

Srdja Trifkovic¹

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CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE U.S. POLICY IN THE BALKANS

Article I.

Over the past two decades the decision-makers in Washington and in the major capitals of Western Europe have acquired a bias in Balkan affairs which goes beyond any single piece of policy and falls outside the parameters of rational debate. As Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute has noted, such policy is not as inconsistent as it seems: “time after time the U.S. policy makers would ask what is it that the Serbs want, think about it for about five seconds, and reply that it is totally unacceptable.”²

Such consistency has had grim results. In Serbia the NATO powers carried out a premeditated aggression in the last year of the last century. Their mendacity, as displayed at Rambouillet in February 1999, was on par with Munich 1938. In Kosovo they engineered a violent secession by an ethnic minority which will render many European borders tentative. In Bosnia-Herzegovina they helped ignite the war in the spring of 1992, notably with U.S. Ambassador Warren Zimmermann’s now notorious mission to Sarajevo.³ They kept it going in 1993 by torpedoing the Europeanled peace initiatives,

¹ Историчар, политиколог (аналитичар међународних односа, гео-политичар итд.), уредник међународне рубрике часописа “Cronicl”, професор по позиву Факултета политичких наука у Бањој Луци.

² Verbatim quote from Dr. Bandow’s presentation at The Lord Byron Foundation Round Table on Bosnia at the Capitol Hill Club, Washington D.C., May 27, 2009.

³ As *The Times* of London summarized in Zimmerman’s obituary (February 11, 2004), the Lisbon agreement was signed in the spring of 1992 between the Muslim Izetbegovic and Bosnian Serb and Croat leaders, brokered by José Cutileiro, the Portuguese Foreign Minister: “Zimmerman flew to Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, where Izetbegovic told him he was having second thoughts about having signed the agreement. Zimmerman appears to have reassured Izetbegovic that, if he did denounce the agreement, the United States would recognise Bosnia as an independent state. A few days later the war had spread to Bosnia.”

and notably the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan.⁴ They engineered an outcome in 1995 that could have been obtained three years earlier without a single shot. In Croatia, in August 1995, they aided and abetted the biggest single act of ethnic cleansing in post-World War II Europe.⁵

The puzzling question remains: why the elaborate lie, why the multi-layered myth contained in those very words, “Bosnia” and “Kosovo”? Why did America in particular get involved in Balkan affairs, which bear no relationship to U.S. security, involving itself in long-standing and perhaps incurable national conflicts, and acting in bad faith at that?

THE BURDEN OF HISTORY – The U.S. policy in the Balkans made its debut near the end of the First World War. President Wilson, while advocating the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918, did not realize that the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was at least half-century overdue: the process of separate cultural development and the emergence of mutually incompatible national identities among the South Slavs had been completed. Being a liberal, Wilson did not allow Balkan realities to get in the way of his vision. He blended the Puritan self-righteous zeal with the Progressive Era’s belief in the power of politics to change the world for the better. His concepts of “enlarging democracy” and “collective security” signaled the birth of a view of America’s role in world affairs which has created – and is still creating – endless problems for America and for the world.

With similar historical inattention key political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic disregarded, in 1991-92, the fact that Tito’s internal boundaries between the six federal republics were the root cause of the looming conflict.⁶ Arbitrarily designed by the communist dictator in 1945, they left a third of all Serbs outside Serbia-proper, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia

⁴ “In Bosnia, the Europeans’ failure to achieve a settlement was used to justify deeper American participation -- a European failure that was largely due to the Clinton Administration’s active undermining of European efforts. For example, in Bosnia, the Clinton Administration torpedoed the Vance-Owen and Owen-Stoltenberg peace plans... and helped the Iranians ship in weapons.” The United States Senate Republican Policy Committee, “Clinton Kosovo Intervention Appears Imminent.” Washington D.C., February 22, 1999.

⁵ According to the late Ivo Pukanić, Croatia’s foremost investigative journalist, the United States was actively involved in the preparation, monitoring and initiation of Operation Storm; the green light from Washington was passed on by the US military attaché in Zagreb and the operations were transmitted in real time to the Pentagon: “The US was thrilled with the how fast and clean the operation was conducted... [This] was later confirmed in the statements that the operation was carried out properly, and the US-Croatian cooperation in intelligence and military matters intensified.” *Nacional* (Zagreb weekly), May 24, 2005.

⁶ Lord David Owen, the EU negotiator during the Bosnian War, in his *Balkan Odyssey* says: “My view has always been that to have stuck unyieldingly to the internal boundaries ... as being the boundaries for independent states, was a folly far greater than that of premature recognition itself.” (p. 33)

and Montenegro. For good measure two “autonomous provinces” were carved out of Serbia, one of which – Kosovo – is an almost *Serbenfrei* quasi-state today. For as long as Yugoslavia existed the Serbs could nevertheless derive some comfort from the existence of a common Federal framework: it appeared to promise them a measure of security from the repetition of the nightmare of 1941-45. When Yugoslavia started unraveling, however, in 1991-92, they were determined to resist any attempt by the breakaway republics to force millions of Serbs to become insecure minorities in their own land.⁷

POLITICAL ESSENCE OF THE WARS – In Croatia in 1991 and in Bosnia in 1992 the Serbs reacted in the same manner the English-speaking Americans of Texas or Arizona or New Mexico will react if they are outvoted, ten or twenty years hence, by a Latino majority in some stage-managed referenda demanding those states’ reincorporation into Mexico. In the same vein the Protestant Ulstermen fought, demanded, and were given the right to stay in the United Kingdom and apart from united Ireland when the nationalists opted for secession in 1921. In the same vein the state of West Virginia was created in 1863, incorporating those counties of the Commonwealth of Virginia that rejected secession. The Loyalists of Ulster and the Unionists of West Virginia were just as guilty of a “Joint Criminal Enterprise” to break up Ireland, or the Old Dominion, as were the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina who did not want to be dragged into secession by the southern states.

Yugoslavia was a flawed polity, and in principle there should have been no rational objection to the striving of Croats, and even Bosnian Muslims, to create their own nation-states. But equally there could have been no justification for forcing over two million Serbs west of the Drina to be incorporated into those states against their will. Yugoslavia came together in 1918 as a union of South Slav peoples, and not of states or territorial units. Its divorce, once it became inevitable, should have been effected on the same basis. This has been the key foundation of the Yugoslav conflict ever since the first shots were fired in eastern Slavonia in the summer of 1991.

The political essence of the wars of Yugoslav disintegration has been systematically hidden or distorted in the Western mainstream media, academia, and political forums, behind the portrayal of the Serbs as primitive ultranationalists who seek to conquer other peoples’ lands by violent means.⁸ The demonization of the Serbs was an exercise in social constructivism, depressingly effective in its crude simplicity. As early as the summer of 1992 the media pack equated the brutalities of the Balkans with the Ho-

⁷ See S. Trifkovic, *The Yugoslav Crisis and the United States*. Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1991.

⁸ Among a long list of notables venting their spleen, Richard Holbrooke notably called Serbs “murderous assholes” (*The New Yorker*, November 6, 1995).

locoust. Once the paradigm matured with the myth of the “Srebrenica Genocide,” and any doubters equated with holocaust deniers, the possibilities for misrepresentation were literally limitless.⁹

At the level of institutionalized corruption which passes for ‘the political process’ in Washington DC, the Yugoslav policy was the endresult of the interaction of pressure groups within the power structure: finding a new role for NATO, earning points in the Muslim world, pandering to the military-industrial complex, isolating Russia, controlling strategic routes between Europe and the Middle East. The Bosnian war transformed NATO into a tool of U.S. hegemony and the renewal of American dominance in European affairs to an extent not seen since Kennedy. As Richard Holbrooke put it, Dayton demonstrated that Europeans were not capable of resolving their own problems and that America was still the “indispensable nation.”¹⁰ He boasted, a year later, “We are reengaged in the world, and Bosnia was the test.”

Geopolitical-strategic factors undoubtedly have played some role in defining the Balkan policy on both sides of the Atlantic, but “rational” reasons are not sufficient to explain Washington’s zeal in pursuing a premeditatedly duplicitous anti-Serb policy. The clue is not in the realm of tangible strategic benefits and geopolitical assets, of transit corridors, pipelines, or military bases such as Camp Bondsteel. It is in the desire of the Western elite class to use the Balkans as a testing ground for their emerging post-modernist project. They know that Kosovo is more than a piece of real estate, that it is to the Serbs what Alamo is to Texans or Jerusalem to Jews, that taking it away and letting its churches and monasteries be demolished is an exercise in ethnocide. They condoned the Albanian barbarity because they saw the demolition of a small nation steeped in tradition of heroism and martyrdom – the Kosovo saga embodies it perfectly – as a step in the direction of the post-national world based on propositional abstractions rather than collective memories.

The process of achieving this goal has two ideological forms. The form preferred by the Democratic Party in the United States and by the European Union is multilateralist, didactic and therapeutic. The form favored by those who controlled the U.S. foreign policy under President George W. Bush was unilateralist and millenarian.

The former – the liberal hawks – claim to be motivated by the disinterested desire to bring peace, human rights, and democracy to the benighted multitudes of the world. They are commonly known as *liberals* but have more in common with Antonio Gramsci than with J.S. Mill or Karl Popper.

⁹ See Edward S. Herman and Phillip Corwin (Editors), *The Srebrenica Massacre: Evidence, Context, Politics*. www.srebrenica-report.com/Srebrenica_Book.pdf

¹⁰ Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War*, New York: Modern Library, 1999.

They are not at all opposed to military interventions – the advocacy of the Libyan war by Hillary Clinton, Susan Rice and Samantha Power is a recent example – but prefer to have them conducted under a multilateral cloak and ostensibly in pursuit of ideals common to all men. In the 2004 election campaign John Kerry thus insisted that “our ideals and interests in this globalized world are consistent with the peace, prosperity, and self-determination of every country on earth.”¹¹ For as long as there is a single country anywhere in the world that does not enjoy peace, prosperity and self-determination, the adherents of this view may feel justified to launch Wars for Human Rights. The intervening country’s security interests, as defined in any traditionally intelligible sense, are discarded in favor of a regime of global social work.

The latter are commonly known as *neoconservatives* but there is nothing even remotely “conservative” in their world view. At times they also use universalist rhetoric, notably when they tried to justify their Iraqi adventure by the alleged need to expand democracy in the Middle East. They assert the right of the United States to act in pursuit of its security interests, provided that *they* define those interests, in disregard of the desires and misgivings of other players in the international system. They revel in what two of their leading theorists, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, termed “benevolent global hegemony.”¹²

The liberal hawks are the neoconservatives’ mirror image, with former assistant secretary of state Strobe Talbott declaring that the United States won’t exist “in its current form” in the 21st century because the concept of nationhood itself will have been rendered obsolete. This was an exultant prophecy, not an impartial analyst’s assessment. It came from the man who had defined and executed the Clinton Administration’s foreign policy since its first day. Back in 1992 Talbott had stated that in 21 century “nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single, global authority and that all countries are basically social arrangements, accommodations to changing circumstances. No matter how permanent and even sacred they may seem at any one time, in fact they are all artificial and temporary.”

Both camps claim that everyone around the world wants what America wants. Both are ready to impose their gifts by force, if it turns out that the recipients of their largesse are reluctant to accept it. The liberals will pretend to use that force because they no longer have any choice; the neoconservatives will use it joyfully when they hope to win quickly and cheaply. In real life, however, both are acting in disregard of their stated principles.

¹¹ John Kerry: *A Call to Service*. Penguin 2004.

¹² William Kristol and Robert Kagan: “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy.” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1996

In 1979 Jimmy Carter presided over the first American administration in history to proclaim that “human rights” are its guiding light and main objective. It decided to support hardcore Islamists in the insurgency against the Soviets in Afghanistan. As we now know that decision was a strategic mistake of the highest order: it prompted the release of the Jihadist genie from a bottle that had remained sealed for almost three centuries after the siege of Vienna. Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski’s “brilliant idea” – as he called the Afghan covert action almost two decades after the event – violated Carter’s stated abhorrence of *Realpolitik* and his reverence for human rights. Hundreds of millions, and eventually billions of dollars were poured into the coffers and arsenals of people who openly stated their intention to rebuild an earlymedieval theocracy in Afghanistan in which the women would remain downtrodden, the *infidels* killed or enslaved, the remaining non-Islamic works of art wantonly destroyed, and the Khalifate’s shining model offered to the rest of the Muslim world.

The fruits went beyond the jihadists’ wildest dreams. Brzezinski will go down in history as the man who did for Bin Laden what the Kaiser did for Lenin by providing him with that sealed train from Switzerland to the Baltic, back in 1917. Two “liberal” interventions on the side of the Balkan Muslims, in Bosnia and Kosovo, ensued in the 1990s.¹³ The most tangible result of promoting “common ideals and interests in this globalized world” by NATO bombs is the existence of a vibrant, hard-core jihadist base in the heart of Europe that has had a connection, one way or another, with every major terrorist attack in the past decade.¹⁴ Even 9/11 itself had a Bosnian Connection: Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, who planned the 9/11 attacks, was a seasoned veteran of the Bosnian jihad, as were two of the hijackers.¹⁵

After the demise of communism and fascism, the two dominant strains of political thought in Washington, liberals and neoconservatives, have gelled into the third heir of what Spengler presciently described, a century ago, as *the Decline of the West*. They share with communism and fascism the same moral relativism. Their dictum that humans could be transformed by the political process was not defeated in the Berlin bunker in 1945 or on the Berlin wall in 1989. To them the nation is a transient, virtualreality entity. Owing allegiance to any one of them is irrational and attaching one’s personal loyalty to it – let alone risking one’s life for its sake – is absurd.

¹³ “[T]he establishment of an independent Islamic territory including Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania... is one of the most prominent achievements of Islam since the siege of Vienna in 1683. Islamic penetration into Europe through the Balkans is one of the main achievements of Islam in the twentieth century.” Shaul Shay, *Islamic Terror and the Balkans*. Transaction Publishers, 2008.

¹⁴ John R. Schindler, *Unholy Terror: Bosnia, Al-Qa’ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad*. Zenith Press, 2007.

¹⁵ As pointed out by John Schindler in *World Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 35, September 27, 2007.

Atavistic sentiments may have to be invoked as communication tools for the 19-year-old boys from the prairies who provide the cannon fodder for any given intervention, but they do not affect the elite in charge of making decisions.

Like Marx's proletariat, a member of the contemporary transnational elite knows no loyalty to a concrete country. He could serve any one of them if they can be turned into the tool of his Will to Power. In 1792 it could have been France, in 1917 Russia. Today the United States is the host-organism of choice for two reasons. It is immensely powerful, and its political system is just as immensely susceptible to the penetration by what is an anti-traditionalist world outlook and political agenda. By treating America as an ideological concept (a “proposition nation”) they are imposing a birds-eye view of world affairs that makes the discussion of their policy possible only within their peculiar terms of reference. The bombing of Serbian buses, hospitals, TV stations and trains thus was a “humanitarian intervention.” The destruction of the traditional concept of sovereignty and the rule of law is a triumph of “the international community.”¹⁶

This is the cue to the treatment of the Serbs by the Western political and media decision-makers over the past two decades. Old legal systems for the protection of national liberties have been subverted into vehicles for their destruction. On the ruins of real nations, the rhetoric of “universal human rights” is imposed as the new basis for law and morality. The Serbs were merely a litmus test. The lodestar is multi-cultural democracy, irrespective of the wishes of the citizens of the particular territory involved – unless it is Serbs who wish to maintain a multi-ethnic state, in which case secession is the West's preferred policy.

The result is a global problem that is a synthesis of all others. The globalist-interventionist mindset is symptomatic of the looming end of Western culture as such. The decision-makers' environment, the real world outside the Empire's control centers, is symbolic rather than substantial. The “natural” is squeezed out of their milieu, with nature merely providing the building blocks for the virtual. Most relations between humans cease to be regulated by pre- and extra-rational means – by feelings, customs, faith, love, hate, opposition of good and evil, sin and punishment, the fine and the ugly. What the ruling elite would call ‘ideology’ and what used to be known as spirituality, is replaced by ‘content,’ by *information*. Wealth, success and health are the only ‘values.’ Emotional experiences and personal opinions are regarded as waste that distracts from the precise execution of instructions. Culture is a relic, too; if it is not already neutered and relegated to ‘heritage’, it is automatically designated ‘traditional.’ The Western elite class seeks a peculiar ‘end of history’ in the transformation of society

¹⁶ See Bill Clinton's own apologia for the Kosovo intervention, “A Just and Necessary War,” published in the May 23, 1999, edition of *The New York Times*.

into a socio-technological system regulated by “the market.” If realized, this would signify the end of mankind’s cultural history and a step to the end of mankind in general.

Why not, comes the reply from those who are eagerly anticipating the Post-Human Era, such as Professor Jon Huer of Maryland University at College Park. He gloats in the prospect of all aspects of social life being streamlined and rationalized, and all shades of human relations and nuances simplified into manageable routines and procedures. In this paradigm, according to Huer, “Americans are the future prototype humans, and Serbs an atavistic holdover from a bygone era,” and “it would behoove the Serbs to recognize this inevitable development of history and join up with what will be, not what was or should be.”¹⁷

This is why the Western policy towards the Serbs not just about the Serbs. The Balkans – humanitarian bombings, instant “genocides,” “rape camps” and all – was an exercise in counter-realism as the essence of post-modernism. Jamie Shea and Jamie Rubin simply followed their peers in literary genres with their exercises in unraveling meanings. Theirs is ‘culture’ of the artificial world, of post-historical post-humans. They are beyond conscience. Their reversibility of the signifier and the signified, aggressor and victim, reflects the culture of man that has lost his bond with nature, immersed in artificial reality and permeated with it from within.

The result is a malaise at the very core of Western foreign-policymaking, and notably on both sides of the dominant duopoly in Washington. At its poles there may be differences over tactics and means, but the alleged necessity of America’s continued, open-ended “engagement” in faraway lands is never questioned. The impulse is neurotic; its justification, Gnostic and circular. It reflects the collective loss of nerve, faith, and identity of a diseased society, producing a self-destructive malaise that is literally unprecedented in history.

The intoxication is the arrogant belief that our reason and our science and our technology can resolve all the dilemmas and challenges of our existence, and, in particular, that enlightened abstractions—democracy, human rights, free markets—can be spread across the world and are capable of transforming it in a way that would ultimately turn little Muhammads into Joes (which is what they all want, we are assured, or would choose only if they could think clearly). The vision is utopian. It is rooted in the legacy of the Enlightenment and the rejection of any power independent of “the market” and the ostensible will of the multitude. It holds that Man is naturally good and improvable, that human conflict is unnatural and vanquishable, that chaos and bloodshed around the world can be eliminated. The desire to make the world as one wants it to be, rather than to deal with the world as it is, produces policies that are invariably flawed and occasionally fatal.

¹⁷ Srdja Trifkovic, ‘Post-Human America.’ *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, March 2000.

It is incorrect to describe Wilsonianism and neoconservatism as two “schools” of foreign policy. They are, rather, two sects of the same Western heresy. Their shared denominational genes are recognizable not in what they seek but in what they reject: polities based on national and cultural commonalities; durable elites and constitutions; and independent economies. Both view all permanent values and institutions with unrestrained hostility. Both exalt state power and reject political tradition based on the desirability of limited government at home and nonintervention in foreign affairs. Both claim to favor the “market” but advocate a kind of state capitalism managed by the transnational apparatus of global financial and regulatory institutions. Their shared core belief—that society should be managed by the state in both its political and its economic life—is equally at odds with the tenets of the liberal left and those of the traditional right.

The power of the Wilsonian-neoconservative duopoly is unlikely to be broken incrementally by the Washingtonian elite gradually coming to its senses. It will indeed be broken, but the price will be paid in Middle American blood and treasure. In spite of all other unresolved domestic and foreign issues, at a time when the U.S. power and authority are challenged around the world, key players in President Obama’s team still look upon the Balkans as the last geopolitically significant area where they can assert their “credibility” by postulating a maximalist set of objectives as the only outcome acceptable to the United States, and duly insisting on their fulfillment. We have already seen this pattern with Kosovo, and now we see an attempt to stage its replay in Bosnia under the ongoing demand for constitutional reform, i.e. centralization.¹⁸

The current clamoring for unitarization raises an old question that remains unanswered by the Bosnifiers: If the old Yugoslavia was untenable and eventually collapsed under the weight of the supposedly insurmountable differences among its constituent nations, how can Bosnia—the Yugoslav microcosm *par excellence*—develop and sustain the dynamics of a viable polity?

As for the charges that the Republika Srpska is founded on war crimes, we need not hypothesize a pre-war “joint criminal enterprise” to ethnically cleanse and murder, to explain the events of 1992-1995. The crimes that followed were not the result of *anyone’s* nationalist project. These crime, as Susan Woodward of Brookings has noted, “were the results of the wars and their particular characteristics, not the causes.” The effect of the legal

¹⁸ “For half a decade now, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been sliding backwards,” US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and British Foreign Secretary William Hague wrote in a piece carried by the main Bosnian papers on June 7, 2011, and singled out the Serbs as culprits: “In the Republika Srpska entity, harsh nationalist rhetoric and actions challenging the Dayton framework risk dragging Bosnia-Herzegovina back towards the past – just at the moment its neighbors start moving towards a European future.” Clinton and Hague called on the powers-that-be in Sarajevo to apply “all of the levers available to achieve progress” in centralizing Bosnia.

intervention of the “international community” with its act of recognition was that a Yugoslav loyalty was made to look like a conspiratorial disloyalty to “Bosnia”—largely in the eyes of people who supposed *ex hypothesi* that if there is a “Bosnia” there must be a nation of “Bosnians.” The assumption was absurd and its consequences tragic.

The continuing automatic-pilot policy directed against the Serbs – as manifested in the ongoing demands for Bosnia’s centralization and for Serbia’s acceptance of an independent Kosovo – is detrimental to any conceivable American interests. This is taking place without any serious debate in Washington on the ends and uses of American power, in the Balkans or anywhere else. Obama’s and Bush’s rhetoric differ, but they are one regime, identical in substance and consequence. Its leading lights will go on disputing the validity of the emerging balance-of-power system because they reject the legitimacy of any power in the world other than that of the United States, controlled and exercised by themselves.

The quest for hegemony leads to a counter-coalition which defeats it. The proponents of American exceptionalism nevertheless scoff at history’s warnings provided by Napoleon’s defeat in 1815, the Kaiser’s in 1918, or Hitler’s in 1945, as inapplicable in the post-history that they seek to construct. They confront the argument that no vital American interest worthy of risking a major war is involved in Russia’s or China’s near-abroad with the claim that the whole world is America’s near-abroad. Indeed, the demand for rekindling the Bosnian crisis after 16 years of peace comes at a particularly dangerous period in world affairs: the return of asymmetrical multipolarity. Following a brief period of post-1991 full-spectrum dominance, for the first time since the Cold War Washington is facing active resistance from one or more major powers.

More important than the anatomy of the South Ossetian crisis in August 2008, or the Taiwanese crisis five or ten years from now, is the emerging powers’ refusal to accept the validity of Washington’s ideological assumptions and the legitimacy of its associated geopolitical claims. At the same time, the key “liberal hawks” in the Obama Administration remain anchored in Madeleine Albright’s hubris: “If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future.”¹⁹

The old premises of an imperial presidency – which in world affairs translates into the quest for dominance and justification for interventionism – remain unchallenged. American meddling in the Balkans has been paradigmatic of the problem. It remains unaffected by the ongoing financial crisis, just as Moscow’s late-Cold War expansionism was enhanced, rather than curtailed, by the evident shortcomings of the Soviet centrally planned economy.

What the American government and its European clients have been doing and still are doing to the Serbs is worse than a crime. It is a mistake.

¹⁹ NBC-TV *The Today Show*, February 19, 1998.