

SOURCES OF BALKAN INSTABILITY

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I would like to thank the American Hellenic Institute and the Pan-Macedonian Association for organizing and sponsoring this important and timely panel on the need of reassessing American policy in the Balkans.

The American Hellenic Institute since 1974 has been the main Greek-American organization promoting the rule of law in American foreign policy and in advancing the relations of our country with Greece and Cyprus.

The Pan-Macedonian Association , for nearly six decades, has defended the historical, the cultural and the political heritage of Macedonia from irredentist claims emanating from certain northern neighbors of Greece.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AMERICAN POLICY FROM THE END OF WWII TO THE END OF THE COLD WAR

- 1) Balkans: a region NOT known to the US
- 2) Greece and Turkey became the anchors of American policy in the region in 1947 under the Truman Doctrine and, later, with their admission to NATO and the granting of military facilities to the U.S.
- 3) The United States accepted the status quo created by the October 1944 Moscow “Percentages Agreement” on the Balkans.

- 4) The Balkans, as a region, was considered secondary to US interests. The focus of American policy was on the central front.
- 5) The quest for stability required limiting Soviet influence in the region. This is why the US supported Yugoslavia's break from the Cominform in 1948, sought regional alliances (Balkan Pact of 1954), etc. The United States Department of State definitively denied the existence of a "Macedonian" ethnicity despite Tito's claims.
- 6) Most regional sources of instability during the Cold War were internal to each bloc. For example, the conflict between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria over their Macedonian provinces, or the problems between Greece and Turkey (Greek minority in Istanbul, in the Aegean and Cyprus).

THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD

Yugoslavia's collapse caught the United States, the EEC/ EU, and its member Greece, unprepared for the crises that followed.

Their responses to the events in the Balkans were spasmodic. These responses were affected by the burden of history, the lack of knowledge of the region and its socio-political dynamics, and competing interests between the US, its European allies and Russia.

- 1) We saw the early recognition of former Yugoslav republics which created a major dilemma of how to balance the principles of self determination, the protection of human rights and the inviolability of borders. Internal borders of the Yugoslav federation became the external borders of the newly independent republics.

- 2) There was diplomatic rivalry. The US worked mainly the southern tier (Albania, FYROM, Bulgaria) while Germany primarily the north (Croatia, Slovenia).
- 3) This rivalry was enhanced by the EU's military dependence on the US; questions of burden sharing; actions under the new NATO Charter(1999/ out of area operations) and questions about the role of Russia in the Balkans.
- 4) The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia brought about direct American mediation initiatives that resulted in the Dayton agreement on Bosnia (1995) and the Interim Agreement between the FYROM and Greece (1995). These crises and the crisis over Kosovo (1999) were a real wake-up call for the EU. They were also a real wake-up call for Greece which had first hand experience with nationalist outbursts and claims from Albania, from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and occasionally from Bulgaria. Therefore, the Greek responses to these regional problems could not be separated from Greece's historical experience dating back to the last quarter of the 19th century.

Explanations of the American policy responses to the crises in the Balkans often reflected:

- 1) Simplistic journalistic analyses, like the book "Balkan Ghosts" by Robert Kaplan reflecting a region of ethnic conflict and violence.
- 2) Humanitarian appeals, including those by certain NGO's, calling for border changes in the interest of protecting human rights.

- 3) Resort to apocalyptic theories. The Clinton administration justified its Kosovo policy with historically unfounded arguments that both World Wars began in the Balkans.

In turn, the implementation of American policy involved:

- 1) Allegations about the inability/unwillingness of the EEC/EU to act;
- 2) Cooperation with unsavory groups. In Bosnia this involved cooperation with the Iranian secret services on behalf of Bosnian Muslims. In Kosovo, it involved the financing, training and arming of the so-called KLA/UCK, a group that had been on the State Department's narco-terrorist list for years.
- 3) Active ethnic group involvement including East coast Albanian-American groups helping to finance and legitimize the KLA/UCK; and the MPO from Indiana and Toronto on behalf of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

During the presidential campaign of 2000, Condi Rice writing in "Foreign Affairs" called for an American exit from the Balkans as this was a European problem; concluded that the involvement of the US in peacekeeping weakened America's deterrent capability; and that the US should not engage in nation building activity. This last commitment was soon forgotten with our engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since 9/11:

- 1) The Balkans have slipped off the radar screen despite mini flare-ups in Kosovo and the FYROM.

- 2) The region has become a peripheral issue in the absence of an immediate humanitarian or armed crisis, and the bigger problems facing the US in the Middle East.
- 3) Since the 1995 Interim Agreement on the denomination issue between Greece and the FYROM, Greece's role in the Balkans has become constructive and positive. Now Greece is part of the solution and not part of the Balkan problem.
- 4) Greece is a member of the EU, of NATO, and currently of the UN Security Council, in addition to being involved in other regional arrangements and peacekeeping activities. Greece has supported the democratization efforts in the region and has taken leadership in the economic development of the region. The Greek public and private sectors are the largest investors in Albania and the FYROM. Moreover, Greece has NO territorial claims against ANY of its neighbors, while supporting the principle of the inviolability of borders.
- 5) Many of these principles are also the foundation of EU policy in the Balkans: democratization, the rule of law, respect for human rights, combating corruption and organized crime, etc. The implementation of these principles is vital if any of these countries are to make any progress towards an association with the EU.

There are many problems lurking in the background that, if left unattended, will create serious future problems for the U.S.

- 1) Economic problems involving development, foreign investment, economic reform, combating corruption and organized crime.

- 2) Serbia's shaky transition to democracy and uncertainty over the future of the union with Montenegro.
- 3) Uncertainty over the viability of fictitious states, of the so-called "fragile democracies" like Bosnia Herzegovina, the FYROM, and potentially Kosovo.
- 4) The existence of armed extremist groups, the violations of human rights, corruption, and the presence of weapons of mass destruction in countries like Albania.
- 5) The unresolved issue of FYROM's denomination. FYROM's negotiating intransigence has been bolstered by last November's American recognition as the "Republic of Macedonia". This opportunistic action, at a time when talks continued in NY under the United Nations and Mathew Nimetz, came the day after our presidential election. This was a clear indication that the Bush administration was fearful of the response of the Greek-American community. I will return to this point shortly.
- 6) The uncertainty over the future status of Kosovo. Its status is to be reviewed by the UN Security Council in the summer of 2005.
 - a) While the status of Kosovo needs to be settled, how to get there and with what consequences, presents a real dilemma. UN administrator for Kosovo Joren Jessen Petersen, speaking to the Associated Press (reported on February 25, 2005), indicated that none of the 8 benchmarks for settling Kosovo's future in 2005 have been met. These include: minority rights, the return and participation of the Serb minority, democratization, combating corruption and organized crime, etc. Meanwhile, the Albanian prime minister of Kosovo

resigned and surrendered to the Hague Tribunal for crimes committed during the war.

- b) At the same time, many in the US (former Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, Ret.Gen Wesley Clark) in an orchestrated press campaign have called for Kosovo's independence.
- c) The threat of instability due to border changes, especially without Serbian consent, or consultation with Russia, is real. Independence in Kosovo will likely enhance Albanian claims vis a vis Kosovo and the FYROM, while casting doubt on the viability of a state like the FYROM whose ethnic groups look elsewhere for their loyalties. A peaceful future will require consensus building between the EU, Russia, Serbia, the U.S. and the UN. But, is Washington ready to face this issue? Washington's unilateralism raises a lot of questions.

Let me close with comments on the situation in the FYROM:

- 1) The untimely recognition of FYROM as the "Republic of Macedonia" by our government was a bribe to that republic in order for its government to boycott the referendum on the Ochrid Agreement, and to continue its participation in the so-called "coalition of the willing" in Iraq.
- 2) Last November's American action was a slap in the face of Greece, America's most reliable ally in the region since the end of WWII and a country that for the last 10 years has been the pillar of stability in the

Balkans. Washington has failed to realize that its action will NOT resolve ANY of FYROM's internal or regional problems.

- 3) Greece still has a lot of leverage in the on-going New York talks on FYROM's denomination. Under article 11 of the 1995 Interim Agreement, Greece has the right to bloc FYROM's aspirations for any affiliation with NATO or with the EU with a name not agreed to by Greece.
- 4) Until 2001, the FYROM presented itself as an "island of stability" in the Balkans despite its many internal problems. That reality came to a head with the mini civil war of 2001. The Ochrid Agreement of 2001 attempts to provide equitable participation in the political institutions and in the country's administration, including the police. It also attempts to create a civil society. However, in reality, this agreement has divisive elements similar to those in the 1959 Zurich and London Agreements on Cyprus. Aggressive Albanian nationalist movements will capitalize on these provisions, especially if Kosovo is granted independence.
- 5) In the US we celebrate diversity and concepts like civil society. In Kosovo, Albania, the FYROM and Bosnia-Herzegovina, these concepts are alien to their cultural experience and are seen as a disadvantage to the majority community. There is no acceptance of multinational, multiconfessional and multicultural society.
- 6) Even though the prospect of association to the EU should be a major incentive for reform, these societies

are mired in ethnic rivalries with long term agendas. Ethnic leaders are masters in using and capitalizing on foreign interests by paying lip service to favored western concepts in order to promote their long term agendas.

- 7) The US recognition of the FYROM as “Republic of Macedonia”, is not encouraging reconciliation and stability. It is promoting instansigence and undermining the stabilizing role of Greece.
- 8) Albanian ethno-nationalists have replaced the Serbs as the source of regional instability. Along with the national dogma of the Slavic leadership of the FYROM, this is a recipe for future trouble in the Balkans. Irredentism remains the name of the game, and Washington’s recognition of the FYROM as “Republic of Macedonia” has strengthened the prospects for regional instability.
- 9) We often describe these newly independent states as “fragile democracies” and we are willing to forget and forgive their weaknesses. The term “democracy” is inaccurate. The presence of political factions and some electoral procedures cannot hide what happened in the recent municipal elections in the FYROM and earlier in Kosovo.

The bottom line is that unless our government is serious about its interests in the Balkans and assesses calmly the economic, political and social forces in the region, it will find that opportunistic and spasmodic policy decisions such as the recent recognition of FYROM as the “Republic of Macedonia” will only contribute to further

instability in this volatile region and will destroy our credibility among our traditional allies like Greece.

Let me close by emphasizing that our government must impress on the leadership of FYROM the need to negotiate in good faith with Greece over the denomination issue. Our government must recognize the vital interests of its long term ally Greece. It must also accept the fact that any solution that confers the name of Macedonia on this Slavic mini-state and violates the historical, the cultural and the political heritage of Hellenic Macedonia, will only encourage FYROM's irredentism and will contribute to instability in the Balkans.

Thank you.