

*Aristotle Tziampiris*

## **The Impact of the Kosovo Conflict and 9/11 on Greek-American Perceptions and Misperceptions**

*I do hate the Americans.  
It's the only strong political feeling I have ...  
It's jealousy of course.*  
Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?*, 1864

### *A. Introduction*

In his seminal study, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*<sup>1</sup>, Professor Robert Jervis initiates his inquiry by asking a seemingly simple question “Do Perceptions Matter?”. He then proceeds to outline, in great detail, and with a plethora of historical illustrations, that how actions, developments and decisions are viewed and perceived, actually affects policy-making. R. Jervis concludes his work by offering specific recommendations on how to minimize the perils that are associated with misperception. Perhaps most importantly, he recommends the constant practice of “devil’s advocate”. This allows decision-makers to be:

Exposed to conflicting interpretations of events and shown how alternative images make the world appear differently ... An individual rarely has the ability or the incentive to expose the structure of his beliefs, and interaction with someone who holds a different position usually is the best, if not the only, way for those he is advising, and indeed for the person himself, to see where his arguments are most vulnerable. It is unlikely that any participant will be converted. But those who listen to the arguments are in a good position to learn what perspectives they are rejecting, what evidence they should examine more closely, and what assumptions need further thought<sup>2</sup>.

1. R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, New Jersey 1976.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 416.

This essay will assume precisely the role of the “devil’s advocate” as regards the impact that the Kosovo Conflict and 9/11 have had on Greek-American perceptions. It will attack conventional wisdom and argue that they have unfairly contributed towards three fundamental misperceptions. Namely that:

- Greece represents a source of instability in South Eastern Europe.
- Greece is a “hotbed” of anti-Americanism.
- The United States is a source of instability in South Eastern Europe.

### *B. Greece Represents a Source of Instability in South Eastern Europe*

In the early 1990’s, Greek foreign policy was dominated by the dispute with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)<sup>3</sup> that was centred around the new republic’s exact name<sup>4</sup>. Strong popular reactions, enormous mass demonstrations, the imposition of economic sanctions, and the unwillingness of both sides to compromise, created an explosive situation with partisan, political and regional consequences<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the seriousness of the Yugoslav crisis and its importance to neighbouring Greece, the actions of the country’s government and people were portrayed and criticized by the international news media as unfair, unjustified, extremely non-cooperative and, ultimately, endangering the efforts to contain and end the Yugoslav War<sup>6</sup>. Greece was thus

3. Throughout this essay the term FYROM will be utilized. This approach has the advantage of conforming to the 1993 UN Security Council Resolution 813, according to which “this state [will be] referred to for all purposes within the United Nations ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ pending settlement of the difference that has arisen over the name of the state”. For the text of the resolution see Y. Valinakis and S. Dales, *The Skopje Question*, Athens 1994, p. 147 [in both Greek and English].

4. As a result of the almost exclusive attention that was paid to the dispute with FYROM, Greece’s foreign policy was aptly described as having been “skopjeanized” (Skopje being both the capital of FYROM and the term by which almost all Greeks referred to the new state).

5. For extensive accounts of events in Greece during this period see E. Kofos, “Greek Policy Considerations Over FYROM Independence and Recognition”, in J. Pettifer, ed. *The New Macedonian Question*, London 1999; T. Skilakakis, *In the Name of Macedonia*, Athens 1995 [in Greek]; A. Tarkas, *Athens Skopje. Behind Closed Doors*, Volumes I and II, Athens 1995 and 1997 [in Greek]; A. Tziampiris, *Greece, European Political Cooperation and the Macedonian Question*, Aldershot 2000; and T. Veremis, *Greece’s Balkan Entanglement*, Athens 1995.

6. For example see J. Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, London 1997, p. 78, note 32.

associated with the perception of a maverick “black sheep” that could not be entirely trusted to fully comprehend or participate in the West’s response towards former Yugoslavia.

During the Kosovo Conflict, the international news media again highlighted the fact that 85% of Greek citizens opposed NATO’s intervention, while 95% actually held NATO responsible for developments in the region<sup>7</sup>. Almost daily demonstrations in Athens, as well as in many other cities, contributed towards the conclusion that once again, the country’s people and political leadership could not think beyond a very narrow regional outlook.

In other words, the dispute with FYROM and the reaction to the Kosovo Conflict created the perception that Greece would either contribute directly towards instability in South Eastern Europe or, at best, adopt a negative, detached and counter-productive stance towards developments in the region.

However, this is a rather unfortunate misperception about Greece’s foreign policy and role in the Balkans. Given the immense unpopularity of the Kosovo Conflict, the case can be made that never before was a country’s government and opposition tempted so much by so many. Nevertheless, actions and rhetoric were moderate and in full realization of the constraints imposed on a relatively small country by the international system. Demonstrations were attended by only a tiny fraction of the total that could have participated.

Furthermore, Greece’s decision to support a political resolution of the crisis, and refusal to join in military operations appears (with the benefit of hindsight), as entirely justified. Direct military involvement would have created complications, which Greece would not have been able to avoid confronting, being geographically permanently situated in the region. Also, the series of problems emanating from the Kosovo Conflict, as well as the recent rise of armed Albanian irredentist groups, suggest the potential significance that a comprehensive political agreement could have had, as opposed to what may have been premature military action.

7. See Y. Loulis, *The Twenty Years That Changed Greece*, Athens 2001, pp. 325 and 369, note 49 [in Greek]. See also T. Michas, *Unholy Alliance. Greece and Milosevic’s Serbia*, 2002, pp. 121-122 for an analysis of this poll.

It should further be stressed that during the recent crisis in the western Balkans, Greece acted in a responsible way aiming to assist and support FYROM. This behaviour demonstrates a new approach in Greek foreign policy on regional issues, as well as the culmination of a (largely unnoticed by the international media), improvement in bilateral relations with FYROM.

Crucially, an Interim Agreement was signed in September 1995 between the two states, although it did not resolve the name issue. Subsequently, Greece's business community took advantage of the various opportunities offered, making Greece one of the largest trading partners and foreign investors in the country. The tone of public discourse ceased to be aggressive and hostile, while even a military agreement was signed in December 2000. Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski described this new situation as a "small miracle"<sup>8</sup>.

After the eruption of hostilities by Albanian extremists, Greece's government and political parties immediately and publicly declared their support for their neighbour's territorial integrity. The Foreign Minister and Leader of the Opposition traveled to Skopje to demonstrate their concern for developments, while a consensus emerged in Greece, insisting that KFOR troops effectively guard Kosovo's borders with FYROM. At the same time, sensitivity to minority rights has also been expressed, thus sending a clear signal that Athens does not ignore, as long as they are peacefully expressed, the concerns of the neighbouring country's Albanian citizenry<sup>9</sup>.

In effect, these actions suggest a new Greek foreign policy in the Balkans that is widely shared by both the country's people and political class. This new policy is first characterized by the realization that Greece's national interest is best served by stability and democracy in the Balkans. This is why Greek troops are serving as members of both

8. See Internet Site: [http://world.flash.gr/research/print\\_version.asp?articleid+2251](http://world.flash.gr/research/print_version.asp?articleid+2251).

9. For an extensive analysis of Greece's reaction to the ethnic conflict in FYROM see A. Tziampiris, *International Relations and the Macedonian Question*, Athens 2003, pp. 113-130. For an analysis of the conflict see also K. Balalovska Kristina, A. Silj, M. Zucconi, *Minority Politics in Southeast Europe: Crisis in Macedonia*, Brescia 2002; J. Philips, *Macedonia: Warlords and Rebels in the Balkans*, London 2003 and V. Roudometof, *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict. Greece, Bulgaria and the Macedonian Question*, London 2002, pp. 211-223.

KFOR and SFOR. This is also why the Greek government provided considerable support, advice and encouragement to Serbia's opposition, prior to Milosevic's overthrow.

Secondly, there is a clear determination that the country never again be perceived as part of the region's problems. The "black sheep" reputation acquired in the 1980's and early 1990's is resented and countered by Greek efforts to contribute to diplomatic and stabilizing initiatives. Also, there is a preference for participation in the decision-making procedures within multilateral frameworks, and especially that of the European Union. Unilateral actions are largely eschewed, or only of secondary importance.

Finally, it should be stressed that Greece has demonstrated that it has a mature and responsible political system. Most of the major opposition parties refuse to fan popular discontent and exploit sensitive foreign policy issues connected to events in South Eastern Europe in order to "score" political points. It is impossible to stress sufficiently the significance of this development. Without the sensible, largely non-partisan, pro-European Union and pro-stability in the Balkans positions of particularly the opposition party of *New Democracy*, it would have been impossible or extremely difficult for Greece to pursue a new policy in South Eastern Europe.

Hence, it can be concluded that the proper perception concerning Greece's role and actions in South Eastern Europe is that of a state striving to contribute towards democratic reform, economic development and military security. Greece is effectively a stabilizing force in the region, and should finally be viewed by the international news media as precisely such a force.

### *C. Greece is a "hotbed" of Anti-Americanism*

The Kosovo Conflict is perceived as having contributed towards feelings of anti-Americanism in Greece. Perhaps the most important arguments reinforcing this conclusion are related to Bill Clinton's visit to Greece in November 1999. Unlike the uneventful and smooth visit of his immediate predecessor following the successful conclusion of the Gulf War, Clinton's visit was briefly postponed for security concerns, and was then met with demonstrations. The international news media

reported (and CNN broadcasted live) that:

Thousands of leftists protesters chanting anti-American slogans clashed with the police, and set dozens of stores on fire ... as President Clinton arrived in the Greek capital. Banks and shops throughout the main commercial area of central Athens were smashed and fires set across central Athens as Air Force One touched down ... for a stopover of under 24 hours<sup>10</sup>.

The conclusion thus seemed evident. To quote an anonymous US high official: "Greece is the most anti-American country in Europe"<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the only logical explanation for these protests (given their absence during George Bush's visit), had to be linked to the feelings of disapproval and dissatisfaction surrounding the US' role and involvement in Kosovo.

Similar conclusions concerning the extent of Anti-Americanism in Greece were reached on the basis of the Greek people's reaction to the murderous events of 9/11. An important poll published on 16 November 2001 concluded the following on the question of culpability behind 9/11:

Americans Belonging to the Far Left	1,9%
The Secret Services of Israel	7,7%
Bin Laden's Organization	29,6%
The US Secret Services	28,2%
Some Arab Terrorists	8,9%
Americans Belonging to the Far Right	4,2%
None of the Above	1,8%
Don't Know	17,9% <sup>12</sup>

The results are truly astounding, but despite first impressions, whether they actually amount to a predominant degree of anti-Americanism ought to be questioned. They certainly show the Greek public's distrust and mistrust towards the US; and it clearly exhibits the people's penchant for conspiracy theories. Previous not particularly democratic or independent phases of Greek history have offered examples of behind the scenes and ultimately unaccountable processes of decision-making

10. "Greek Leftists Battle Police In Protest Over Clinton Visit", *International Herald Tribune* (20 November 1999).

11. "How 'Greek' Is President Clinton?", *Ependytis* (27 November 1999) [in Greek].

12. "Poll: Greeks On the War", *Eleftherotypia* (16 November 2002) [in Greek].

that have undoubtedly influenced the development of such theories.

The poll possibly also demonstrates a failure of the government and media to address promptly and properly the events surrounding 9/11. However, it is doubtful that the Greek public would express similar views again today, since more is known about what transpired on that day and it would indeed be interesting to see the results if a similar poll was conducted again<sup>13</sup>.

At this point it should be stressed that this essay is not attempting to deny the existence of anti-Americanism in Greece, but to argue that its true proportions and extent are exaggerated. Still, any such reasoning must confront the findings of studies such as the recently published *They Got What They Deserved (Kala Na Pathoun)*, a large compilation of Greek comments, articles and descriptions of events that were not exactly sympathetic to a traumatized post-9/11 United States<sup>14</sup>. On closer inspection however, a different picture emerges. Consider for example the many demonstrations and marches in the wake of 9/11 that are presented as *prima fascia* evidence of Anti-Americanism. They include:

- The infamous AEK soccer game, where “about 200”<sup>15</sup> chanted “Osama, Osama”.
- “5-6 thousand”<sup>16</sup> marching in Athens on 27 September 2001.
- A “march of a few hundred”<sup>17</sup> in Thessaloniki on 28 September 2001.
- A demonstration of “a few thousand”<sup>18</sup> in Athens on 8 November 2001.
- “2-3 thousand”<sup>19</sup> demonstrating in Thessaloniki on 9 November 2001.
- The November 17, 2001 march in Athens with a participation of “5 to 6 thousand”<sup>20</sup>.

13. Regrettably, the poll probably demonstrates a small degree of Anti-Semitism that is abominable and requires urgent addressing.

14. See M. Vasilakis, *They Got What They Deserved*, Athens 2002.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

There is a clear parallel between the post-9/11 demonstrations and the infamous anti-Clinton violent demonstration that was attended by only some 5,500 people<sup>21</sup>. The numbers of people demonstrating vocally and on occasion violently against the United States government and its policies are usually tiny and should be contrasted with the more than four million residing in the Greater Athens area. Most of these demonstrations amount to partisan drills for the party remaining faithful, since they are attended primarily by members and sympathizers of the Greek Communist Party (KKE). Over the past two decades, the KKE has been rapidly declining in membership, influence and relevance; and as regards the more violent acts, they are committed by a mere handful of individuals lacking any partisan sanctioning or organizational aid.

It has also been argued (most recently and forcefully by Takis Michas)<sup>22</sup>, that contemporary Greek society has been witnessing an ideological rapprochement between the far Left and certain elements of the far, neo-orthodox Right:

It is not simply US policy that offends the nationalist Right. It is the entire narrative of American society and history and the values that constitute it that contradict the basic premises of nationalist conservatism in Greece and perhaps elsewhere<sup>23</sup> ... Seen as a system of ideas, the new anti-Americanism constitutes one more variant of the dominant ideology of ethnonationalism in Greece<sup>24</sup>.

This apparent far Left and far Right alliance constitutes a truly remarkable development that is fundamentally anti-modern and anti-globalization in nature, and hence *only incidentally* anti-American (the US being the state best exemplifying these trends). More importantly, both far Left and far Right are minority movements fighting a rearguard and futile battle (not unlike the Luddites who were quixotically battling industrialization). Their current importance and policy influence in Greece is certainly marginal. This is because of the existence of a rather “enlightened” and rational competing tradition in Greek society, with firmer roots in “Athens”, that finds its modern intellectual antecedents

21. See *Anti-American Protests Mark Clinton Visit to Athens*, CNN.Com, 20 November 1999.

22. See T. Michas, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-139.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 139.



in Adamantios Koraes (perhaps the greatest Greek thinker of the past centuries). It views Greece as fundamentally European (some 85% of Greeks adopt a Europhile stance), aims for the country's modernization, and welcomes the challenges of globalization —rather than attempting to deny or demonize their impact. This tradition has given birth to a movement whose ranks include the majority of citizens, almost all mainstream politicians, media outlets, as well as most leading intellectuals.

Furthermore, in considering the extent of Greek anti-Americanism, it should be stressed that the relations between the peoples of Greece and the United States can only be described as excellent and almost harmonious. The prominent position and considerable influence of Greek-Americans in all aspects of their society provides evidence for this assertion. Americans are invariably treated with friendliness, respect and possibly admiration, whenever they visit Greece. Absolutely no evidence exists, and no case has ever been claimed, concerning the ill treatment of Americans as a result of their nationality. Finally, American culture tends to be popular in Greece, and manifests itself in a variety of ways in the every day life of Greeks, including in music, food, movies, clothes etc.

Subsequently, it must be concluded that Greece is no “hotbed” of anti-Americanism. Historically, vocal protests are primarily related to specific decisions made by various US Administrations that include support for the Colonel's Junta during 1967-1974, the American role in Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974, and the decision to press for the initiation of NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo. Many of these complaints are probably justified<sup>25</sup>, as evidenced by Clinton's apology in Athens for his country's policies towards the Junta. At any rate though, honest and public disagreements on foreign policy decisions do not amount to massive anti-Americanism, nor do they “erase” the friendly relations among the peoples of the two countries and decades of official cooperation within multilateral frameworks and international organizations.

25. See A. Papachelas, *The Rape of Greek Democracy*, Athens 1997 [in Greek].

#### *D. The United States is a Source of Instability in South Eastern Europe*

The Kosovo Conflict undoubtedly represented a major upheaval in South Eastern Europe. To a considerable degree, it was a direct result of the willingness of the US Administration to persuade and pressure its NATO allies into confronting Milosevic's Kosovo policies<sup>26</sup>.

The result of this determination was 78 days of bombing, an uncertain status for Kosovo, the fatal weakening of Milosevic's regime, the reversal of a humanitarian catastrophe, and the demise of Serbian nationalism as the primary source of instability in South Eastern Europe<sup>27</sup>. However, an indirect result was also the encouragement of armed Albanian irredentist forces that subsequently (but briefly) operated in Presevo, Kosovo and especially FYROM.

Thus, the perception emerged that as a result of America's Kosovo intervention:

We ... severed the head of Greater Serbia, only to discover that Balkan nationalism is hydra-headed. In its place ... now [stands] ... the evil spectre of rabid, expansionist Albanian nationalism, which aime[s] to create either a Greater Albania or at least a Greater Kosovo<sup>28</sup>.

Hence, the conclusion shared by many in Greece that the US has been a source of instability in South Eastern Europe.

Once again, this constitutes a misperception. First, it should be stressed that no American official has ever made any statement in favour of altering borders in the Balkans, including during NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo. Although the KLA was encouraged by the US during the Kosovo Conflict as a counterforce to Milosevic's much more powerful military, no evidence exists of any deal, implicit promise, or understanding concerning a possible redrawing of borders.

Secondly, the universal fear of all regional states is that even a US withdrawal from the Balkans will encourage tensions and precipitate war<sup>29</sup>.

26. See M. Albright, *Madam Secretary*, New York 2003, pp. 393-428.

27. For an excellent account of the Kosovo Conflict see T. Judah, *Kosovo, War and Revenge*, London 2000.

28. T. Judah, "Greater Albania?", *The New York Review of Books* (17 May 2001).

29. For example see "Balkan Leaders Urge Powell To Retain US Role in Region", *Washington Post* (3 February 2001); "Powell Reassures NATO on Balkan Force",

The 11,000 US troops now serving in Bosnia and Kosovo represent a small fraction of the international peacekeeping forces, but they have a disproportionate impact in deterring extremists in those countries. Moreover, the United States is the only Western country that enjoys real credibility and leverage with the Albanians and their leaders<sup>30</sup>.

Hence the genuine concern and anxiety about a premature American disengagement from the Balkans, that also offers the best evidence that the US is not today a source of instability in the Balkans.

Thirdly, the US Administration, despite its costly efforts to stabilize, democratize and in essence modernize Iraq, continues to honour prior significant monetary commitments as regards the Balkans. More specifically:

Based on current spending patterns, [it is] estimated that the United States will spend \$8 billion to \$12 billion on military operations and \$2 billion to \$3,5 billion on assistance to the Balkan region between [2002] and 2010<sup>31</sup>.

Finally, despite an unacceptably long delay to intervene forcefully, America's role in securing the (admittedly not perfect)<sup>32</sup> Dayton Peace Accord should be highlighted. Negotiated on American soil, it finally brought peace to Bosnia that is still holding today. Unfortunately, the European Union does not offer, so far, a similar stabilizing record during the war years in former Yugoslavia, not necessarily because of a lack of will, but possibly due to constitutional and operational shortcomings. At any rate, the obvious point is that the US cannot justifiably be blamed for contributing towards turmoil and further war in Bosnia, after it decided to act in a diplomatically decisive manner<sup>33</sup>.

Based on all of the above, it emerges that the adoption of a "devil's advocate" attitude demolishes a series of misperceptions about the US and Greece that were created or reinforced during the Kosovo Conflict

*Washington Post* (27 February 2001) and "Rumsfeld Worries Europeans On Bosnia. Allies Warn US Against Withdrawal", *Washington Post* (23 May 2001).

30. "Relearning the Balkans", *Washington Post* (31 May 2001).

31. Council on Foreign Relations, *Balkans 2010*, New York 2002, p. 6.

32. On the imperfections of the peace achieved through the Dayton Peace accords, see S. Bose, *Bosnia After Dayton. Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*, London 2002 and D. Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton*, London 2000.

33. See I. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton. The Making of America's Bosnia Policy*, Washington D.C., 2000 and R. Holbrooke, *To End A War*, New York 1998.

and 9/11. Ultimately, the proper perception about the two countries and peoples is that of common views and interests in South Eastern Europe. Both are in favour of guarding the territorial integrity of regional states, and both support human rights, democratic reform, economic growth and, eventually, the incorporation of all of the Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures.

It is of paramount importance that these perceptions become understood by all concerned, and especially by the international news media. Such a development will influence actions that are grounded on correct views and a proper understanding of Greek-American attitudes and policies in South Eastern Europe, and not on pernicious misperceptions.