

Waist Deep in the Balkans and Sinking Washington Confronts the Crisis in Macedonia

by Ted Galen Carpenter

Executive Summary

The eruption of fighting in Macedonia and in Serbia's Presevo Valley has underscored the bankruptcy of Washington's Balkan policy. NATO cited as its principal reasons for intervening in Kosovo in 1999 the need to stop ethnic cleansing and to prevent a wider war. Yet, since NATO assumed control of Kosovo, there has been a massive reverse ethnic cleansing as Albanian nationalists have driven nearly 90 percent of the province's non-Albanian people from their homes. And now the Kosovo Liberation Army and its offshoots have expanded armed conflict into southern Serbia and Macedonia.

Even as the current round of fighting fades, there are ample signs of trouble ahead. By wresting Kosovo from Belgrade's control, the United States and its NATO allies gave Albanian nationalists a base of operations from which they can foment insurgencies across the borders. Their ultimate goal is to create an ethnically pure "Greater Albania" that includes not only Kosovo and Albania but large portions of Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Greece.

Rather than face that reality, proponents of current U.S. policy circulate far-fetched myths about the nature of the struggle in the Balkans. Having ignored the accurate warnings about the

KLA issued by critics of the original Kosovo mission, interventionists are repeating the same kind of errors.

If the United States insists on staying in Kosovo, it faces three unpalatable options. Option 1 is *passive accommodation*—looking the other way while the KLA pursues its agenda. That approach might minimize the danger to American military personnel, but it would virtually guarantee a wider Balkan war in the long run. Option 2 is *assertive mediation*. That approach risks getting the United States into the middle of the dispute between Albanian nationalists and the governments of Serbia and Macedonia. Option 3 is *aggressive confrontation*. The United States would conclude that the KLA is now the enemy and would try to crush the Albanian nationalist cause. That strategy would likely lead to serious armed conflict and American casualties.

Instead of trying to choose the least dreadful option, Washington should extricate U.S. forces from Kosovo forthwith and transfer responsibility to the European Union. America has no economic or strategic interests that warrant the risks it is incurring. U.S. and European security interests are separable. The United States should disengage and let the Europeans grapple with making the hard decisions.

As soon as NATO assumed control of Kosovo, the Kosovo Liberation Army began a systematic campaign to rid the province of non-Albanians.

Introduction

NATO's Kosovo intervention has been ill-starred since its inception. U.S. policymakers assumed that Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic would capitulate during negotiations and accept a NATO occupation force in the province. Even when that did not happen and the alliance decided to take military action, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and other U.S. officials were confident that a few days of bombing would do the trick. Instead, the air bombardment went on for 78 days, at a cost of many innocent lives, before Milosevic gave in.

American proponents of the mission emphasized two reasons for taking action. The first was to stop the Milosevic regime from cleansing the province of its ethnic-Albanian inhabitants. Some of the more overwrought advocates of intervention even accused Milosevic of genocide although only a few more than 2,000 people (including combat fatalities) had perished in more than 13 months of fighting before the onset of NATO's bombing campaign.

The second reason interventionists cited repeatedly was the need to prevent the disorder in Kosovo from triggering a wider war in the Balkans. President Clinton himself made that point explicitly: "We act to prevent a wider war; to defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe." He added, "Let a fire burn in this area and the flames will spread."¹

On both counts, U.S. policy has failed. Ethnic cleansing has certainly taken place. Almost as soon as NATO assumed control of Kosovo in June 1999, the Kosovo Liberation Army began a systematic campaign to rid the province of non-Albanians. Not only was the Serbian minority a target, but some 70,000 Roma (the so-called Gypsies) were driven out as well as thousands of Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Jews, and Macedonians. By the spring of 2000, more than 250,000 non-Albanians of a prewar population of 350,000 were refugees in neighboring countries.² Six months later the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe estimated that 90 percent of Kosovo's

non-Albanian people had been forced to leave their homes.³ Most of the non-Albanians who had not fled the province were huddled together in a small number of heavily guarded NATO enclaves. The cleansing has been accompanied by hundreds of murders. In addition to those confirmed deaths, nearly 2,000 people simply disappeared. One must conclude that most of them were kidnapped and murdered. NATO proved either unable or unwilling to stem the monoethnic tide in Kosovo.

The other goal of U.S. and NATO policy—to prevent a wider war—clearly has not fared well either. As early as the spring of 2000, there was evidence of insurgent activity in the Presevo Valley (that portion of southern Serbia directly adjacent to Kosovo). KLA-inspired fighters operating under the name of the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac exploited the three-mile-wide buffer zone inside Serbia where NATO insisted that Serbian security forces must not intrude. The ostensible reason for creating the buffer zone was to prevent incidents between Serbian and NATO military units. The Albanian insurgents, however, operated with impunity within the zone and used it as a base of operations from which to launch attacks against Serbian police personnel and other targets in the Presevo Valley. By early 2001 a full-scale insurgency was under way.

During the same period, episodes of violence in Macedonia began to be reported. At first it was not clear whether those incidents were part of a pattern, but it was suspicious that the overwhelming majority occurred in the heavily ethnic-Albanian northern and western parts of the country. Those incidents increased in both number and severity in late 2000 and the beginning of 2001. By early March it was apparent that a major insurgency was under way in Macedonia. The wider war had come to the Balkans.

Wearing Blinders: The West Excuses or Ignores KLA Outrages in Kosovo

Western policymakers and other proponents of an activist policy in the Balkans failed

to understand what was occurring under their very noses. The KLA's systematic campaign of terror and ethnic cleansing was typically dismissed as uncoordinated acts of revenge against Serbs by Albanian Kosovars who had suffered grievously at the hands of the Belgrade regime. (Among other problems with such excuses was that they did not explain why the Roma and other non-Albanians were also targets.) Although interventionists offered perfunctory condemnations of such acts of violence, exculpatory comments about the Albanians' justifiable feelings of rage invariably followed. State Department spokesman James Rubin's comments were typical: "The Albanians are angry—It's irrational emotionalism."⁴ The reasoning of Brookings Institution scholars Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon was more nuanced but still exculpatory: "There has been a regrettable degree of reverse 'ethnic cleansing' of Serbs by ethnic Albanians since June 10, 1999, but it is neither surprising in the aftermath of this type of conflict nor realistically preventable. Nor is it comparable to what happened to the ethnic Albanians in the spring of 1999—or for that matter in 1998."⁵ In reality, there are substantially more refugees from Kosovo living outside the province now than there were the day before NATO's bombing campaign started. Only the ethnicity of the victims has changed.

Indeed, the harshest comments of U.S. and other Western officials continued to be reserved for Slobodan Milosevic—as though he were still the main problem in Kosovo. Commenting on the strife in the ethnically divided city of Mitrovica in February 2000, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke stated: "I think there is no question who is responsible for it. It's Belgrade."⁶

Supporters of NATO's peacekeeping mission grasped at straws to show that the operation was going well. For example, NATO secretary general George Robertson and others cited the declining murder rate in Kosovo in 2000 as evidence that things were getting better. Albright boasted that "the murder rate in Kosovo is now lower than in many

American cities."⁷ Similarly, Clinton's national security adviser, Sandy Berger, crowed, "The murder rate has declined by 90 percent in the past year."⁸ The *New York Times* opined in November 2000 that "Kosovo is generally a less violent place than it was last year."⁹ But, as Cato Institute foreign policy analyst Gary Dempsey points out, such claims failed to take into account "that the murder rate had fallen in Kosovo precisely because the province had been virtually cleansed of non-Albanian murder targets."¹⁰

Interventionists engaged in other wishful thinking. They hailed the KLA's pledge to disband and disarm, even as NATO troops kept uncovering large caches of weapons and ammunition.¹¹ As incidents proliferated in the Presevo Valley, supporters of the Kosovo mission spent most of their energy warning about Belgrade's desire to reestablish control over the area and denied that the disorders were part of a strategy to create a "Greater Albania."¹² A *Washington Post* editorial perfectly captured the naive conventional wisdom: "Albanians struck inside Serbia because they believe, with some justification, that Slobodan Milosevic's forces had begun the ethnic cleansing of a small Albanian-populated area abutting Kosovo."¹³ Even after Milosevic was ousted from office and a new democratic government had taken power, interventionists repeatedly warned about the danger of shrinking the buffer zone or allowing Serbian security forces back into any portion of that zone.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Albanian nationalist insurgents operated there with increasing impunity. In December 2000 Michael Radu, senior fellow with the Foreign Policy Institute, correctly concluded, "We are simply witnessing Albanian expansionism under the very nose of NATO troops."¹⁵ Only with great reluctance did NATO finally allow Serbian security forces limited access to the buffer zone in late February 2001.¹⁶

New York Times correspondent Steven Erlanger concisely describes the implicit bargain that has characterized U.S. and NATO policy in Kosovo since June 1999: "After the war, NATO decided it had to placate and co-opt

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the Kosovo Liberation Army or risk being attacked by the very Kosovars it had come to liberate. Washington and NATO pretended that the KLA had disbanded and disarmed, closing their eyes to organized efforts to drive out non-Albanians from Kosovo, to murder moderate Albanian politicians, to intimidate witnesses and judges, and to rebuild and dominate illegal activities like drug-running, arms smuggling, and people trafficking.”¹⁷

Washington Ignores Reality—Again

As the crisis in the Balkans has deepened and widened, proponents of an activist U.S. role have made a concerted effort to put their “spin” on events. The resulting barrage of wishful thinking and pervasive myths is disturbingly reminiscent of that which led up to the original intervention in Kosovo. In the months before NATO’s air assault on Yugoslavia, interventionists loudly insisted the genocide was occurring in Kosovo and that the alliance had a moral obligation to stop such horror. The reality was that Belgrade’s counterinsurgency campaign against the KLA, while brutal at times, was indistinguishable from similar episodes in at least a dozen other countries around the world during the initial post-Cold War decade as well as numerous episodes during the Cold War.¹⁸ Belgrade did not commence ethnic cleansing—which, although odious, is merely a land grab, not genocide—until NATO launched its bombing raids. Ironically, the alliance’s decision to go to war triggered the very humanitarian crisis it ostensibly sought to avert.¹⁹

At the same time interventionists exaggerated the seriousness of situation in Kosovo in 1998 and early 1999, they downplayed or ignored warnings about the nature of the KLA. The struggle in Kosovo became little more than a crude melodrama, with the Serbs as the designated villains and the Albanian Kosovars as noble victims awaiting rescue by the United States and its allies. The

mounting evidence that the KLA was a motley collection of nationalist fanatics, unrepentant communists, and common criminals was simply brushed aside.

Armed with such illusions, the NATO powers not only blundered into Kosovo, they greatly strengthened the faction in the Balkans with the most aggressively expansionist agenda. NATO’s intervention set the stage for the current crisis; indeed, it made that crisis virtually inevitable. Instead of learning from its mistakes, though, the same crowd is back with a new set of dangerous illusions.

New Interventionist Myths about Kosovo

One of the least believable allegations is that the events in Kosovo, the Presevo Valley, and Macedonia are all discrete phenomena.²⁰ The evidence suggests otherwise. There are numerous eyewitness accounts of armed men crossing from Kosovo to the other two locales and back again. Even the name of the insurgent army in Macedonia has the Albanian acronym (UCK) used by the KLA—an amazing coincidence. Moreover, key KLA leaders in Kosovo have steadfastly refused to condemn the violence in either the Presevo Valley or Macedonia. Instead, there have been large demonstrations in Kosovo supporting the Macedonian insurgency.²¹

The spinmeisters would have us believe that the root of the problem in Kosovo is the continuing timidity of the Western powers in clarifying the political status of the province and helping to empower the Albanian majority. Former NATO supreme commander Gen. Wesley K. Clark made that point explicitly: “Ultimately, the international community must recognize that the nub of the problem is the continuing delay in moving the province toward democratic self-rule and the resolution of its final status. Troubles across the region are unlikely to ebb until Kosovars are fully engaged in building their own institutions.”²² In practice, clarification and empowerment mean accelerating the schedule to hold parliamentary elections. For many (although not all) of the lobbyists for

the original intervention in Kosovo, the two terms are code words for granting the province independence.

The notion that the reverse ethnic cleansing in Kosovo as well as the violent insurgencies across the border in southern Serbia and Macedonia all have their root cause in the West's slowness in granting the Kosovars self-government violates the principle of Ockham's razor: the proposition that the most obvious explanation of a phenomenon is usually the correct one. In this case, the simplest explanation is that Albanian nationalists want to create a greater Albanian state and are taking fairly direct measures to accomplish that goal. Instead of facing that rather obvious (but to them disagreeable) reality, proponents of Washington's current policy in the Balkans have latched on to a far-fetched alternative explanation. Hearing hoof beats, they posit zebras rather than horses.

New Myths Regarding Macedonia

The "spin" on the situation in Macedonia is also becoming increasingly evident. And much of it is coming from the same sources that pressured the United States to intervene in Kosovo on behalf of the Albanian Kosovars. The essence of the spin is that Macedonia, although ostensibly democratic and tolerant, has discriminated against and otherwise mistreated its Albanian population since independence. A small faction of extremists has exploited the Albanian minority's sense of alienation to launch an armed revolt. Therefore, the solution to the crisis requires major concessions on the part of the Macedonian government. Typical of such reasoning was an editorial in the *Washington Post*. The *Post* criticized Macedonian president Boris Trajkovski for feeling compelled "to wage war against what he calls 'terrorists' before starting any talks. The consequence of that poor judgment will be that negotiations between Macedonia's Slavs will be harder and may require an international broker. Even if they go well, heading off more warfare across the Balkans will require satisfactory political

solutions for the Albanian populations of Kosovo and Serbia as well as Macedonia."²³

On the same day the *Post* editorial appeared, the *Los Angeles Times* neatly encapsulated the interventionist conventional wisdom on both Kosovo and Macedonia: "The root cause of the ethnic Albanian unrest is deep frustration born of their [*sic*] uncertain status in Kosovo and discrimination suffered in Macedonia next door." The *Times* asserted further that the United States must exert diplomatic pressure to get the Macedonian government "to accept legitimate claims of its ethnic Albanian minority."²⁴

Similar reasoning was used earlier by Wesley Clark. Although he suggested that KFOR and NATO elements inside Macedonia work closely with the government to interdict the flow of arms and fighters across the border, the bulk of his message emphasized a very different point: "We must make clear to the government of Macedonia that it too is under close scrutiny. The use of force alone will only worsen the underlying problem, not resolve it." He then became more specific. "The longer-term solution rests on Macedonia's commitment not to just say the right things about the Albanian minority but to follow through with actions. Discussion of the constitutional status of Macedonian Albanians and other minorities should begin without delay in Macedonia's parliament."²⁵ In other words, steps toward political autonomy should begin.

Far more worrisome for the Macedonian government than such calls for appeasement by newspaper editors and a former U.S. general is the pressure for concessions coming from the United States and its NATO allies. Even as he pledged U.S. support for the government in Skopje, Secretary of State Colin Powell urged it to "tackle the grievances" of the Albanian minority and not alienate that group through excessive military action. "Start to look at the points of irritation in your society," Powell admonished. "There may be some constitutional changes you want to look at."²⁶ The secretary was not the only Western official to offer such advice. His

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views echoed those of NATO secretary general George Robertson and other Western leaders.²⁷ The underlying message was that a substantial portion of the blame for the violence resided with the Macedonian authorities and the very makeup of the Macedonian state.

The denigration of the Macedonian government has been more subtle and limited than the earlier campaign against Slobodan Milosevic. But that's hardly surprising. Trajkovski's democratic government (which includes some ethnic-Albanian political figures) is a much more difficult target than was Milosevic's regime. Milosevic was a villain out of Central Casting, and it became ridiculously easy for advocates of intervention to vilify and demonize him. Nevertheless, while the negative stories about the government in Skopje may be more nuanced, the goal is similar: to portray the ethnic Albanians as victims and turn up the pressure on Trajkovski to make concessions leading to greater autonomy for that population.

One can only speculate about the motives for this increasingly evident spin. The most likely reason is that political and opinion elites in the United States and Western Europe are desperate to avoid a NATO military mission in Macedonia. Arm-twisting mediation is one thing; committing troops to armed struggle is far less appealing. Given the public and congressional opposition to the original Kosovo intervention, support in the United States for an expanded military mission would be problematic at best. The extent of support even in the West European countries is difficult to predict. A second possible reason is that it would be acutely awkward for the NATO governments that had portrayed their intervention in Kosovo as a moral crusade on behalf of mistreated ethnic Albanians to explain to their legislatures and publics that the alliance must now intervene to prevent the same faction from running amok and destabilizing a democratic neighbor. A third reason may be that the pressure on Macedonia is merely the latest manifestation of the West's myopic bias in favor of the Albanian nationalist cause.

Myths Lead to Bad Policies

Whatever the motivation, the notion that the solution to the widening conflict in the Balkans is to pressure Belgrade and Skopje to make more concessions is disastrously wrong. That is not to say that the Albanian inhabitants of southern Serbia and Macedonia have never suffered discrimination at the hands of the respective governments. As it is in virtually all parts of the Balkans, ethnic discrimination is a very real phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is a problem that should not be exaggerated in this case. The new democratic government in Belgrade bears little resemblance to its authoritarian, chauvinistic predecessor. And it wasn't too long ago that Macedonia was held up in the Western press as a model of democratic stability and ethnic tolerance. When, exactly, did Skopje make the sudden transition to ethnic oppressor?

More to the point, The KLA and its offshoots have no intention of allowing the Albanian populations in the Presevo Valley and Macedonia to live under Slavic majority governments under any circumstances. The Albanian nationalist agenda has been clear for years—at least to those people in the West who are willing to look.²⁸ That agenda is to create an expanded, ethnically pure Albanian state. Those who wish to create Greater Albania are not about to be bought off by concessions on education, language, culture, or government jobs. Maps circulated by the KLA show Greater Albania encompassing not only Kosovo and Albania but additional chunks of Serbia, portions of Montenegro, the western half of Macedonia (including the capital), and significant portions of northwestern Greece. Detaching Kosovo from Serbia's control was the first stage in that campaign—foolishly aided and abetted by NATO. Detaching the Presevo Valley and destabilizing Macedonia so that the fragmentation of that country becomes likely is the next phase.

Clarifying Kosovo's status and pressuring the Macedonian government to grant greater autonomy to the Albanian minority will not alter the Albanian nationalist agenda in any

meaningful way. In fact, a NATO decision to grant Kosovo independence would advance that agenda. The new insurgencies are not being waged by a tiny extremist faction that can be undermined in that fashion.²⁹ A significant portion of the ethnic-Albanian population in the Presevo Valley and Macedonia supports the insurgents. The KLA and its allies may or may not have majority support in either area. (Indeed the municipal elections in Kosovo suggest that even the population of that province apparently prefers the more moderate—although just as pro-independence—Ibrahim Rugova and his faction.) But that is ultimately beside the point. The militant nationalists have the allegiance of at least a sizable minority—more than enough to sustain a prolonged insurgency. Equally important, they have the guns to press their claims in a serious manner. The history of many other countries has demonstrated that a determined, well-armed insurgent force that does not command majority support can often achieve its objectives.

Even as the current round of fighting fades, there is little reason for optimism. True, the Macedonian army's offensive has forced the rebels to retreat—many of them back across the border into Kosovo. But the Albanian nationalist cause has suffered setbacks before. There is no evidence that the KLA and its allies are about to give up their goals.³⁰

A Choice of Poisons

From the moment it decided to meddle in the Balkans, the United States grasped a poisoned chalice. That point has emerged with great clarity as the KLA and its offshoots pursue the agenda of creating Greater Albania by conducting insurgent campaigns in the Presevo Valley and Macedonia. But there was evidence even during the original Bosnia crisis that, if it continued down an interventionist path, Washington would end up mired in the ethnic disputes of Kosovo and Macedonia.³¹ If the United States insists on persisting with an interventionist policy, it

has only three options—all of them bad.

Option 1 is *passive accommodation*. Washington can continue to insist that the NATO mission is confined to Kosovo and stand by while Albanian nationalists take advantage of the province's porous borders to use it as a base of operations for undermining Belgrade's control of southern Serbia and Skopje's control of northwest Macedonia. That passive, "look the other way" option was the one the United States and its NATO allies practiced while the KLA cleansed Kosovo of the overwhelming majority of its non-Albanian inhabitants and drove the remnant into NATO-guarded enclaves. If U.S. policymakers adopt that option this time around, though, they will enable the KLA to destabilize Macedonia, a prospect that would deeply alarm Greece, Bulgaria, and other countries in the region. The wider war that NATO insisted it was determined to prevent when it intervened in Kosovo would be much closer to reality.

Option 2 is *assertive mediation*. This appears to be the option initially favored by U.S. officials and much of the opinion-shaping elite in the United States. Proponents want to combine enhanced NATO patrols of Kosovo's borders, selective support for counterinsurgency efforts by the Macedonian government (provided they aren't too vigorous), and Western pressure on Skopje to grant majority-Albanian areas significantly greater political and cultural autonomy. Advocates are grudgingly willing to allow a small number of Serbian security forces to return to the buffer zone separating the Presevo Valley from Kosovo, but they also demand that Belgrade make (as yet largely unspecified) concessions to improve the situation of the Albanian inhabitants.

This option appears no more likely to succeed than does passive accommodation. Indeed, it repeats the errors made during the period leading up to the intervention in Kosovo. This approach would enable the KLA to foment incident after incident in an effort to provoke a violent reaction from Belgrade and Skopje. Whenever those gov-

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ernments dared adopt serious counterinsurgency measures, the Albanian nationalists would use the same propaganda techniques they used so successfully in 1998 and early 1999 to emphasize their victimhood and gain backing from NATO. If the authorities in Serbia and Macedonia gave in to such pressure, the result would be the secession of "Albanian areas" (however that concept might ultimately be defined) on the installment plan. The United States and its allies would risk being manipulated yet again to advance the KLA's territorial agenda. Even if Washington somehow managed to avoid that trap, its mediation efforts might well antagonize all parties as U.S. officials sought to bridge the gap between factions making irreconcilable demands.

Option three is *aggressive confrontation*. In essence, the United States and the other NATO members would reverse alliances. Having originally gone into Kosovo to aid the KLA, Western governments would now conclude that Albanian nationalism and expansionism, not Serbian nationalism and expansionism, are the primary disruptive force in the Balkans. The resulting strategy would seek to crush the KLA and its offspring. There would be no sympathy with the agenda of the Albanian populations in the Presevo Valley or Macedonia. Indeed, the flirtation with supporting an independent Kosovo would come to an end. Kosovo would either remain a NATO protectorate indefinitely or be gradually returned to the jurisdiction of a democratic Serbia.

This strategy has a greater potential to dampen the mounting threat of instability in the Balkans. But it also has a serious downside. It is not likely that Albanian nationalist fighters would quietly lay down their weapons and abandon their goal of Greater Albania. Indeed, it is far more likely that they would regard NATO forces as a mortal enemy and launch attacks against alliance troops. Knowing that there is little stomach in the United States for enduring casualties in murky struggles that have little to do with American security interests, the insurgents

would probably make U.S. forces prominent targets.

Option 3 raises the prospect that the U.S.-led mission in Kosovo could turn out much like the British military intervention in Northern Ireland. When British troops arrived in the late 1960s, their primary goal was to protect Catholics from armed Protestant extremists. Within a few years, however, the Catholic residents who had initially greeted the British units as protectors increasingly saw them as an army of occupation and a political adversary. British troops spent the next three decades mostly dealing with assassinations and terror attacks launched by the Irish Republican Army—at a cost of several thousand casualties.

Whichever option Washington selects, the situation is likely to turn out badly. Indeed, if they continue to accept the interventionist paradigm, U.S. policymakers face a choice roughly akin to deciding which poison they wish to ingest. Fortunately, a fourth option exists. But that means choosing to extricate the United States from the Balkan morass as expeditiously as possible and to turn over responsibility for dealing with the problems in that region to the European Union.

Passing the Chalice to the European Union

The European Union insists that it wants to take greater responsibility for dealing with security problems in the European theater. Indeed, that is the central point of the EU's much-touted European Security and Defense Policy.³² There is no better time or place than the current crisis in the Balkans to insist that the Europeans back up their words with meaningful action.

During the 2000 presidential campaign, Condoleezza Rice, now President Bush's national security adviser, stated that the Europeans should take over peacekeeping duties in places such as the Balkans. The United States, she argued, should focus on dealing with serious, large-scale security prob-

lems elsewhere in the world. Unfortunately, since taking office, the Bush administration seems to have backed away from that formulation. It needs to be revived.

America has no legitimate interests in the Balkans that even remotely justify baby-sitting that region and becoming obsessed with its parochial disputes. America should view the Balkans as a strategically and economically irrelevant snake pit. The ugly ethnic-group-identity politics of the region and the zero-sum-game mentality of many of the players need be of no concern. Whether Greater Albania comes into being, Serbia regains control of Kosovo, or Macedonia survives as a state will not affect America's well-being in any meaningful way.

Matters are somewhat different for the Europeans. Disorder in the Balkans creates refugee flows and a variety of other problems for EU members. It would not be unreasonable for the EU to conclude that its own security interests require an interventionist role in the region. (On the other hand, it would be equally reasonable to conclude that the costs and risks entailed in peacekeeping missions outweigh any probable benefits.) The point is that the Europeans ought to be the ones making such decisions. The EU collectively has a population greater than that of the United States, a larger economy, and more than a million active-duty military personnel. The EU should be able to handle Balkan contingencies—if it chooses to do so.

U.S. policymakers have been blinded by the obsolete Cold War assumption that American and European security interests are inseparable. That wasn't entirely true even during the Cold War, and it most certainly is not true in the absence of a serious great power threat such as that posed by the Soviet Union. Today, American and European interests are eminently separable. If the United States decides a few years from now to intervene militarily to prevent a Marxist, narco-trafficking takeover of Colombia (an unwise step, to be sure), it is highly improbable that the European members of NATO will commit combat troops to such an operation.

Civil war in Colombia would be regarded as a U.S., not a transatlantic, problem. By the same token, Americans should regard the civil wars in the Balkans as a European, not a transatlantic, problem.

Secretary of State Colin Powell has said that the United States and its NATO allies went into the Balkans together and they will leave together. But U.S. foreign policy should never be a suicide pact. It is time to pass the tainted chalice to the Europeans.

Notes

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2. "UN's Ogata Urges Better Security for Kosovo Serbs," Reuters, March 26, 2000; and Nora Boustany, "Kosovo's Unrecognized Victims," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2000, p. A26. In addition to its ethnic cleansing campaign, the KLA targeted Albanians who did not go along with the organization's agenda. "UN Vows to Protect Moderate Kosovo Politicians," Reuters, December 1, 2000.

3. UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Assessment of the Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Kosovo," September 2000, <http://www.unhcr.ch/world/euro/seo/protect/0010min.pdf>.

4. Quoted in Ben Barber, "Albanians Heeded Warning, Rubin Says," *Washington Times*, March 24, 2000, p. A14.

5. Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 215. See also William Howard Taft IV, "Speaking for Kosovo," *Washington Post*, April 14, 2000. According to Taft, former U.S. ambassador to NATO, the violence was largely due to the ethnic Albanians' insecurity about the province's political status.

6. Quoted in "Holbrooke Says Belgrade 'Fomenting' Kosovo Strife," Reuters, February 21, 2000. See also Susan Blaustein, "Once Again, Milosevic Is Having His Way with Peacekeepers," *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2000. Blaustein is a senior consultant with the International Crisis Group, one of the strongest advocates of NATO's mission in Kosovo.

7. Madeleine K. Albright, "Our Stake in Kosovo," *New York Times*, March 28, 2000, p. A27.

America has no legitimate interests in the Balkans that even remotely justify baby-sitting that region and becoming obsessed with its parochial disputes.

8. Samuel R. Berger, "Rebuilding Kosovo," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2000, p. A23.
9. "Progress in Kosovo," Editorial, *New York Times*, November 2, 2000, p. A30. Even that claim became dubious in light of the bombing of a bus carrying Serbs to a commemoration at a cemetery in February 2001. R. Jeffrey Smith, "Bomb Kills Serbs on Bus in Kosovo," *Washington Post*, February 17, 2001, p. A20; and Carlotta Gall, "Death Toll in the Kosovo Bomb Attack on Serbs Rises to 11," *New York Times*, February 18, 2001, p. A4.
10. Gary Dempsey, with Roger Fontaine, *Fool's Errands: America's Recent Encounters with Nation Building* (Washington: Cato Institute, forthcoming 2001), chap. 5.
11. Norman Kempster, "A Diplomatic Victory for Washington in Kosovo," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 2000, p. A4; Shaban Buza, "Kosovo NATO Force Makes Biggest Illegal Arms Seizure," Reuters, June 17, 2000; and George Jahn, "NATO Links Weapons Cache to KLA," Associated Press, June 23, 2000.
12. See, for example, the comments of Miranda Vickers, an analyst for the International Crisis Group. Miranda Vickers, "Kosovo: One Year Later," *Wall Street Journal*, March 24, 2000, p. A18.
13. "The Balkan War," *Washington Post*, March 10, 2000, p. A20.
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15. Michael Radu, "Kosovo Crisis Is Albanian PR Ploy," Letter to the editor, *Washington Times*, December 3, 2000, p. B2.
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