink bottles.

While compliant Canadians dove head first into metrication, we recalcitrant Americans ignored and laughed at it until it slinked away. Perhaps you saw the "Saturday Night Live" skit that lampooned the marvels of the metric alphabet, comprised of only ten letters! J, K, L, and M were combined into a single character.

A quarter-century later, the metric crusade looks as quaint as the "Duck and Cover" campaign of the 1950s. But while the communists' dream of world domination has faded away, the metric zealots persist in threatening our economic and personal freedom.

In their decades-long "re-education" to metric, defenders of British weights and measures—and of British sovereignty—recently suffered a drastic setback. Beginning in January 2000, merchants throughout the United Kingdom were ordered to give priority to the gram, liter, and meter in their measuring,

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