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## **The Evolution of US Policy-Making toward Southeast Europe in the Post-Cold War Period**

Astute observers of US policy in the Balkans during the mid-1990s might have detected two strangely interrelating trends. On the one hand, US presence in the region underwent a considerable upgrade in terms of commitment and resources, a trend which is distinctly discernable even if one deletes from the picture US military and military-related efforts in Bosnia and Kosovo. The US currently has a strong diplomatic presence throughout the region, including in the republics of the former Yugoslavia. Several executive departments and agencies staff offices in these missions, and it has been estimated that the US federal government has spent \$24 billion in development aid in Southeast Europe since 1991<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, despite frequent rhetoric of troop withdrawal, the US still has substantial military capacity on the ground in Bosnia and in Kosovo, even if the region does not attract the high level attention it did during the Clinton years<sup>2</sup>.

US presence in the Balkans has thus undergone a remarkable transition since the 1980s, when the region was deemed not to be vital to US interests and important only for comparative stability. During the Reagan-Bush years the foreign policy environment in Washington was not particularly committed to well-defined policy objectives in Southeast Europe. Between the fall of the communist regimes in the Balkans and the 1999 Kosovo crisis, however, actors in the policy process had begun to call into question both the relative importance of the Balkans

1. See Daniel Serwer's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of June 25, 2003, [http://www.usip.org/aboutus/congress/testimony/2003/0625\\_serwer.html](http://www.usip.org/aboutus/congress/testimony/2003/0625_serwer.html).

2. As evident in two messages from President Bush to Congress on the continuation of the national emergency with respect to the Western Balkans, dated, respectively, June 21, 2002, and January 29, 2003. Cf. M. Abramowitz and H. Hurlburt, "Can the EU Hack the Balkans?", *Foreign Affairs* 81 (5) 2002, esp. pp. 5-7.

in US foreign policy and the means by which policy decisions—in the Balkans and elsewhere in the world— were being made. Paradoxically, however, while it would appear on the surface that US policy in Southeast Europe had entered a post-Cold War mode by the middle of the 1990s, notably in terms of the projection of soft power, it is also arguable that the policy-making process in Washington all throughout the decade actually followed well engrained patterns established early on in the Cold War.

Unfortunately, perhaps, the niceties of the policy process in the US federal government are typically not well understood by the general public, but rather are subject to simplistic misconceptions. Writers on international affairs commonly engage in semi-journalistic shorthand when referring to the decision-making environment in a given country, referring to this or that capital city as the source of unified policy – “Paris did this, London did that,” and so on (More crudely still one also hears such statements as “Clinton did this” or “Bush wants to do that”). In this very collection of papers Van Coufoudakis asks whether “Washington” will have the will to sustain its level of engagement in Southeast Europe even as it turns its attentions to other problems elsewhere. What can this mean, in terms of the people and institutions in Washington responsible for policy making?

This essay will seek briefly to elucidate the means by which policy toward Southeast Europe was made during the 1990s, using principally a simplified version of an analytical scheme developed by Charles Kegley and Eugene Wittkopf to better understand US foreign policy during the Cold War and post Cold War periods<sup>3</sup>. Standard accounts of US foreign policy focus on the various actors in policy making at the level of the federal government – the Presidency and the White House, the National Security Council, the Cabinet and the relevant Departments of State, the two houses of Congress and in particular the different Congressional committees and sub-committees involved in foreign affairs, the so-called “intelligence community”, and finally public opinion (the media, lobbies, think tanks and foreign policy élite, and so on)<sup>4</sup>. Rather Kegley and

3. C. W. Kegley and E. R. Wittkopf, *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process*, New York 1991<sup>4</sup>. A fifth edition of the work was published in 1996, but paradoxically the 1991 edition is better suited to my purposes in this paper.

4. Two good surveys from the mid-1990s are J. Dumbrell, *The Making of US Foreign*

Wittkopf ascribe the making of policy to one of five “sources” —role, governmental, societal, external, and variable (including the personality of individual actors, the coming of elections, the onset of a crisis domestic or foreign, etc.). Furthermore, Kegley and Wittkopf argue that in “normal” circumstances one can also rank these different sources. To what extent does this type of analysis help us understand US policy toward the Balkans in the immediate post-Cold War years?

Bill Clinton came into the White House in January 2003 with clear domestic priorities, and grew into his foreign policy role only with time, although he did take a leading role in formulating his Administrations economic policies nearly from the onset. His introduction to national security issues was a rude one, as his Presidency inherited a rapidly evolving international situation, with problematic US positions in Somalia and in Haiti, and a looming crisis in Bosnia<sup>5</sup>. His Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff intimidated him (arguably one major turning point in the first Clinton Presidency came with the retirement of Powell in 1993), and after 1994 he was faced with a hostile Republican majority in the House of Representatives. The CIA was rocked with the aftermath of the Ames case in the early 1990s, leading to an effective downgrading of the intelligence community until 1996 or so. Always preoccupied with his place in the polls, by this time too Clinton was also faced with reelection considerations which tended to hamper his freedom of action.

Clinton’s initial foreign policy team of Les Aspin, Warren Christopher, and Tony Lake did not cohere immediately, and arguably it was not until 1995 and after that a so-called sub-cabinet took shape, consisting of Lake, Strobe Talbott, Richard Holbrooke, and Sandy Berger. This team was later modified in Clinton’s second term in office to include Madeleine Albright, William Cohen, George Tenet, Holbrooke, Berger, and possibly also General Shelton of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; in particular it was the “ABC” trio of Albright, Berger, and Cohen who formed the backbone of the second Clinton team<sup>6</sup>.

*Policy*, Manchester 1997, and J. M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of US Foreign Policy*, Baltimore 1994.

5. See L. H. Brune, *The United States and Post-Cold War Interventions: Bush and Clinton in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia*, Claremont 1998.

6. A. S. Scott, “Three Musketeers of US Foreign Policy,” *Christian Science Monitor* (February 2, 1998) 1.

Clinton faced some paradoxical resistance from his foreign policy departments early on, especially with respect to the crisis in Bosnia. The Department of Defense, slated for a comprehensive bottom-up review under the tenure of Secretary Aspin, who resigned owing to health problems before Clinton's first term was over, was opposed to military intervention, while a faction in the Department of State, the so-called "Yugoslaves", rose in protest over US inaction in Bosnia. Perhaps the most effective department in the early years of the Clinton Presidency was the Department of Commerce under the leadership of Ron Brown and Mickey Kanter.

In Congress rank and file Republicans were increasingly hostile toward Clinton, although Senate leadership in particular was more moderate in its stance. This leadership did take a leading role in 1994 in trying to formulate a policy on the arms embargo in Bosnia. The principal Congressional committees involved in foreign policy issue were general compliant, although the House Appropriations Committee did challenge the White House actively. At no time during the Clinton Presidency was War Powers evoked in a serious manner<sup>7</sup>.

Congressional hearings did have an effect on public opinion, however, which was another predominant consideration in how the Clinton team proceeded. As the general public was unaware of the drama unfolding in the Balkans public opinion was not appealed to in one way or another during the first months of the Bosnian crisis. When Clinton did decide to act decisively in 1995 by ordering air strikes he discovered arguably that his action could be useful in helping sway public opinion behind him.

It should become evident that although there were no factors that should provoke inevitable policy failure in the early Clinton years, the lack of a clear sense of mission and the confusion in foreign policy sources did contribute mightily to the initial inaction of the Clinton Administration in the Balkans. Role and government sources cancelled out one another, while societal and external sources were not immediately important. Clinton did not emerge early on as a decisive personality, and arguably his foreign policy in Bosnia (and later in Kosovo) was one of crisis-driven unilateralism (or "multilateralism à la carte", as

7. R. C. Hendrickson, "War Powers, Bosnia, and the 104th Congress", *Political Science Quarterly* 113 (2) (1998) 241-259.

a recent observer has phrased it<sup>8</sup>).

Certain variables need to be mentioned, including the importance of mid-term elections in 1994 and of Clinton's reelection campaign in 1996, the gradual effect of media coverage tending to lay the blame for the carnage on the Bosnian Serbs, and, for Clinton's second term, the weight of impeachment proceedings. It is also essential to acknowledge that the Clintonites inherited the Bosnia crisis from the Bush, Sr., Administration, which chose not to get closely involved in the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Debates over post-Cold War doctrine also played a part. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine regarding US intervention. No less critical were debates over neo-isolationism and over the sense of US hegemony in world affairs.

Where does this lead us? Kegley and Wittkopf have argued that for the Cold War period role sources were of primary importance in the making of US foreign policy, followed in order by governmental, societal, external, and variable sources. A brief evaluation of the foreign policy of the Clinton Administration, with respect particularly to Bosnia and Southeast Europe, reveals that the same ranking pertained in the 1990s, particularly once the Administration had fixed on its strategy after 1995. To be sure, soft power priorities were implemented with reasonable success, in the Balkans and elsewhere, marking a potential shift in policy focus. Fundamentally, however, there was no change to the constitutional architecture of foreign policy making during the Clinton years.

One is led to conclude that for the Clinton Administration in Bosnia things were business as usual, revealing congenital problems in US foreign policy making, particularly with regard to interventionism. Indeed, the Clinton Administration's forays into crisis management in the Balkans were sub-optimal – typical for most cases of the sort both before and after. Given this prognosis it would be interesting to know whether commentators on the scene troubled themselves with this state of affairs. Certain analysts believed that the relative incoherence of policy making could nonetheless lead to important policy shifts. James

8. H. LaFranchi, "New US Foreign Policy Very Much Like Old", *Christian Science Monitor* (October 3, 2001) 2.

Scott has determined that if anything the Reagan Presidency in the 1980s was characterized by even more “messiness”, which did not deter a concerted effort to deal with foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union; Scott predicted that if anything the post-Cold War period would be even more problematic for the formulation of policy<sup>9</sup>.

On the other hand, some, like James Roche and George Pickett, Jr., thought that the complexities of the post-Cold War era would require significant “managerial reform” in policy making.

Today the U.S. government is not well structured to operate as effectively in the interventionist environment of the future as necessary. It lacks the broad expertise in many foreign countries, regions, and their languages. Its overall focus may be driven by cold war management cultures ... Restructuring of military development and acquisition activities is occurring only superficially; changes are not being made in the fundamental manner in which requirements are developed, options considered, and solutions implemented. New technologies may not be developed rapidly to support political leaders, and very innovative technologies and operational practices may not emerge except over decades. Finally, declines in the resources available to national security are not being paralleled by sufficient decreases and restructuring of the bureaucracy of national security<sup>10</sup>.

Others still, like George Weigel, believed in terms not without resonance today that only through strenuous unilateral leadership, both within and without, could the US manage to maintain its place in international affairs.

When difficult decisions have to be taken, diplomacy in the post-Cold War world should not be understood on the

9. J. M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy*, Durham 1996.

10. J. G. Roche and G. E. Pickett, Jr., “Organizing the Government to Provide the Tools for Intervention”, in *U.S. Intervention Policy for the Post-Cold War World: New Challenges and New Responses*, New York 1994, p. 210.

analogy of lawyers meeting in a dark-paneled room over after-dinner Courvoisier to “work things out”. There is no consensus and there will be no consensus, on the Balkans or on virtually any other serious security issue, until the United States defines a policy that others are then persuaded (or, more likely, obliged) to accept. That is what happened during the Gulf crisis of 1990; and that is what is likely to happen throughout the rest of the decade<sup>11</sup>.

11. G. Weigel, *Idealism without Illusions: U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1990s*, Grand Rapids 1994, pp. 165-166.