

Review Essay

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US Foreign Policy in the Balkans

Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001, pp. 318.

David Fromkin, *Kosovo Crossing: American Ideals Meet Reality on the Balkan Battlefields*, New York: The Free Press, 1999, pp. ix+210.

A. The American Foreign Policy Tradition

The conduct and goals of US foreign policy have been greatly influenced by events in the Balkans during the past decade, and especially by the Kosovo Conflict. Dr Henry Kissinger and Professor David Fromkin have produced two important studies that contribute towards the understanding of America's policies and actions. Both authors are proponents of political realism that places particular emphasis on concepts such as national interest, balance of power and prudence¹. Both are also uncomfortable with the recent innovations in international politics and seem to prefer the certainties of the Westphalian system². By paying particular attention to NATO's 78-day Kosovo bombing campaign³,

1. The classic statement of political realism is Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York: Knopf, 1985 (6th edition revised by Kenneth W. Thompson). For a recent powerful critique see Jeffery W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?", *International Security*, 24/2: 5-55.

2. For the text of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, see Internet Site: <http://www.Tufts.edu/fletcher/multi/texts/historical/westphalia.txt>. See also the recent revisionist views in Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth", *International Organization*, 55/2 (Spring 2001): 251-287. Also important is Stephen D. Krasner, "Westphalia and All That", in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

3. It should be stressed that the scope of Dr Kissinger's book is wide, and goes beyond US foreign policy towards Kosovo, on which however this review essay will concentrate.

they present an elegant critique of US mistakes and omissions, as well as a condemnation of the discrepancies and dangers that are associated with the pursuit of a doctrine of humanitarian intervention.

In analyzing US foreign policy, Fromkin and Kissinger stress the creative tension and struggle between its two major approaches, represented best by Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt, aptly described as “an American version of the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck”⁴, was the first president since the Founding Fathers to resurrect the Hamiltonian idea of treating the balance of power as the distinctive feature of international relations and to undertake an active American role in shaping it. Unlike his predecessors and most of his successors, Roosevelt did not think of the United States as a messianic cause but as a great power—potentially the greatest⁵.

Importantly, Kissinger follows the seminal argument by Walter Charles Meade, and thus identifies a Jacksonian tradition in American foreign policy (after President Andrew Jackson)⁶. Closer to Roosevelt and to political realism, but also in certain ways to the older isolationist tradition, “Jacksonians” are democratic, populist and give emphasis to concepts such as self-reliance and individualism. They approach foreign policy in a ... spirit ... in which honour, concern for reputation, and faith in military institutions play a ... greater role⁷. Jacksonians have the least regard for international law and international institutions⁸ ... [and] believe that international life is and will remain both anarchic and violent. The United States must [thus] be vigilant and strongly armed⁹.

Jacksonians are also willing to fight with all available means when provoked and if they become convinced that the country’s honour or vital interests are at stake¹⁰. Once victorious though, they tend to ad-

4. Fromkin, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

5. Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 240. On Theodore Roosevelt see also H. W. Brands, *TR: The Last Romantic*, New York: Basic Books, 1998 and Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, New York: Basic Books, 1988.

6. Walter Russell Meade, “The Jacksonian Tradition”, *The National Interest* 58 (Winter 1999/2000) 5-30.

7. Meade, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

9. *Ibid.*

10. For an analysis of the expected Jacksonian response to the recent terrorist attacks

vocate policies exhibiting magnanimity.

This attitude towards world politics was rivalled by Wilson's more universal and idealistic vision¹¹. To a considerable extent, Americans were seduced by the (not always consistent or comprehensive) Wilsonian approach. "In the 1920's, Jacksonians at first opposed Wilsonianism, allied with it during the Second World War and the Cold War, and retreated to their earlier principles after the Cold War ended"¹². Wilsonianism emphasized self-determination, democracy, collective security and promised, ultimately, perpetual peace or at least an international system that for the first time would not be condemned to continuous war¹³.

Fromkin correctly stresses that America's idealistic tendencies have not been the result of higher moral standards or of more virtuous people. Geography and history played an important role, the United States having been blessed by its location: protected by the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and surrounded by mostly friendly and certainly much weaker neighbours, it never had to confront an invasion.

This situation also permitted the isolationist policies that were advocated by the Founding Fathers¹⁴. However, gradually, the US adopted a more internationalist and interventionist outlook, ultimately achieving a position of world pre-eminence and significance. This was not the result of sinister or consistently long-term planning. The US entered the First World War late, suffered much fewer casualties, and found itself enjoying an enhanced Great Power status as a result of a conflict that was initiated and mostly fought by others. The US also became a direct

against America, see *Braced for Jacksonian Ruthlessness*, *The Washington Post*, 17 September 2001.

11. On Woodrow Wilson see especially Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, Latham Earl, ed. *The Philosophy and Policies of Woodrow Wilson*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958 and Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study*, New York: Dover Publications, 1956.

12. Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 245.

13. See Innis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations*, New York: Random House, 1962 ch: 4 and 5 and also Kissinger, *op.cit.*, pp. 244-245.

14. See for example George Washington's Farewell Address in W. B. Allen, *George Washington: A Collection*, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988, p. 525 and the famous passage by former Secretary of State (and subsequent US President) John Quincy Adams, cited in Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 238.

participant in the Second World War later, and only after having been attacked. Although the American army suffered considerable losses, they cannot be compared with what amounted to an unprecedented catastrophe that was visited upon the peoples and countries of especially Eastern Europe and Russia.

After the war, Germany was defeated and the old European Powers laid weakened and exhausted. What then took place was somewhat surprising:

In an unusual —perhaps even unique— act of enlightened realism, Britain, the supreme world power for generations, handed over its top position to its successor consciously, deliberately, and in a sense, voluntarily¹⁵.

The Cold War that followed was characterized by the rivalry between the US and the USSR. Interestingly, the generation of Cold War strategists reduced and, for a while, nearly eliminated the historic tension in American thinking between idealism and power. In the world dominated by the two superpowers, requirements of ideology and equilibrium tended to merge¹⁶. The alliance between Jacksonians and Wilsonians continued all through the Cold War¹⁷ ... [allowing] bipartisan exertions spanning nine administrations over almost half a century¹⁸.

The Cold War eventually ended unexpectedly and mostly peacefully with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of its Empire. Hence, in less than a century, the US found itself in the position of the world's sole if reluctant Superpower. Fromkin stresses that "History has not taught [Americans] lessons in power, for the United States rose to the top by surviving rather than by winning. This has been a dangerous omission in the country's education"¹⁹. It is thus suggested that partly as a result of this inadequate "education", US foreign policy in the Balkans has proved problematic, allowing ill-timed interventions and support for an imprudent humanitarian doctrine. Ultimately, a new reality emerged in which, according to Kissinger, "Wilsonianism ...

15. Fromkin, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

16. Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

17. Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 246.

18. Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

19. Fromkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-48.

triumphed over competing traditions in American foreign policy”²⁰.

B. The Kosovo Conflict and the Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention: A Critique

Both Kissinger and Fromkin embark upon a detailed and forceful critique of US policies and actions in Kosovo. First of all, they stress the importance of understanding the history of a region before deciding upon any military involvement. For example, Kissinger is critical of the Rambouillet negotiations for including into the text of the agreement the following paragraph:

8. NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access *throughout the FYR* including associated airspace and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right of bivouac, maneuver, billet and utilization of any areas or facilities as required for support, training and operations²¹.

The former US Secretary of State is opposed to this arrangement not because he finds it morally reprehensible or unacceptable, but based on a deep understanding of the past:

For anyone familiar with Serbian history, the Rambouillet proposals were certain to lead to war. The country that had fought the Ottoman and Austrian empires, often alone, and had fiercely resisted Hitler and Stalin without the help of allies, would never permit transit of foreign troops or turn a province containing its historic shrines over to NATO²².

Unfortunately, American diplomacy often fails to take into account that people in South Eastern Europe (SEE) have long historical memories and experiences, often traumatic, and as a result the past may preside with a particular vengeance over contemporary events. As Henri Brailsford warned in 1906:

That nothing changes in the [Balkans] is a commonplace which threatens to become tyrannical. Assuredly there is something in the

20. Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 254. He explains that the process of this gradual triumph began in 1974. See Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

21. Cited in Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons From Kosovo*, Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1999, p. 107.

22. Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 262.

spirit of the East which is singularly kindly to survivals and anachronisms. The centuries do not follow one another. They coexist. There is no lopping of withered custom, no burial of dead ideas²³.

American officials sometimes give the impression that people and governments in the Balkans ought to automatically follow US values and policy preferences, regardless of problems and limits created by historical rivalries and complications. In this sense, Kissinger and Fromkin offer a useful corrective, or rather an important parameter that should enter calculations during the process of US foreign policy formulation for the Balkans.

After the failure of the Rambouillet negotiations²⁴, NATO initiated a 78-day bombing campaign. Both authors are critical of America's participation and leadership role, since they fail to detect any vital interests that were at stake and that would have rendered the operation necessary. More importantly, they are indignant of the fact that the entire campaign was justified on the basis of a doctrine of humanitarian intervention, especially since the logical conclusion of its application would be for the US to become the world's policeman. America though "is not going to be able to protect all the world's thousands of minorities against abuse or deportation, or all the world's two hundred or so countries against nationalist secessions"²⁵. Hence, the more likely outcome might be the pursuit of several additional misguided humanitarian interventions that would nevertheless render the US liable to essentially just accusations of hypocrisy, inconsistency and unfairness.

However, both authors fail to fully comprehend that although the liberal morality and humanitarian concerns of the doctrine are central to its application, they remain conditional upon the satisfaction of a series of additional criteria. During the Kosovo Conflict, former US President Bill Clinton and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair consistently explained the doctrine's conditionality. For example, Blair stressed the importance of the following:

Are we sure of our case? ... Have we exhausted all diplomatic

23. Henry N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: Its Races and their Future*, London: Methuen and Co., 1906, p. 1.

24. The best account of the Rambouillet negotiations is contained in Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 197-226.

25. Fromkin, *op.cit.*, p. 174.

options? ... On the basis of a practical assessment of the situation, are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake? ... are we prepared for the long run ... and *finally, do we have national interests involved?*²⁶

President Clinton also provided continuously specific *Realpolitik*-related justifications for NATO's campaign. They included the need to avoid a widespread war in SEE²⁷ and "the fundamental interest in a long-term, positive relationship with Russia"²⁸. Seen in this light, the concerns of Kissinger and Fromkin about the effects of the new doctrine's scope and implementation probabilities prove somewhat exaggerated.

Nevertheless, Fromkin's assertion that an intervention motivated exclusively by humanitarian concerns should not have involved military action, but "concentrat[ed] on resettling [the one million Kosovar refugees] elsewhere and providing them with the means to start new lives for themselves" requires further elaboration²⁹. In what constitutes a remarkably cynical and powerful passage, he argues that US intervention actually prevented the solution of the Kosovo Problem:

If the United States and NATO had not intervened, the Serbs would have settled the Kosovo issue, by ethnic cleansing. The Kosovars would have been pushed into Albania and forcibly reunited with their own people. Kosovo would be owned and inhabited exclusively by Serbs. Monstrous though it would have been to let the Milošević regime profit from its crimes, it would all be over³⁰.

Milošević though was not permitted to end the Kosovo Issue in such a manner. According to Fromkin, the ensuing situation after NATO's intervention remains unsatisfactory and will be unable to provide long-term stability and security:

You cannot administer a society day to day by force alone ... [By]

26. Tony Blair's speech to the Economic Club of Chicago on 22 April 1999; emphasis added. It can be found at Internet Site <http://www.usinfo.state.gov>.

27. See Clinton's Statement to the Nation on 24 March 1999 that can be found at Internet Site <http://www.usinfo.state.gov>.

28. Clinton's 23 May 1999 letter to *The New York Times* titled *A Just and Necessary War*. It can be found at Internet Site <http://www.usinfo.state.gov>.

29. Fromkin, *op.cit.*, p. 182.

30. Fromkin, *op.cit.*, p. 190.

opposing boundary changes, the international authority [in Kosovo] could be brought into collision with the population it will be governing ... The trusteeship-for-Kosovo concept comes at the wrong time in history ... we will be imposing an international regime on foreign population that will perceive that regime as imperialist³¹.

Kissinger is in complete agreement, warning of the potentially “ironic” situation in which Albanians insisting on an independent Kosovo could attack American troops, formerly perceived as liberators³².

Given the arguments of Kissinger and Fromkin, it could perhaps be suggested that since Serbian ethnic cleansing failed and the current arrangements are ultimately not tenable, the only remaining option is that of an independent Kosovo, probably cleansed of Kosovar Serbs. However, Kosovo’s independence or partition will mean that the violent redrawing of borders in the Balkans is possible. This would be a truly dangerous message to send to the various minorities residing within the region’s sovereign states, and especially to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). A belief that national borders are temporary, armed struggle welcome, and Great Power intervention inevitable, is a formula that will open Pandora’s Box for SEE, possibly ushering in a prolonged period of uncertainty and conflict.

Based on all of the above, the authors reach the conclusion that US foreign policy in Kosovo should be judged a failure. By adopting exclusively Wilsonian principles, and ignoring the lessons of History and power politics, the US made a momentous mistake by intervening in Kosovo and furthermore justifying its decision on the basis of a flawed doctrine of humanitarian intervention. In effect, the future stability and security of the region, as well as America’s long-term credibility, are now in jeopardy.

C. The Balkans Must Not Be Forgotten: The Need for an “International Conference on the Future of SEE”

Despite this bleak assessment, a more optimistic scenario can be constructed for the Balkans. It begins with the realization that American

31. Fromkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 188-191.

32. See Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 270.

foreign policy matters. The US is the sole Superpower, enjoying pre-eminence and advantages in the fields of economics, military power, technology and culture³³. What is required first is a synthesis of its competing foreign policy schools that would ensure a consensus and hence America's determined and continued support for a final settlement in SEE. At the same time, any US role in the attempt to confront the region's problems has to take into account the dramatic shift in the country's foreign policy goals, following the unprecedented terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 and its aftermath. The Balkans must not be forgotten, though they now require an approach that is consistent with the new international realities and constraints.

Such an approach could center around the backing of an "International Conference on the Future of South Eastern Europe". This proposal, (advocated very briefly by Henry Kissinger)³⁴, should aim to secure for the Balkans democracy, peace, stability, a reduced US military commitment, as well as economic development (with its concomitant trade and investment opportunities). In this way, it could simultaneously satisfy both Wilsonians and Jacksonians, and free resources for the fight against terrorism.

In organizing an International Conference, it should be kept in mind that during the decade-long process of Yugoslavia's dissolution, the international community intervened essentially in an ad hoc way, and often with considerable delay³⁵. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and more recently FYROM, constitute a record that can boast only of the unmitigated success in having managed to contain, but not to prevent, the wars within the borders of former Yugoslavia.

Today, potential sources of further conflict include Montenegro, Kosovo, Presevo and FYROM. The most important destabilizing factor in the region is that of the armed Albanian irredentist movement³⁶, best

33. See Fromkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 72-80. For a more comprehensive discussion (and in a sense celebration) of all the dimensions of contemporary US power, see Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999, pp. 297-329.

34. Kissinger devotes merely a paragraph in support of such a conference. See Kissinger, *op.cit.*, p. 271.

35. See James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, London: Hurst and Company, 1997.

36. For its intellectual underpinnings, see Academy of Sciences of Albania, *Platform for the Solution of the National Albanian Question*, Tirana, 1998.

(and violently) expressed by the KLA in Kosovo and the NLA in FYROM³⁷. Albanian irredentism entails the serious danger of an armed conflict or terrorist acts spreading to neighbouring countries.

There can be no doubt that NATO's intervention in Kosovo had as an unintended consequence the encouragement of militant Albanian nationalism, particularly in FYROM. Thus, it appears that NATO 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 Kosovo³⁸.

Concurrently, problems in the Balkans are interlinked. An independent Montenegro would precipitate an independent Kosovo; and an independent Kosovo would greatly enhance the demands of the Albanian minority residing in neighbouring FYROM. Hence, it becomes clear that the interconnectedness of the problems and potential conflicts in SEE call for comprehensive measures, that take into account the totality of the situation.

It is noteworthy that the Stability Pact for SEE, in its attempt "to achieve the objective of peace, prosperity and stability"³⁹ encompasses three Regional Tables on democratization and human rights, economic reconstruction, development and cooperation and on security issues. Hence, it has been allowed to pursue a more comprehensive approach towards the Balkans. However, despite its strengths (especially on economic and infrastructure matters), it is not realistic to expect the Stability Pact to solve all of the region's troubles, and especially the politically sensitive ones or those associated with armed nationalism. It does not have such a mandate, or the appropriate mechanisms. It lacks the legitimacy, flexibility, "muscle" and will.

An "International Conference on the Future of SEE" could confront the region's political problems in a comprehensive, constructive and

37. On the KLA see Chris Hedges, "Kosovo's Next Master's", *Foreign Affairs*, 78/3 (May-June 1999) 24-42. On the NLA see *Birth of New Rebel Army: Macedonian Guerrilla Group Forming in Kosovo Poses Threat of Expanded Conflict in Balkans*, *Washington Post*, 30 March 2001.

38. Tim Judah, *Greater Albania?*, *The New York Review of Books*, 17 May 2001.

39. *Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*. For the full text, see Internet Site: <http://www.seerecon.org/KeyDocuments/KD1999062401.htm>.

possibly successful way. In such a Conference, the states of SEE must play the protagonistic role. The peoples of the Balkans should not feel that they have been sidelined, or forced to obey the dictates of foreign powers, in a manner replicating the Congresses of Berlin or Vienna. The Conference accordingly will have to seek the active participation of the European Union and the US, since only they can provide the financial and military resources required to guarantee putative agreements. Russia and several other states should also participate, so that the Conference will acquire the necessary international inclusiveness and resultant legitimacy. This is why Kissinger wisely suggests the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as providing an appropriate and useful framework for this undertaking.

The proposed International Conference ought to define and endorse beforehand the largely Wilsonian principles on which any comprehensive solution will be based: Respect for human rights, democratic political organization, respect for religious and ethnic diversity, encouragement of free-market structural reforms and a free press.

Crucially, there should also be consideration of potential adjustments of borders. In the best Wilsonian tradition, violent alterations are to be condemned and opposed. However, peaceful agreement for changes on the basis of the principles mentioned above could be discussed, especially as regards Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Both seem to be experiencing (admittedly in different degree) the intermediate, unsatisfactory and untenable in the long-run status of an International Protectorate. Of course, it must be stressed that discussing peaceful alterations of borders is not tantamount to imposing an agreement. Certainly, though, contemplating this issue requires the Conference's comprehensive framework, clearly enunciated principles and the active involvement of all the governments representing the peoples of SEE.

America's involvement will be of central importance. First of all, it should be stressed that 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 leaders⁴⁰.

Furthermore, through an International Conference, the competing US foreign policy traditions can reconcile and synthesize their goals, allowing the world's sole Superpower to actively offer long-term support to any final agreements. Wilsonians will feel comfortable with the construction of SEE's future on the basis of the principles discussed previously. At the same time, the incorporation of a plan to reduce the burden to America's taxpayers and military personnel, will win the endorsement of the Jacksonians. This is because the latter have been critical of US interventions in the Balkans, since they did not consider any tangible national interests to have been at stake. However, Jacksonians would probably not endorse an immediate, unilateral withdrawal from the region, since it would damage America's credibility and prestige with its Allies, and dishonour previously made commitments.

It should also be noted that a reduced military official US involvement in the Balkans necessitated by the relentless struggle against terrorism, could be counterbalanced by continued political support for a final settlement, as well as the utilization of the unparalleled resources, capabilities and opportunities that America can offer through its influence in international organizations, its private business sector, educational facilities and technological know-how.

At any rate, developments in the Balkans will continue to be influenced by US foreign policy-making. The new Bush administration has been confronted with an unprecedented terrorist attack and the resulting struggle against this "new evil"⁴¹. At least as regards the Balkans, it has eschewed any premature disengagement, proclaims a more realist outlook on policies and is in general closer to the Jacksonian tradition. This suggests that the Wilsonianism of the Clinton Administration and its support for a doctrine of humanitarian intervention will be somewhat attenuated. However, instead of a triumphant Jacksonianism replacing the previous Wilsonian ascendancy, a balanced approach for the Balkans should be advocated. A positive future for SEE could be better secured if a synthesis is achieved by the main competing

40. *Relearning the Balkans*, *Washington Post*, 31 May 2001.

41. This is how UK Prime Minister Tony Blair described the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack against the US. See *European Pledge to Mount a Joint Battle on Terrorism*, *The New York Times*, 11 September 2001.

traditions of American diplomacy. This can best be expressed through an International Conference, aiming at a comprehensive agreement that condemns armed irredentism and terrorism, allows the US to have an appropriate and militarily reduced role and, ultimately, helps ensure democratic stability, military security and economic growth for the peoples of SEE.