

KOSOVO

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THOMAS P. H. DUNLOP Political Counselor Belgrade, Yugoslavia (1978-1982)

Mr. Dunlop was born in Washington, D.C. and raised in North Carolina. He was educated at Yale University and the University of Berlin. After serving in the US Air Force, he entered the Foreign Service in 1960. His foreign assignments took him to Saigon and Seoul in the Far East and to Belgrade and Zagreb in Eastern Europe. In Washington, he also dealt primarily with matters concerning Romania and Korea. Mr. Dunlop was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: I've heard this as pertaining to the Middle East, with the scorpion and the tortoise crossing the Nile River.

Harry, obviously, we're looking at the Yugoslav situation from the perspective of 1996. You were the Political Counselor in the Embassy in Belgrade, 1978-1982. Were you able to travel out of Belgrade and sound out the ethnic groups that made up Yugoslavia at that time?

DUNLOP: Yes. I think that collectively the Embassy did that. We had a lot more access as Tito's power waned during his last six months of life. One of the things that we were looking for were security crackdowns. It was reported by some European foreign correspondents that it was inevitable that the Yugoslav Government would become increasingly nervous as the Old Man's death approached. They speculated that the Yugoslav Government would start cracking down in various ways. There would be arrests of people who were critical of the government. There would be harassment of people aimed at limiting contact with foreigners. However, that did not happen.

We had a lot of access. Perhaps I should mention here one of the things I should have said earlier, when you asked how things were different in 1978, compared to the early 1970's. I said that some of the atmosphere of tension I had experienced in Zagreb some six years before had disappeared. Generally speaking, access to people was easier, and the press was able to say more about real events, in realistic terms, than it was before. There was less of this patina of "This is the best of all possible socialist worlds" which had previously seemed to cover everything. You had to scrape that away to get down to what was going on in the way of issues and confrontations in the country. It was easier to report and to get out into the country.

I had a couple of younger officers in the Political Section in Belgrade whom I regarded as brilliant and still do. They were really doing remarkable things, such as establishing contact with people at the university level, for example, in student committees and so forth. We had never been able to establish contact with such people before. Even though these people might have wanted to talk to us, they wouldn't have done so. The police would have made it uncomfortable for them if they had dared to talk to us.

For example, in the period shortly after Tito's death [in May, 1980], I will mention something which still has its implications for the present. In the spring of 1981, following Tito's death, there was a surge of the recurrent political tensions in Kosovo. I say "resurgence" of tensions because this had periodically happened over the years. There had been such a resurgence in 1968, just before I returned to Yugoslavia. There certainly had been a lot of difficulty in imposing Communist Party rule in Kosovo during the period 1945-1948. Here we were in 1981. There were student strikes and obviously a factional struggle going on within the Communist Party of Kosovo. To remind those who listen to or read these comments, the Kosovo is that portion of southern Yugoslavia very largely inhabited by Albanians. Kosovo is also the heart of the old, medieval Serbian state. It's the place where four or five of the great Serbian Orthodox monasteries are located which the Serbs look at with great reverence and awe. These monasteries are identified with the Serbs and give them a sense of national identity. The monasteries are, indeed, marvelous to see. Kosovo is where the Serbs place the mythological beginning of their historic, modern struggle against the Turks, who beat them at the Battle of Kosovo. It is in a fashion the Serbs "Jerusalem."

The population profile in Kosovo at that time [1981] was about 75 percent Albanian and maybe 25 percent Serb. It is now [1996] over 90 percent Albanian. There was then a resurgence of political instability in Kosovo, generated by Albanians wanting more say over what the government does and the emergence of friction with the Serbs over that. There was rioting at the

university, which spread into the streets. Tanks were sent down there. There were rumors of massacres and large numbers of people killed.

The Embassy in Belgrade was very much interested in this, and we sent a couple of our officers down there. They actually observed some of this violence and were able to report on it. Other embassies did the same. The Italian Embassy sent some people down to Kosovo. The Greek Embassy was always interested in what was going on in Kosovo. Then the Protocol people in the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry called us up and told us that Kosovo was "closed" to visitors and that we couldn't go down there. Correspondents were being told that they couldn't go there.

What did the people of Kosovo do? They came up to Belgrade to see the press and came to our Embassy to see us. These were the same people that we would have been talking to, had we gone down there. They were able to come up to Belgrade. Police controls were not in place to prevent that, so we had access to them. Kosovo was the place where the most friction existed during the last two years of my tour in Belgrade [1978-1982]. The Yugoslav Government actually sent front line troops into Kosovo. They didn't want to do this. They wanted to use their militia and their riot police. However, they didn't have enough of them, so they shipped front line troops down to Kosovo in large numbers. They found that they had to put a tank battalion or two in the streets of Pristina [capital of the Republic of Kosovo]. There were some pretty horrendous pictures taken by civilians with video cameras which were available then. There is nothing quite so impressive as a tank, slithering from side to side down a street that's narrow enough and has parked cars on both sides of it. It's kind of a "dodge 'em cars" exercise, with high stakes.

We knew pretty well what was going on down there. We knew that the Serbian response, or the Yugoslav Government response, was as it almost always has been with the Albanians, to give minimal lip service to negotiations and then hit them just as hard as they could along the bridge of the nose, as it were, with the largest piece of lumber, so to speak, that they could find handy. If necessary, hit them again. That's what they did in 1981.

As far as Croatia and Slovenia were concerned, the Consulate in Zagreb was directly responsible for reporting out of there. I traveled up there. I remember a couple of conversations I had in Slovenia, which confirmed what was so evidently going to be the case or was moving in that direction. In most instances the Slovenians had already made their own little world up there. They were the ones paying lip service to Belgrade. They kept their eyes fixed very firmly and pragmatically on what was good for Slovenia. To the degree that they had to pay money into the Yugoslav Treasury which went for developing the less developed parts of the country, they would do it as long as it was necessary to keep a large group of Slovenians employed in the federal government in Belgrade. They would do that, but those Slovenians would get on a train every Friday and go back to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. This was called "The White Train." By the time it got to Ljubljana they were a rather drunk group of Slovenians. [Laughter]

The Slovenes started an airline, in competition with "JAT," Yugoslav Air Transport, the national airline. JAT was then kind of a reserve wing of the Air Transport Command of the Yugoslav Air Force. Its head was an active duty Yugoslav general. Its pilots were all qualified officers in the Air Force reserve. There is no reason why that shouldn't have been the case, actually, but you would think that that would make JAT the "government" airline, by God, and the Slovenes

wouldn't have a prayer of being able to compete with it. But they did! I forget the name of the Slovenian airline, but they got it up and running. This was before all of the turmoil of the late 1980's. The Slovenes went out, leased some airplanes, and hired pilots. Of course, JAT didn't like it, but in the post-Tito era it wasn't able to stop it.

In late 1980, just about at the mid point of my last tour in Belgrade, David Anderson replaced Larry Eagleburger as Ambassador to Yugoslavia. As you will recall, Stu, David was in the same Serbo-Croatian language class as Eagleburger, you, and I. He was an excellent officer who had had a lot of experience serving in Germany. He was a very good man to serve under. I was very happy to see him come in. Eagleburger went back to Washington to be Assistant Secretary for European Affairs and then Under Secretary for Political Affairs. After that, he retired from the Foreign Service and went off to make money with former Secretary Henry Kissinger's consultancy firm in New York.

Q: This is a reference to what the Germans did to the Jews, gypsies, and others during World War II, although they generally used large, "gas ovens" rather than "gas trucks."

DUNLOP: History there means the period between the 13th or 14th century and the 20th century. It has been marked by hostilities and made worse by Turkish domination and by Serbian stupidity and even brutality. It is a terribly bad situation, with absolutely no imagination being used by the Serbs to deal with it. The Serbs have no policy except to occupy the country with militia [police] and armed force. They hope that they can repress any rebellion.

For the last three or four years the Albanian political leadership in Kosovo has decided to challenge the Serbs, with a non-violent policy of passive resistance, although there is an underlying current of violence. Serbs and Albanians are always knifing each other and shooting each other up. At the "macro" level, the Albanians follow a policy of "passive resistance" against a kind of hopelessly ineffective repression by the Serbs. When the Serbs threw the OSCE Mission out of Kosovo, the Albanian ethnic community living there was very upset. They felt that the world was again "abandoning" Kosovo. They kept using this term, "abandoning." They use the analogy: "You know, we've never been on anybody's radar scope. Nobody was paying any attention to us until you people came, and now you're leaving." Well, I felt the same way about it. That statement was very true. My prediction then was that, without putting it in any particular time frame, because that would be ridiculous until the Serbs change, demographic and other pressures on the Albanians will be heavy. With the "new" Albania just across the border to the West, however disinterested it may be now in challenging the Serbs over Kosovo, that will all change some day. As I see it, the only way that it can change now is for the lid to blow off and a bloodcurdling, Ruanda-like pogrom to occur.

After we were thrown out of Kosovo, well, was it polite or impolite? I didn't find the Serbs to be polite at any time. Anyway, before we were expelled from Kosovo by fiat, I spent a day or two in Belgrade. I went over to the American Embassy. By that time the Ambassador had left, and the Embassy was in the charge of a very good DCM and a very hard-working bunch of people. The Political Section of the Embassy was trying to keep track of all of the political assistance which

the Serbs in Serbia were trying to give to the Serbs in Bosnia The evidence was overwhelming that the core of the so-called Bosnian Serb Army was simply the Serbian Army fighting in Bosnia. In the Political Section they were all "hawks." They welcomed a newcomer like me, in this case a retired Foreign Service Officer to whom they could talk. They wanted air strikes and much greater American intervention in Bosnia.

I was neither a hawk nor a dove. Well, I guess that I was a dove. I didn't think that air strikes on Bosnia would do much good. However, we had some pleasant discussions at the Embassy, and I left them poring over their maps and looking at the latest places where they'd put skulls and crossbones, to designate another massacre. It was really grim.

Q: Harry, what about living in Prizren and how did you get out? If I recall it correctly, it was a rather nice town. Market day was a great occasion. People would come in from the countryside. The women would wear those rather odd outfits which made them look pregnant.

DUNLOP: Well, Prizren is virtually a 100 percent ethnic Albanian town. Not all of the towns in Kosovo are so heavily Albanian. It's right up against the Shar Mountains, which are a dramatic range with the highest peak in Yugoslavia. It was formerly named Mount Tito and has not yet been renamed, as far as I know. [Laughter] Maybe it has been renamed. Nobody knew its new name if it has been renamed. The town had 27 mosques, very Muslim in character, in that peculiarly Albanian fashion. I don't know anybody who's been in the Middle East, but I understand that anyone who has been there would say that these people are Muslims, but they have "peculiar" customs. The men wear a little, white skull cap with great pride. It looks like a Jewish-type "Yarmulke," although it's larger. This cap would fit right on top of their black, curly locks. How it stays on I don't know.

RUDOLF V. PERINA
Chief of Mission
Belgrade, Yugoslavia (1993-1996)

Ambassador Perina was born in Czechoslovakia when that country was under communist control. He escaped with his family to Morocco, then Switzerland and finally the United States. The ambassador was educated at the University of Chicago and Columbia University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1974, Mr. Perina specialized in Military-Political Affairs at posts abroad, including Moscow, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna and Belgrade. In Washington he served on the National Security Council, specializing in Soviet issues. From 1998 to 2001 Mr. Perino was US Ambassador to Moldova. Ambassador Perina was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006

Q: So what was happening with Kosovo in your time?

PERINA: Kosovo was a whole other story. The entire diplomatic corps in Belgrade talked a lot about Kosovo but the U.S. took it most seriously. We were always worried about Kosovo. The

conventional wisdom was that it would blow up someday, but no one knew when. The fact that it had not blown up, however, invariably led to it being relegated to the back burner. People were just too focused on Bosnia, where an actual war was going on, to focus on someplace where a potential war might take place. But we still did take it more seriously than other countries, in part also because of the interest in the U.S. Congress. The Albanian lobby in the U.S. was very effective. Probably only the Israeli and Armenian lobbies were better.

I do not mean to imply that the Kosovo problem was somehow an artificial one, however. It was a very real problem, and very bad things were happening in Kosovo. The Serb approach was basically a colonial one. The Kosovar Albanians were treated brutally. They saw the U.S. as their major protector and often showed me photographs of the abuse: terrible pictures of people beaten, women raped, and so on. They were very good in documenting all of this and taking their case to the international community. On the other hand, in fairness one must say that many Serbs in Kosovo were also beaten up by Albanians when opportunities presented themselves for this. The gulf and the hatred between Serbs and Albanians were enormous.

I haven't started talking about the Holbrooke visits yet but one of the things that I tried to do with Holbrooke was to get him more interested in Kosovo. I met a number of times with Ibrahim Rugova, the Kosovar Albanian leader who was elected President in elections that the Serbs did not recognize. He was a very moderate, reasonable and impressive person who did much to try to avoid an explosion in Kosovo because he knew, rightly, that the Albanians would pay an enormous price for it. He promoted peaceful resistance to Serbia and did so very effectively. Rugova almost never came to Belgrade but he told me that he would be willing to come if he had an opportunity to meet Holbrooke. I tried to interest Holbrooke in this but he turned it down. His position, both in Serbia and later during the Dayton talks, was that one had to resolve Bosnia first, that if the two issues became intertwined they would create a Gordian knot much more difficult to untangle. So he wanted to stay completely away from the Kosovo issues until Bosnia was resolved. He felt if he ever met with Rugova, even once, he would not be able to get away from it.

Q: I think he had a point there. They were two quite different issues.

PERINA: I think he was right but it was hard explaining this to the Albanians, which became my job both in Belgrade and during the Dayton talks. While we were in Dayton, there was a demonstration outside the base of several hundred Albanian-Americans who came from all over the country to ask that Kosovo be put on the Dayton agenda. It was the only demonstration during the Dayton talks, and I was assigned to go out and meet with the leaders. They were a very peaceful and reasonable group, headed by an Albanian-American physician from Texas. I told them very honestly that Kosovo was not on the table in Dayton because this was a meeting about the war in Bosnia but I assured them that the U.S. had not forgotten Kosovo and would deal with the issue at the right time. They were disappointed, of course, but seemed to accept the argument.

It was true that we had not forgotten the issue but there was just too much on the Yugoslav agenda at the time. Back in Belgrade, however, I raised Kosovo regularly in my meetings with Milosevic. I tried to convince him that Belgrade's policy would lead to another explosion and

violent conflict in the region if it remained unchanged. His standard response was that we were taken in by Kosovar Albanian propaganda, that most Albanians in Kosovo were quite happy, and that only a few troublemakers were fomenting discontent. I am not certain if he really believed this and was so totally misinformed about the situation in Kosovo, or if he just believed that he could keep a lid on the problem indefinitely. I suspect it was a combination of both.

Q: But it was also a nationalistic issue throughout Serb society.

PERINA: Absolutely. Even the pro-Western, pro-democracy Serbs we knew had very little sympathy for the Kosovar Albanians. There were a few exceptions to this but they were very rare. The gulf even between moderate and reasonable Serbs and Albanians was enormous. To me it was clear that the situation was untenable and would lead to a crisis at some point. What we tried to do in the interim was to urge both sides toward moderation and non-violence. In the case of the Albanians, we had Embassy officers specifically assigned to visit Kosovo on a weekly basis to maintain contact with the Albanians and show them that their plight had not been forgotten by the United States. These officers stayed in local hotels and spent a lot of time going back and forth. After the Holbrooke visits to Belgrade started and Milosevic was trying to demonstrate what a reasonable person he was, I had the idea of asking him whether the Embassy could open a permanent office in Pristina, the Kosovo capital, as a permanent base for our visits. This was actually a big request since everyone knew the sensitivity of Kosovo, and we still lacked formal diplomatic relations for even an Embassy, much less an Embassy branch office. But I persuaded Holbrooke to ask the question, which was one of the few times he agreed to engage on Kosovo. Milosevic was caught off guard and responded in a cavalier way “ Sure. If you want to do this, why not.” I think he regretted this answer the minute he gave it, and the Foreign Ministry certainly regretted it when it came to working out the details. But we did open an office in Pristina, and I think it was one of the more significant accomplishments of my tour. The Kosovar Albanians were so delighted that they actually found a building for us to use free of charge. They saw it as a big step forward in getting international recognition for the entire Kosovo problem. It was also seen as a victory for Rugova and his non-violent policies. It helped defuse the tension, at least for a while.

Q: We have people who were brought out of retirement to go to Kosovo. I recently interviewed one of them.

PERINA: During my time, we sent people from the Embassy but alternated them. One of our political officers, Liz Bonkowski, spent a lot of time in Kosovo. The Kosovar Albanians were very anxious to have Western diplomats, particularly American diplomats, in Kosovo because they believed it inhibited the Serbs and offered the Albanians some protection. So having a permanent Embassy office down there was a big step forward. The fact is the situation in Kosovo was extremely tense. I always believed that Kosovo would prove more difficult to resolve than Bosnia. In Bosnia, the Serbs, Muslims and Croats basically spoke the same language, intermarried, and could often not be distinguished except by their last names. And still they slaughtered one another. In Kosovo, the gulf was much wider. The Kosovar Albanians had created their own parallel society that excluded everything Serb. They boycotted Serb schools and set up their own school system so that a whole generation of Albanians already existed that

could not speak or even understand Serbian. It was clear that the situation was untenable and a disaster was coming.

Q: How were the Europeans dealing with this situation?

PERINA: Well, everyone would wring their hands when Kosovo was mentioned, but the Europeans by and large did not know what to do. One got the impression they were secretly hoping that in fact the Serbs would keep the Albanians in line so that there would not be an explosion. Some Europeans were reminded of ethnic minority problems in their own countries and had a lot of sympathy with the Serbs. The most active European diplomat was the British Chargé, Ivar Roberts. As far as I know, he was the only other diplomat in Belgrade other than myself and the Russian Ambassador who on occasion had meetings with Milosevic. But even he underestimated the Kosovo problem. We were the most engaged Embassy on Kosovo, though even with us it was a secondary issue in comparison to Bosnia.

The real difference in approach to Kosovo between us and the Europeans was shown after the Dayton Agreement. Here I have to jump ahead a little. Basically, Milosevic made the Dayton Agreement possible. He was the key person who forced the Serb delegation to accept the agreement. Even Holbrooke recognized this. Milosevic did this because he was not a Serb nationalist but rather a self-serving opportunist. He believed that if he helped Dayton succeed, he would be seen in the world as a peacemaker and given legitimacy and respect, the sanctions on Serbia would be lifted, and his role in starting the whole Yugoslav conflict would be forgotten and forgiven. This is what he most wanted and why he helped Dayton succeed. The problem was, however, that we were committed to our promise to the Albanians that we would not forget Kosovo. So after Dayton we did not lift all of the sanctions but rather stated that an outer wall of sanctions would remain until the Kosovo issue was resolved. In effect, the economic sanctions were lifted but the political sanctions, such as non-recognition of Serbia-Montenegro, remained. Milosevic was furious when he learned that some sanctions would remain. He felt that he had been tricked, and it was the beginning of his falling out with Holbrooke.

But also—and this is where the Europeans come in—most of them did not support the U.S. on the outer wall of sanctions policy. They did not believe that Kosovo should be a reason for further sanctions on Serbia. Most of them started recognizing Serbia-Montenegro and elevating their Chargés to Ambassadors. By the time I left Belgrade, I was one of the few remaining Chargé d’Affaires. This European rush to normalize relations with Serbia and overlook the Kosovo issue was of course the biggest dread of the Kosovar Albanians. I think it was partly because of this development that the Albanians gave up hope that the international community would help them and moved toward developing the Kosovo Liberation Army, which suddenly appeared on the scene about two years later. This was when I was serving as the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Department, and it took the entire international community by surprise. Suddenly, the Kosovar Albanians had an army which they had largely secretly put together. It was an amazing feat but also reflected how bad our intelligence was on Kosovo because we were still focusing almost exclusively on Bosnia. But I think I am getting too far ahead. I am sure we will come back to Kosovo later.

Q: In the two months when you were back in Belgrade, how did the Dayton accords go over?

PERINA: Much better with most of the Serbs in Serbia than one would think. They were for the most part relieved that the war was over and that the sanctions might be lifted. I think the Bosnian Serbs were much less happy. The average Serb in Serbia was less supportive of the Bosnian Serbs than many people understand. Sure, there was a sense that Serbs have to support their own against Muslims and Croats. But there was also a real exasperation with the war and a sense that Serbia was paying the price for the likes of Karadzic and Mladic. Most Serbs wanted the war to end and considered Dayton an acceptable and fair conclusion.

Q: Were you seeing a significant exodus of bright young Serbs out of Serbia?

PERINA: Certainly during the period of the sanctions there was an enormous desire among young people to leave the country. There were no opportunities in Serbia. There was not even a functioning economy. But not that many Serbs managed to leave because it was very difficult. Countries clamped down on granting visas, and Serbia was very isolated. There were not even international flights from Belgrade. Getting out was a real challenge, even for non-Serbs.

Q: How soon were the sanctions lifted after Dayton?

PERINA: The process of lifting sanctions started right away but it took some time. Lifting economic sanctions is actually not an easy task. In the U.S., it takes a Presidential directive to both impose and lift economic sanctions. Political sanctions are easier to work with. But changes in Serbia were noticeable right away. Within a few months, the economy was remarkably normalized. What did not change was what we called the “outer wall of sanctions,” the sanctions we had decided to retain because of the Kosovo issue. These were mainly political sanctions related to recognition of Serbia-Montenegro, exchanging ambassadors and so on. They were largely symbolic, but Milosevic was furious when he realized they would not be lifted. This was the kind of political stigma he thought he had shaken at Dayton. It was the beginning of a real parting of ways between Milosevic and Holbrooke. It also marked a divergence between the U.S. and most of our European allies. The Europeans were not as concerned with Kosovo as we were and did not support the outer wall of sanctions. Most of them rushed to recognition and full normalization of diplomatic ties with Serbia. Unfortunately, this sent just the wrong message to the Kosovar Albanians.

Q: How did the Kosovar Albanians react to Dayton?

PERINA: They were of course disappointed that Dayton had done nothing to address their problems. Suddenly everyone was rejoicing that peace had returned to former Yugoslavia but Kosovo seemed to be forgotten. This was greatly damaging to Rugova’s advocacy of non-violent resistance to Serb domination. Some Albanians were saying that precisely the lack of violence in Kosovo made it possible for Europeans to forget the issue. That is why we felt it essential to maintain this outer wall of sanctions. It was a message to Milosevic but also to the Kosovar Albanians that we had not forgotten Kosovo. But it was not enough. It was in this period after Dayton that some of the Kosovar Albanians decided they had to rely more on themselves and

started building the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which about a year later took everyone by surprise when suddenly the Albanians had an army.

Q: What was the role of Albania proper in all of this?

PERINA: I can't really say definitively but I think it was not large. The Albanian Albanians were having a lot of domestic problems, both political and economic. In many ways, the Kosovar Albanians were wealthier and better off than the Albanian ones. There was also a certain rivalry between Albanian leaders in Albania and Kosovo, almost a love-hate relationship. I think all of this minimized the role that Tirana played.

Q: I must say again, as an old hand in the area, I was surprised in later news footage how good Kosovo looked compared to how I remembered it.

PERINA: There was a legacy of better times in Yugoslavia. It was also my impression that the Kosovar Albanians coped with the international sanctions better than the Serbs. The borders of Kosovo were more porous to allow imports, and the Albanians have a reputation of being more mercantile. Even Serbs would tell me during the sanctions that anything could be obtained at the Kosovo open-air market. I don't know if there is any empirical data, but many people believed that the Kosovar Albanians were better off economically under the sanctions than the Serbs. Politically, of course, it was the reverse. The Serbs were in charge, and any Albanian who raised his head was quickly beaten down.

MARC GROSSMAN
Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
Washington, DC (1997-2000)

Ambassador Marc Grossman was born in Los Angeles, California in 1951. He received his BA from the University of California, Santa Barbara and his MSc from the London School of Economics. He entered the Foreign Service in 1976. His overseas posts include Islamabad, Pakistan, Amman, Jordan, Brussels, Belgium, and Ankara, Turkey. He was Executive Secretary of the State Department (1993-1994), Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (1997-2000), Director General (2000-2001) Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs (2001-2005) and U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (2011-2012). Ambassador Grossman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy beginning in 2006 and finishing in 2014.

Q: Well then, turning to the major challenge, which was Kosovo, wasn't it?

GROSSMAN: Yes.

Q: What was the status of play when you started the job in '97?

GROSSMAN: When I started the job in '97 the major focus was still on Dayton Implementation. Kosovo was not at the top of the agenda in '97, Dayton Implementation was, and with the leadership of Bob Gelbard and then Jim Dobbins and Jim Swigert, the EUR bureau focused hard on Dayton Implementation. They did a great job and they kept at it. By '98, and of course in '99, Kosovo rises up higher and higher on the agenda. Through all of '98, there are Contact Group meetings and we were trying to get allies to support a robust policy on Kosovo. We saw it as a test of whether the Triple Crown was going to be a useful thing, because if you were going to be successful in Kosovo, there was going to be a NATO piece because you might have to fight. There was certainly going to be a US-EU piece because it was in Europe and there was certainly going to be a piece from OSCE, and you'll remember before NATO got engaged, the OSCE was the leader in Kosovo—the OSCE missions and observers and others. As we turned the corner into 1999, it was clear that when the NATO Summit was convened in April in Washington it was not just going to be about expansion and a major change to the NATO strategic concept summit, it was going to be a Kosovo summit; the new members found themselves quickly to be in an Alliance in combat.

Q: Well did you find, as I recall just watching on TV, there seemed to be innumerable meetings in France sort of ...

GROSSMAN: Rambouillet (a commune in north-central France).

Q: Could you describe sort of your, both role but impression of the players in this?

GROSSMAN: Secretary Albright, I think, sensed early on that there was going to be a conflict in Kosovo. And what we had to do was work our way through every other single conceivable alternative in order to get the allies and to get NATO to come to a similar conclusion. We used to go to Contact Group meetings month after month. They were dreadful. We wanted action in Kosovo and everybody else wanted to keep talking.

Q: Would you explain what the situation was?

GROSSMAN: Well as I remember it, the situation was that Milošević was actively—my perspective anyway—was actively proceeding with ethnic cleansing verging on genocide against Kosovar Albanians.

Q: I've interviewed (William G.) Bill Walker, who was the OSCE observer at the time, who called it genocide.

GROSSMAN: Secretary Albright got it right when she said, “We are not going to allow people to be put in railway cars in Europe for a second time in the 20th century.” That crystallized it for me. This was about Milošević and it was about genocide and it was about Kosovars and it was about the future of that part of Europe.

And then we went to Rambouillet. Rambouillet was a castle-like place outside of Paris, a half-hour, 40-minute, drive. There had been a G-7 meeting there once, I believe. We got to Rambouillet and the Serbs were there, and the Kosovars were there, and the Contact Group was

there. It was a surreal experience in the sense that we were in this beautiful place and the French had catered it beautifully and we went to session after session where we just couldn't break through to any settlement. They were the worst two weeks of my diplomatic life until 9/11; there were worse weeks in terms of wars and killings and assassinations, but in terms of pure diplomatic frustration, Rambouillet tops the list.

Q: Was it on both sides; the Kosovars and the Serb side?

GROSSMAN: Both. They were both pursuing the interests as they saw them. The Kosovars were, I thought, more flexible than the Serbs.

The structure of the negotiations worried me. There were too many people, too many groups, and too few clear objectives. I was probably wrong about this because I misjudged the politics, but after a day or so at Rambouillet, I advised Secretary Albright to leave and only return if there was likely to be an agreement. I said it was better if I took the blame for failure rather than her.

But she had a different vision and her vision was that we had to do everything we could and be seen to do everything we could so that if Rambouillet was a failure then there were no further excuses against military activity. And so we worked at trying to bring Serb and Kosovars to some agreement. I remember in the last couple of days at Rambouillet there was a document, but I can't remember the details and it was just an immensely frustrating two weeks. And it failed. I can remember flying home on the airplane from Paris and we landed at Andrews and Jim Dobbins and I had decided that as we landed at Andrews, he would take over the day-to-day running of Kosovo because I was trying to organize the NATO summit and do a million other things. I can remember landing at Andrews and Jim had been sleeping on the floor of the aircraft we said, "Here we go, this is going to turn into a war so now we have to do our best in the circumstances." And that's what we did.

Q: What was your impression of the other representatives at the Rambouillet meeting? Were they in a way willing to keep talking?

GROSSMAN: I think they were willing to keep talking. But after Rambouillet, there were then one or two more meetings of the Contact Group and the one that really sticks in my mind was a session at Heathrow Airport in a VIP lounge and it was where things finally got sorted out. Dick Holbrooke came up from Serbia and Kosovo, where he'd been trying to have one last talk with Milošević, and the agreement reached at Heathrow was that we had to just go ahead and fight. The Russians were part of this Contact Group. The arrangement was that it would go to the Security Council and the Security Council would say, "Go ahead and act militarily," but if the Security Council couldn't agree because the Russians in the end said no, then we would go to NATO and do this job. For me there was both a theoretical and a practical victory here. The theoretical victory was we had worked to make sure that at the NATO summit in '99 we prevailed against those NATO allies who were arguing for language in the Strategic Concept that NATO could never act unless there was a Security Council resolution authorizing its action. We said, "No way." In the end, the phrase in the Strategic Concept that was agreed upon was that a UN Security Council resolution authorizing NATO action was "desirable but not necessary." Everybody at the time thought it was some strange theoretical or theological argument, but here

we were now faced with it and we never did get a Security Council resolution on Kosovo and NATO acted anyway. The phrase “desirable but not necessary” turned out to be a very important protection for the United States.

We went to Heathrow, I think it was after Rambouillet, and what I remember most was I was sick as a dog. The other memorable thing was that Secretary Albright was assigned one of those “doomsday planes,” a huge airplane, to take us home.

Q: A 747?

GROSSMAN: I don’t know, but it was fitted out to command survive a nuclear war or something. That’s what brought us home from London that night and I can remember lying in a bunk in the back. I can remember I got called the next morning to go to a Deputies Committee meeting with Tom Pickering, then the Under Secretary for Political Affairs and I said I’m not going, I can’t talk and I’m sick. I regretted not being able to support Tom, but I had come to the end of my rope.

But then, of course, there were two dozen more Deputies Committee meetings over the next weeks and anyway, we fought the war in Kosovo and I think it turned to have been the right thing to do.

Q: Well tell me, as you moved up to this, as I recall somebody who was at ... going with Holbrooke, I think, going into Belgrade and talking to Milošević, that the Serbs were sort of taunting them with 18, 18; this is, I think, the number of people who were killed in Somalia in the Black Hawk Down incident. The idea being, “Okay, you can talk big but you can’t sustain losses, therefore, you’re not going to do anything,” and so very much the feeling we’re not going to act. I would think the American military, particularly after Somalia, would be very touchy about something like this.

GROSSMAN: Well, they were properly cautious about this. And they should be cautious before sending people into combat situations. But in the end, the President made a decision to do this and this was the decision of the United States and I think the way our military and our allies executed that mission was remarkable.

Q: Well did you, your Bureau get at all involved in the bombing campaign? You know, there was a problem of an accidental bombing of the Soviet Embassy.

GROSSMAN: Chinese Embassy.

Q: Chinese Embassy, but the other part of essentially the bombing consisted of sort of knocking Serbia out of the communications business.

GROSSMAN: Right.

Q: As opposed to going after its army, which didn’t really suffer that much loss. But was that a military decision or was that one that was sort of achieved ... Were you all looking at this?

GROSSMAN: Yes. My recollection was that we were. Ultimately military operations are properly decisions for the President based on advice from the Secretary of Defense and the military leadership, but I think the idea that we were able over a period to do this job without having to use ground forces turned out to be a good one. I don't know what would have happened if we'd have faced the issue of ground forces. President Clinton took it off the table. I think that probably extended the time we had to do the bombing, but that's what he felt was necessary and yes, I can remember daily—certainly twice, three times a week—going up to the Hill and briefing what we were doing, where we were going. I can remember Tom Pickering and the Vice Chairman of the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff), General (Joseph W.) Ralston, having to go to China to explain the mistaken attack on the embassy.

When I was the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, and working again on Kosovo, I visited Belgrade on a number of occasions and it was interesting to still see the bombed out buildings; the precision of the bombing was remarkable. You could go down the street in Belgrade and everything was standing except this fourth building, which was the former defense ministry building or a former secret service building or a former police building. They were gone. I thought it was interesting that the Serbs had kept it like that and that we always were driven by it. On the other hand, compared to the devastation that could have been done through a bombing campaign, this was pretty remarkable.

Q: What was your impression of the Kosovar representation and the idea that would this be an independent state or part of Albania or somehow unwillingly join to Serbia?

GROSSMAN: The people we met clearly had as their long-term goal to be independent. At the time, our objective was to see if we could keep them connected to Serbia in some way, consistent of course with their physical safety and create some political space for them to breath, because that seemed like a good interim step. My view at the time was that, when it came for a vote, because that's what was envisioned by the failed document at Rambouillet, if democracy had been building up in Serbia and Kosovo, that would help answer the questions about what the future would look like. So, if five years from then, five years from '99, Milošević was still the boss in Belgrade and Belgrade was still an authoritarian state and still making trouble all around, then the Kosovars were going to vote for independence and we'd probably support them. If, on the other hand, five years hence or six years hence, I think it was five because in the document, there was a democratic Belgrade and a democratic Serbia and a less authoritarian Serbia and people were free then, that there was a chance then that both people in Belgrade and people in Pristina and around in Kosovo might think differently about their options. I also thought that if Serbia could be a more normal place, the prospect of EU membership might also be an incentive. So far, that's not turned out to be true, but that was my vision at the time.

VICTOR D. COMRAS
Kosovo War Sanctions Team
Washington, DC (1998)

Victor D. Comras was born in New York State in 1943. Comras graduated from Georgetown University in 1964, the University of Florida Law School in 1966, and promptly joined the Foreign Service. While in the Foreign Service, Comras served overseas in Zaire, Nigeria, South Africa, France, Canada and Macedonia. He also worked on the Law of the Sea negotiations. Comras was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Today is May 5, 2003. Maybe we should talk about the whole Kosovo thing.

COMRAS: I'd like to do that. In June 1996 I left Skopje and went to the University of Pittsburgh, where I was a diplomat in residence. But, I continued to watch the events in Yugoslavia very closely. This included the aftermath of Dayton, what was going on in Bosnia, Kosovo, and, of course, Macedonia.

Up until June 1996 I was a participant in shaping or dealing with many of these events. From 1996 until late 1998, I was just an interested observer. In late 1998 I was asked by James Dobbins to join his team and to handle the sanctions related to the Kosovo war.

You know, in the role of an observer you get to be even more critical of what's going on than when you are a participant. I watched with great interest, and a great deal of skepticism, as the post-Dayton scenario unfolded in Bosnia. I am thankful that it turned out a lot better than I would have thought. In my view the credit goes more to SFOR than to the agreements worked out in Dayton. They provided the security force necessary to secure the peace in Bosnia and to get the warring faction forces back into their barracks.

There was much less success in providing for a stable Bosnian government that would be able to reintegrate the country. Train and equip also fell largely by the wayside. The Bosnian economy remained (and remains today) in shambles. There is still no timetable for eventual IFOR troop withdrawal. But, nevertheless, due mostly to IFOR continuing force presence - and the presence of U.S. forces well beyond the one year that was initially envisaged by President Clinton - stability was maintained. But, there was a price to pay. And one price was to strengthen, rather than pull down, Milosevic in Serbia.

Milosevic used the aftermath of the Bosnian conflict to strengthen his own hand as an international player. He became an essential interlocutor with respect to events in Bosnia, he was able to serve his own purposes and interests, and he was able to strengthen his repressive regime in Serbia and in Kosovo. Following Dayton, our diplomats traveled more and more to Belgrade to talk with Milosevic about events related to Bosnia and to get his accord or support for our various projects there.

Dayton overlooked the Kosovo issue. It pushed the question of Kosovo aside. Rather, our policy was to retain what became known as an outer wall of sanctions pending resolution of several issues in Serbia, including the Kosovo question. This outer wall of sanctions didn't amount to much except for limitations on direct government and international assistance to the Milosevic regime in Serbia.

During the Bosnian war, Kosovo lost its autonomy and became the subject of a direct repressive regime from Belgrade.

The story of Milosevic and Kosovo starts in April 1987 when Yugoslav President Ivan Stambolic sent Sblo to pacify the restive Serbs in Kosovo. Tensions had risen between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo soon after Tito's death. Albanians constituted the majority living in Kosovo and Albanians dominated the local Communist Party apparatus. But the Serbs were very distrustful of the Albanians and complaining of discriminatory treatment.

Kosovo holds an important place in Serbian history and lore, and Serbia has always had a very strong emotional tie to the province, which once had a majority Serb population. That changed during and after the Second World War as a result of the settling of additional Albanian families moved into the region during the Second World War and the expulsion of Serb families. Following the war the Serbian exodus continued, heightened again by civil disturbances in the early 1980s.

The Serbians wanted to curb the domination of the province by Albanians. They believed this could be accomplished by withdrawing Kosovo's autonomy and allowing the Serbs to benefit politically from the vast Serbian majority in Serbia (of which Kosovo was a part). Milosevic was directed by Stambolic to meet with the Serbs and to ask them to show patience and cooperation vis a vis the Albanian Communist party leadership. Milosevic reportedly broke away from his meeting with ethnic Albanians to mingle with an angry crowd of Serbians in a suburb of Pristina. This was his opening to play his new "Serbian Nationalist" card.

His actions in Kosovo served as a marker in Yugoslav history that the Tito era was over and that Serbs, who constituted a majority of all Yugoslav's would now be free again to demonstrate their own nationalistic inclinations. This helped set the stage for the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars that followed.

Milosevic easily won the support of the Serbian nation in Kosovo and elsewhere, and released a penned up nationalism that stormed across Yugoslavia. This force propelled him into a firm leadership position in Serbia as he pushed aside Stambolic. It also had a direct impact on growing Slovene, Croat, Macedonian, Bosnian, and Albanian nationalism throughout the region.

With his rise to power Milosevic moved quickly to suspend Kosovo autonomy and to impose direct rule from Belgrade. The Albanians lost their control of the province. They were forced out of the government, out of the bureaucracy, out of the police, and out of the schools. They began to establish their own parallel institutions in order to provide basic order, education and daily requirements for their community. Kosovo became a police state controlled and patrolled by special Serbian police.

The deteriorating situation in Kosovo led President Bush, on December 29, 1992 to issue his famous Christmas warning. Having obtained intelligence that Milosevic was planning to use military force in Kosovo, the Bush Administration warned Milosevic through diplomatic channels that the U.S. was prepared to take unilateral military action, without European cooperation, if the Serbs sparked a new conflict in Kosovo or Macedonia. These were real

concerns. Many believed that Milosevic intended to use the JNA (the Serbian Army) to escalate and extend the Bosnian conflict into these areas. What was meant to be a private message was quickly and widely reported in the Press.

It was never clear what the Christmas warning really meant or how we intended to back it up. But President Clinton acted quickly to give the Bush warning credence. Plans were made during the final days of the Bush administration and then into the Clinton administration to place American soldiers in Yugoslavia for the first time. They were to be stationed along the Macedonia border with Serbia as part of what was then the UNPROFOR mission in Macedonia. UNPROFOR was the first experiment in deploying a preventive peacekeeping force. The initial force of 300 soldiers grew to almost 1,000.

The inclusion of American forces in UNPROFOR Macedonia was meant to send a clear message to Milosevic that if he did cross that line with Military action in Kosovo or Macedonia he might have to engage American soldiers directly. While the force contingent there was mostly symbolic, engaging even a small American force could lead the U.S. to become directly engaged in the conflict. This was something Milosevic wanted to avoid.

Milosevic seemed to heed that warning at the time. He did not make any significant military incursions into Kosovo and he did not make any at all into Macedonia. There were a couple of border issues that arose in the years that followed but nothing terribly serious. This remained the situation until the Dayton accords were concluded. But the situation began to change shortly after the Dayton Accords.

During the Bosnian war Serbia conducted a number of police actions in Kosovo and continued to institute a very repressive regime. However, he choose to tolerate the Albanian creation of parallel institutions to handle Albanian affairs in the province. It was clear, however, that Albanians had lost basic civil and human rights.

We were very concerned about this deteriorating human rights situation. And we used our efforts to place additional pressure on Milosevic to relax his repressive measures and to restore autonomy to the region. This became one of the conditions for sanctions removal. As I said earlier, some of these sanctions ostensibly were to continue after the Dayton accords as what was called the outer wall of sanctions. These included certain air traffic rights and steps restricting assistance for economic development such as international financial assistance, international loans and guarantees, other things that might help the Serbs come out of the big hole that they had dug for themselves during the sanctions period and the war. These outer sanctions were to be held in place to deal with the Kosovo issue as well as other human rights questions.

I was already greatly concerned, as were many others closely following the situation in Yugoslavia, that the U.S. had relaxed too many elements of the sanctions already at the outset of Dayton and had done so without establishing appropriate benchmarks for fulfillment of the Dayton obligations. We advised that the sanctions should be relaxed only as these various Dayton commitments were being fulfilled. But, this is not what happened. At Holbrooke's insistence, the sanctions were suspended at the beginning of Dayton and were formally lifted on the signature of the accord.

The Albanian leaders in Kosovo watched the Dayton meeting closely. They were quite upset that a return to Kosovo autonomy was not included in the Dayton agenda. They were also very upset to see that the principal economic sanctions on Serbia were being tied only to Bosnia and not to progress also on issues related to Kosovo.

Q: Did you get the feeling that there was a Dayton crew at the State Department who were living in euphoria and didn't want any complications, they had done that and wanted to move on?

COMRAS: Yes, I think that's right. I think there was a great sense of relief and accomplishment in the State Department, and within the Clinton Administration when the Dayton Accords were signed. The ending of the fighting in Bosnia was a great accomplishment. There was a determination in the State Department to move forward with implementation as quickly as possible. Discussions were focused on how to keep progress moving forward in Bosnia. Bosnia was the biggest issue on the table and had the highest priority, even when it came to dealing with related Balkan issues.

I must admit that the fulfillment of some aspects of the Dayton Accords went much smoother and faster than I had anticipated. This was particularly so with regard to the military aspects and getting the warring armies back into their barracks.

Bob Gelbard took over from Richard Holbrooke as the person responsible in the State Department for overseeing implementation of the accords. He became our representative to the Contact Group. As you know Holbrooke left the government shortly after the accords to pursue private interests.

One of the first problems Gelbard faced was the continued entrenchment of the more radical Bosnian Serb nationalist leadership including Radovan Karadzic and his military chief, General Ratko Mladic. Their supporters retained control in the Serbska Republic and continued to thwart positive movement at the Federal level in Sarajevo.

The Administration very much wanted to see progress on implementing Dayton's political provisions. This was not possible as long as the radicals retained political control. One of Bob's goals, therefore, was to promote new and more moderate leadership within the Bosnian Serb community as well as within the Croat and Muslim communities. This was essential to future political development at the federal level and for the country's future political stability. The hope was that we could get such moderate leaders to begin to work together to heal some of the wounds and move the country forward. Gelbard and his team believed that Biliana Plavcic could help us accomplish this. Mrs. Plavcic had served at one time as Karadzic's Vice President. While she was also tainted with radical Bosnian nationalism during the war (and subsequently voluntarily faced sentencing for war crimes at the Hague) she had already broken with Karadzic and stacked out a more moderate line. At that moment she seemed to be the answer - the moderate who could garner sufficient support to represent the Bosnian Serb community in the new government. But, she first needed to gain the support of the Bosnian Serb Parliament.

The road to promoting Plavcic's leadership ran directly through Belgrade, as it did for so many of the Bosnian issues. Milosevic had become the essential arbiter for any issue dealing with the Bosnian Serbs. Plavcic was clearly not one of his favorites, but for a price he would be willing to play ball. Gelbard had to work out a deal with Milosevic in order to get his help to get Plavcic elected by the Bosnian Serb Parliament as RS Acting President. In return for his support on Plavcic, the United States began to relax some of the outer-wall sanctions that were held over after Dayton. We indicated that this might include letting the Yugoslav national airline begin to fly, and we began to entertain the possibility of providing some assistance directly to Serbia.

I must say that this sent some very negative signals to the Albanian leadership in Kosovo. The Kosovo Albanians began to perceive our policy as Bosnia-centric. It appeared that we would be satisfied with Milosevic so long as the Dayton track moved forward in Bosnia. We appeared to be less and less interested in events in Kosovo and more and more eager to simply get out of the Balkans. These signals could not have come to the Albanians at a worse time.

The Albanians were also closely watching the Palestinian Intifada and the attention it drew to events in the Middle East. Some of the more radical leaders began to think that an Albanian Intifada in Kosovo might serve to draw world attention back to Kosovo.

Before the Plavcic issue there had appeared to be some progress being made on Kosovo issues due to the work of the Sant'Egido Community. This became known as the Sant'Egido process.

The Sant'Egido Community became involved in Kosovo in 1996 at the request of Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova. Rugova was very let down with the Dayton Accords, and with the absence of any language in the accords concerning Kosovo. He turned to the Sant'Egido Community to assist him in finding ways to deal with the Serbs and to obtain some kind of humanitarian accord that would ease the harsh humanitarian conditions under which the Kosovo Albanians continued to live. Sant'Egido concentrated its efforts on seeking an accord that would get the Serbian government to reopen the schools and reached an accord on September 2, 1996 to reopen the Albanian primary and secondary schools. Further work was also underway to reopen the University of Pristina. This looked like an important breakthrough and it gave rise to some optimism that maybe further progress would be achieved regarding a new post-Dayton status for Kosovo.

But it just may be that the gestures that we made to Milosevic regarding the Plavcic deal - and signs that we were willing to lift remaining sanctions in return for progress in Bosnia on implementing the Dayton Accords - sent a wrong signal to Milosevic concerning our interest in Kosovo. Milosevic may have believed that so long as he behaved in Bosnia and did our bidding and helped us in what we wanted to do in Bosnia, he would keep us happy. He may have felt that his cooperation on Bosnia would give him a free hand elsewhere. Besides, the Americans were already beginning to show increased concerns about international terrorism. Milosevic might well have thought that he could place a "terrorist" label on the increasingly radical Albanians in Kosovo who were just beginning with their own "intifada." Milosevic may have concluded that the Americans were simply less interested in Kosovo than they were in Bosnia.

This scenario is supported by the fact that Milosevic quickly changed course regarding the September 2, 1996 school agreement. The Serbs simply didn't do what they said they would do. The schools remained closed, and negotiations on reopening the University stalled. There was little or no reaction to this from anywhere in the international community. The deadlines came and passed and nothing happened. It wasn't that Milosevic disowned the agreement. He just didn't do anything to implement it.

Milosevic appeared to be at the height of his power. But, then we were all surprised by major anti-Milosevic demonstrations that broke out in Belgrade in December 1996. Milosevic had called for local elections expecting to win big. However, the results proved the contrary. Milosevic moved quickly to manipulate the outcome and to claim victory in every major city in Serbia. This farce was so evident, however, that the opposition was able to turn out millions of demonstrations in Belgrade and across Serbia. It looked as if Milosevic might be facing his final days in power. But, the demonstrations ran their course without any real international support or intervention. Milosevic conceded a few local elections and rode out the storm. He spent his next several months shaking up his own government and resecuring his hold on Serbia's political processes. Having survived this challenge, he emerged stronger than ever. He also decided to reinforce his political base by appealing again to Serbian nationalism. He again used the growing threat of Albanian rebellion in Kosovo as a new Serbian cause celebre.

Starting in October 1997 the Albanians began to demonstrate against Milosevic's failure to implement the school agreement. Their anger rose with each demonstration. "We had an agreement, they chanted, but nothing's happened." Albanian Students began to carry out a "protest walk" around the university every night. They would circle the university peacefully, carrying placards and shouting slogans. They wanted to give some exposure to Milosevic's failure to implement the school agreement.

Milosevic didn't seem to care. He was continuing to make us happy on Bosnia, and we really weren't reacting to what was happening in Kosovo.

On March 2nd 1998 Serbian police charged into the demonstrators and began a new crackdown. The following day I went to the Office of the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. I remember telling her that "Today is the first day of a new Kosovo war." Unfortunately, I had it right!

Meanwhile, events in Macedonia were also on a downward spiral. Relations between the Macedonian government and the Albanian minority were deteriorating rapidly. The incident sparking the problem related to an Albanian cultural event in the town of Gostivar. To mark the occasion an Albanian flag was raised alongside the Macedonian flag in front of the local city hall. Macedonian police overreacted and sent in a police squad to tear the Albanian flag down. This set off a local demonstration which rapidly grew in size. The Macedonian police called for reinforcements and the demonstration grew even bigger. The Macedonians ended up by arresting a number of local Albanian leaders, some of which were sentenced to several years in prison. This proved to be a major setback for inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia.

I was surprised that our Ambassador did little to calm the situation. In fact, his report to Washington seemed to lay the blame squarely on the Albanians and to vindicate the overreaction of the Macedonian police and the strong prison sentences handed out by the government. I indicated my disagreement at the time. I believed that rather than take sides on this issue, our role should have been to act as honest brokers to calm relations between the two communities. To my mind the long prison sentences meted out by the Macedonian government were outrageous under the circumstances. The costs for these actions became much clearer subsequently.

Q: What was your job at this point?

COMRAS: In 1997 I was serving as the Senior State Department Coordinator for Holocaust Asset Restitution. I had just returned from the University of Pittsburgh where I spent a year as Diplomat-in-residence.

Q: Were you keeping your hand in?

COMRAS: I guess you might say that I remained an interested observer during this whole period. Anybody who wanted my opinion got it whether they wanted it or not. I did all I could to keep abreast of the issues. I felt that I had been exiled from those dealing with Yugoslavia because of my Dayton related criticisms.

Anyway, getting back to my story. Events continue to get worse in Kosovo. The Serbian police were cracking down on Albanian demonstrators, and more and more Albanian students were turning to more and more radical paths to respond. The Sant'Egidio process was failing and support for an Albanian intifada was growing. More and more Albanians were abandoning Rogova's stated policies of peaceful (non violent) protest.

A new Albanian force began to emerge in Kosovo. It was known as the UCK or Kosovo Liberation Army. While we certainly did not support their activities, they were becoming a force to be reckoned with. I think we made a big mistake, however, when we referred to them as "terrorists." If they were terrorists, then Milosevic could feel justified in dealing with them as terrorists. This appeared to give him an okay to take a freer hand in dealing with them. He began to ratchet up military action in response. The Christmas Warning was about to be tested.

Serbian military units began to deploy in Kosovo and against the UCK. The Serbian authorities used the excuse of UCK activities to step up their repression of the Albanian community in Kosovo. They had great difficulty knowing which Albanians were UCK and which were not. So they went around Kosovo like the forces of Simon de Monfort in the 13th Century Albagenisan crusade. When Simon de Monfort asked the Abbot of Ceteaux, the Papal legate, what he was to do with the inhabitants, the legate answered "Kill them all. God knows his own." The Serbian forces shot first and asked questions later. More and more Albanian villages went up in smoke. Kosovo was becoming a new major Balkan crisis.

The Contact group was still concentrating on Bosnia and was slow to pick up on the growing Kosovo crisis. Things were going somewhat better in Bosnia, and there was a reluctance to place

new pressures on Milosevic. Our contact group representative, Bob Gelbard was sent to Belgrade to deliver a message to Milosevic that he needed to cool-it in Kosovo. When he arrived in Belgrade Milosevic refused to see him. This represented a very dramatic turning point. Milosevic was determined to move ahead in Kosovo, and try to cash-in on our evident Bosnia-centricity.

Here was the envoy of U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright - the person who was our lead person on Balkan issues - coming to talk to Milosevic about Kosovo and Milosevic wouldn't see him. What should have been our response? Well, I don't think we got it right. Instead of a strong response, we tried a conciliatory one. If Milosevic wouldn't see Gelbard, maybe he would consent to see Richard Holbrooke, the architect of the Dayton Accords. Milosevic and Holbrooke already had a very established relationship. Perhaps Holbrooke could turn him around.

I don't think that was the right answer to take out Gelbard and substitute Holbrooke. Holbrooke was smart enough to know that he had to keep Gelbard in toe. So, they both went to see Milosevic in early May 1998. One result was to undermine Bob Gelbard's own role and credibility with the Serbian leader. He preferred to deal with Holbrooke, who he knew as a dealmaker. From this point on Gelbard's position was marginalized. Holbrooke would take the lead in a new round of shuttle diplomacy between Belgrade, Washington and Pristina.

I think we should stand behind Gelbard from the start and read Milosevic the riot act directly from Washington if Milosevic continued to refuse to see him. We should have raised the ante - not waited for Milosevic to raise the ante. We shouldn't have appeared to be going to Milosevic to get his accord. We should have made him back-down at the outset!

It should have been clear that the Christmas warning remained valid, and that continued military action in Kosovo would be met with a forceful response. Instead we got involved in a drawn out negotiating game with Milosevic playing all sides - feigning, and then withdrawing concessions, and continuing to carry out his military actions. Looking back, we can see that the crisis continued to go downhill for the next 14 months. And so much damage had already been done when we finally decided to intervene with force.

But let's go back to the beginnings of this new round of Holbrooke diplomacy. After a full round of shuttle diplomacy Holbrooke concluded a deal with Milosevic involving a package of measures which was to include an immediate cessation of military police actions in Kosovo and direct talks between Milosevic and Rogovo's Albanian governing council. That sounded good but it was disastrous!

The Rogovo government was absolutely shocked and felt betrayed by Holbrooke's agreement with Milosevic. Milosevic had always said he was willing to have Rogovo come to Belgrade to talk with him directly. After all he knew that it would be like the Lion talking with the mouse. What leverage could Rogovo, or his colleagues bring to the table in Belgrade? They knew they would be at a great disadvantage in such discussions. Besides, they didn't trust Milosevic at all. Following the Sant Egidio negotiations, and in other talks, it had become clear to them that Milosevic couldn't be held to his word in any these agreements.

The Rogovo council position had always been clear - They wanted negotiations with the Serbs under international auspices. The power and the pressure on the Serbian government couldn't come from the Rogovo council. It had to come from the international community. The Albanians had always looked to the contact group, or international organizations to sponsor any discussions regarding Kosovo. Only under such a formula could the Albanians have any possibility of gaining concessions from Milosevic. In direct negotiations their position would always be very tenuous.

They saw the Holbrooke - Milosevic agreement as a serious set-back for this strategy.

Despite their protests we put them under enormous pressure to form a delegation and to go to Belgrade for such talks. They continued to refuse to join in what they viewed would only be charade in Belgrade. So we ratcheted up the pressure on them and threatened to leave them to their own devices to deal with increased Serb violence in the province.

The Rogovo council faced a real internal crisis. Rogovo finally caved in to our pressure and agreed to form a delegation to go to Belgrade. But many of the members of his council resigned. And many of his supporters began to shift their allegiance to the UCK. We tried to soften the blow by promising that we would include international observers in the talks and closely observe the negotiations. Rogovo wanted Holbrooke there. He didn't get him. We assigned the observer task to the Director of the Office in the State Department responsible for the Balkans, James Swiggart. Subsequently that role was transferred to our Ambassador in Skopje, Christopher Hill.

The discussions in Belgrade were a real fiasco. Milosevic made only a brief appearance. The real discussions took place at a much lower level. A second meeting was scheduled, but never occurred. In the meantime fighting had intensified in Kosovo and the Rogovo government was being deserted by more and more of its members. It became increasingly clear that neither side had anything to bring to a negotiating table. The Albanians didn't trust Milosevic to carry out any commitments. And it was apparent also that the Rogovo government had lost its own ability to speak for the Kosovo Albanian community.

However, the contact group was not willing to recognize the failure of the process. Rather than abandon this approach, Christopher Hill and Wolfgang Petritsch, the Austrian ambassador to Belgrade, representing the EU, began their own shuttle diplomacy between Belgrade and Pristina. They concentrated on negotiating a framework agreement that would include basic documents related to political and civil institutions in Kosovo.

I have to say that this became a very ludicrous operation, especially against the background of increased fighting in Kosovo, the deterioration of the Rogovo council, the increasing importance of the UCK (and their absence from the process), and the failure of Milosevic to live up to any of his concessions. It was time to call Holbrooke back into the fray.

Holbrooke carried a very stern message to Milosevic. He was directed to make it clear that we were heading toward possible military action. NATO aircraft began to over fly Kosovo. We also began to build up NATO forces in Macedonia.

Holbrooke's instructions were to tell Milosevic that, in order to avoid NATO intervention he had to agree to the introduction of international peacekeeping mission in Kosovo which would include uniform military peacekeepers. Unfortunately, Holbrooke produced something far less. He made an agreement with Milosevic that did not include military peacekeepers. I'm never quite sure whether that was within the realm of the instructions that he had been given or how that played through.

The outcome was a completely civilian peace monitoring mission. It was to be based on the lines of other EU monitoring missions in the region. There would be no armed military elements within the mission. Holbrooke explained that Milosevic absolutely refused to allow any foreign military presence in Kosovo.

I think the mission assigned to the new peace monitoring group was one of the most challenging in history. The mission had an impossible task. They worked hard and honorably. And they reported truthfully on what was going on. But, they were helpless to stem a deteriorating situation. They became the witnesses themselves to growing issues and atrocities. In the meantime Christopher Hill and Wolfgang Petritsch were continuing on their shuttle missions to work out a political framework agreement.

In December 1998 I wrote a memorandum to then Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Marc Grossman regarding my concerns about the negotiating process on Kosovo. I told them I thought the Christopher Hill shuttle mission should be ended. I suggested that we convene an all - Albanian party conference to forge a unity governing council in Kosovo and that we establish a common Nato - Kosovo Council negotiating position paper which should be used in a new round of negotiations held outside of Yugoslavia. The new negotiating paper would be subject to discussion and appropriate revision, but would have the weight of NATO behind it. While Grossman found my paper intriguing, he admitted that he little influence on what was going on with our Yugoslav policies at the time. He promised to convey my memo to others.

Apparently, our Yugoslav team had already decided on a somewhat different course. They did not believe that we should appear to choose sides in the Kosovo crisis. Nor did they favor our working out a Kosovo unity council.

Christopher Hill suggested a somewhat different approach. He wanted to call for an international conference to bring the Albanians and the Serbian Government together to hammer an agreement out under international auspices. I think that's where we should have been at the outset - about a year earlier. But, I believed it was much to late for that now. Anyway, Hill's ideas led to the convening of the Rambouillet Conference.

Q: That was the name of the site in France.

COMRAS: That's right. The Kosovo conference was held at Rambouillet, just outside of Paris. The meeting was ostensibly presided over by the French and British Foreign Ministers as the selected representatives of the Contact Group. In fact, most of the negotiations at the conference were handled by Christopher Hill and Wolfgang Petritsch. Slobodan Milosevic never attended the conference. He sent his Foreign Minister instead.

The conference opened with great fanfare, and the presence of just about all of the Foreign Ministers of the Contact Group countries. There were solemn speeches on the need to deal with the issues and work out a resolution. But, the conference went downhill from their.

It was a very unique conference. It dealt with issues of war and peace. It dealt with headline issues of confrontation seriously involving the interests of the United States, Europe, the Balkans and world peace. But, just about the full contingent of Foreign Ministers left at the outset. The conference was left to be handled by mid-level diplomats who lacked direction or authority.

The Albanian delegation was badly fractured among Rogovo and UCK supporters. The Serbian delegation had no authority to deal. They had to refer everything back to Slobodon Milosevic.

The Albanians hadn't worked out a common position and lacked both a common position and common goals. These ranged from those who insisted on complete Kosovo independence to those willing to accept some form of autonomy. The conference was another complete diplomatic and substantive disaster. The international press saw it for the disaster that it was. The Serbs saw it for the disaster that it was. They took advantage of the discord among the Albanians and were able to leave the conference looking as though they had tried to make a deal, but the Albanians were the hold-outs.

When the conference finally broke without any positive result, the blame game began. The contact group realized they needed to develop a common position and hammer out agreement on that position with the Albanians before they could move forward. That meant getting the Albanians to agree among themselves - something I had recommended in my December 1998 memo.

Well, anyway here we were with a deteriorating crisis. Slobo's troops were increasingly active in Kosovo. New Serbian troops were massing along the border. NATO plans were stepping up their over flights. New NATO contingents were moving into Macedonia. Against this background we convened a second Rambouillet Conference. And this time there was a common position presented to the Serbs on a take it or leave it basis. We laid down that kind of line at Rambouillet along with the demand for military armed peacekeepers. It was rejected.

In response to the Serbian rejection, and continued Serbian military operations in Kosovo, We began to carry out a limited air campaign against Serbian forces in Kosovo. We also began to have bombing runs into Serbia proper. A war had begun.

The Kosovo War was conducted from the air. We targeted Serbian troop movements as well as certain support facilities - roads, bridges, supply trains, communications facilities and oil. Serbia has no oil production of its own and relies on imported oil. We view oil as their Achilles, especially when it comes to military activities.

But, as fast as we were knocking out Serbia's oil reserves, Serbia was importing new oil, mainly via barge along the Danube. We had gone to war without seeking to impose any new controls on

the flow of oil to Serbia. In fact the only sanctions that were in place at the beginning of the war were the leftover outer wall measures from the Bosnian conflict.

I was always surprised by the fact that we never pushed for new sanctions on Serbia during the run-up to the Kosovo war. Anyway, only after the air war had commenced did we consider what should be done to stop the flow of new oil into Serbia.

At the time I was serving as the Director of the Office of Canadian Affairs. While I was not directly involved in the Kosovo issue, I continued to make my views known via memos, email and hall and office conversations.

At the moment the war began I was also preoccupied by the decision to move the Office of Canadian Affairs from the European Bureau into the an expanded Bureau of Western Hemispheric Affairs. Our office was no longer with the European. It was now with the Bureau that handled our relations with Latin America.

To my great surprise, I received a call from the EUR people to come around and talk to James Dobbins and James Pardue (his deputy) about what was going on in Kosovo. They asked my advice and assistance on developing and implementing a new sanctions program on Serbia. With my agreement they requested that the Western Hemispheric Affairs Bureau release me as Director of the Office of Canadian Affairs so that I could work full time on this project. I guess my exile had come to an end. What started off as a temporary position became a permanent position on Jim Dobbins' staff.

Our first sanctions priority was to stop the oil moving to Serbia. This was to prove a very difficult task - especially so as we were operating without any new UN Security Council resolution upon which to base such sanctions. We also faced the same kinds of problems that plagued the application of sanctions on the Danube during the Bosnian war period. The Danube enjoys a strict freedom of navigation and commerce status. And without a UN Security Council resolution it was going to be difficult to get countries to abridge a right guaranteed in the Danube Convention. Remember, the Kosovo war was a NATO action, not a UN action.

Our problem was to convince the Romanian, Bulgarian and Ukrainian governments to stop the flow of oil up the Danube to Serbia. Most of this oil was coming from Russia. And Russia itself was disinclined to cut off the flow. The Russian people were already expressing great sympathy for the Serbians in this war.

I formed up a new interagency negotiating team involving both the State Department and the Defense Department. We traveled together to Bucharest, Sofia and Kiev to see what could be done. We needed to get agreement from the Romanians and the Bulgarians to work together to cut off the oil flow. They sought to deflect the pressure we put on them and argued that we had to go directly to the Ukrainians and the Russians to stop the oil at the source. But we knew that wouldn't work. We just had to continue to keep the pressure on the Romanians and the Bulgarians, and to play on their stated interest in eventually becoming NATO members.

We also played on their concerns regarding the possible damage done to the Danube and their riverbeds from oil contamination. After-all, a war was going on and we could not guarantee that oil barges on the Danube would not be hit!. What if a barge train on the river was at the wrong place at the wrong time during a river raid. Can you imagine what that would do to the river with all that oil going down the river? Can you imagine what that would do to the ecology of the Danube River and to the region?

I think these issues weighed heavily on the responsible Bulgarian and Romanian authorities. They had their lawyers look closely at the terms of the Danube Convention and agreed that they could take appropriate regulatory steps, under the situation, to insure against such a river disaster. They agreed to turn back any oil barges that might be heading into the war zone.

Once the agreement was in place, and reported. We left the region to return to Washington via London. While in London we received the good news that Serbia had just caved and signed a Military Technical Agreement to end the fighting. I think this was around June 9, 1999. We joked among ourselves that as soon as Sloba heard that he wasn't going to get any more oil, he caved in. But it was still a great undertaking and the team was very pleased with the outcome of it. The issue then became, "What now?"

The Clinton Administration had finally decided that Milosevic had to go. President Clinton made it clear that the U.S. and its allies would not assist or deal with the Milosevic government and that we would work through peaceful means to foster democratic regime change. So what about the sanctions. The first inclination among the U.S. and other Contact group members was that now that the war is over sanctions were no longer necessary. I disagreed. I thought that sanctions were needed even now - as a main impetus for peaceful regime change. I wrote a memo arguing that targeted sanctions were critical to our accomplishing democratic change in Serbia. Secretary Albright agreed with my position and directed that we continue our sanctions work.

By that time most of Europe had dropped blanket sanctions on Serbia. The situation in Iraq at that time had already led to sanctions being discredited as too blunt an instrument with too much humanitarian fallout. There was concern that we might cause considerable suffering in Serbia if we maintained too broad a sanctions package. So, if we were going to have sanctions against Yugoslavia for regime change, they would have to be very targeted or smart sanctions.

We had to develop a program that we could sell to our European friends - again we did not have a UN Security Council resolution to work with - that would assist our efforts to getting the Serbia people to dump Milosevic.

The program that was developed was a multifaceted program worked out between the U.S. and the European Union. The objective was to strengthen the Democratic Opposition in Serbia while weakening the Milosevic regime. We would target the regime and its political, military, and bureaucratic support structure as well as its political and financial supporters.

We were going to go after Sloba's money, the money that supported his regime. We included in the target circle those we could identify as providing the political, economic, financial foundations of the regime as well as those supporting the repressive structure Milosevic had

created to retain power. We defined a group of about 25 major individuals and companies that were the main sources of revenue and support. Their names were placed on a black list and trade and transactions with them were prohibited. Any of their assets found in a cooperating European country would also be frozen. Their names were also reflected in a blacklist issued by the EU which prohibited trade with them. These measures had a strong impact on Sloba and his financial support. It was beginning to cost more than it was worth to be a friend of Sloba.

Q: Talk about the Europeans. The French and the Germans and the Russians often have varying interests. How much were you able to... Were there some elements of these ones that I mentioned or others that had to be dragged kicking and screaming?

COMRAS: There was a consensus among the critical group - the French, the Germans, the British, and the Americans - on how to move toward regime change. However, there were some differences over where to place the greatest emphasis. Some supported a greater effort on working with the democratic opposition. They were somewhat more reticent when it came to tightening sanctions measures against the regime, or withholding assistance for infrastructure projects - for example the reconstruction of bridges over the Danube. But all in all there was agreement on a common approach that contained both aspects - assistance for the democratic opposition and sanctions against the regime. There were a number of times when we had to get Madeline Albright to intercede at the highest levels to keep the program together, particularly on the sanctions side. It was easier on the democratic opposition assistance side.

The key to retaining broad European Union support for the sanctions against Milosevic was to target them carefully. Exceptions also had to be made to take humanitarian considerations into account. These exceptions involved such issues as providing limited oil to individual towns through carefully managed assistance programs. We tried to give credit to democratic opposition groups so as to increase their influence and credibility.

One of the biggest, and most controversial issues was whether or not to assist Serbia in rebuilding Danube bridges. This was the greatest test of our "no assistance" policy. My instructions were to try and hold back a number of European governments who were more willing to assist the Serbs in rebuilding the Danube bridges. I also had to deal with complaints from the Bulgarians, Romanians and Hungarians that the bridge damage was disrupting so much commerce on the Danube that it had created serious economic problems for them. There was also growing concern that obstructions in the river could cause ecological damage to the river and might hold back the winter ice flow which could result in serious winter flooding. Nonetheless, because of the strong determination of President Clinton and Secretary Albright to the "no assistance" policy, we were able to hold back providing assistance to Serbia for the bridges. I have to say Serbia was their own worst enemy in this regard. They tried to blackmail the other European countries using the Danube by closing the river through Serbia to international traffic.

The Russians played no major role in implementing or blocking the sanctions. Nor did they contribute support to the democratic opposition.

Q: Were they opposed?

COMRAS: They remained pretty much on the sidelines during this period. I guess that was the best we could hope for. However, private Russian individuals and companies did seek to take some advantage from the sanctions through black market and gray market dealings.

There were a lot of other issues of direct concern to the Russians regarding the status of Kosovo, and what was going on in Bosnia. They weren't opposed to regime change in Belgrade but they were not going to be active participants in taking on Milosevic.

Q: As you were doing this, did you see a change in the Kosovars, the Albanian side? Were they coalescing more?

COMRAS: Initially Rogovo was completely discredited. During the war he had become a political hostage of Milosevic. Milosevic held him in "protective custody" in Belgrade. They got him to go on television to call for an end to the NATO bombing. At the time the UCK tried to brand him as a "traitor."

On the other hand, we also had to deal with some of the radical Albanian leaders with whom we were not comfortable. This included some leaders of the UCK.

After the end of the war the UN, the EU and the United States all worked to develop the growth of pluralistic democratic parties in Kosovo. That effort has had some success. Let's hope it holds.

We're going to be in Kosovo for a long time. There are still a number of intractable issues. But hopefully time and Europe will help begin to heal things.

I've always believed, and I think this view is shared by many others, that there could be no resolution of the status of Kosovo, and no lasting political stability in Bosnia so long as Milosevic was in power in Belgrade. But, in the post-Milosevic era, the stakes are very different. Serbia is less threatening. It is moving slowly toward democracy, a free market economy, and participation in Europe institutions. Within that context, the stakes for Kosovo are moderated. In this context some kind of loose association with Serbia remains possible. This would especially be true if Serbia, Kosovo, and the other former Yugoslav countries all continue their quest for full membership in the European institutions.

Autonomy was impossible for the Albanians to accept in the Serbia of Milosevic but it's not so dramatic a solution in a democratic Serbia that is really part of Europe.

I am concerned that a fully independent Kosovo, under present circumstances, could undermine the stability of the region. Kosovo would not be viable economically. Its independence would create serious economic and political problems for its neighbors also. Besides its relations with Serbia, one must consider the impact on Macedonia and its large Albanian minority which might wish to break away from Skopje and join with Kosovo. Then there is the question of relations with Albania proper. This destabilizing effect could reach into northern Greece where there is also a sizable Albanian minority.

I expect that, in time, we will see the establishment of growing economic and political ties between all of Yugoslavia's former provinces and republics. They could all benefit from such closer ties. Such ties would clearly be to their economic, political, and cultural advantage

especially given the strong family ties, intermarriage and dependent economies that already exist. It makes sense now that they have gotten rid of the one great nationalistic dictatorial regime that so threatened the other Yugoslavs.

You know, its something of a miracle that Macedonia survived the Kosovo war and its aftermath. Milosevic had warned a number of times that if NATO forces bombed Serbia or Serbian troops in Kosovo, the Serbian army would kick out all the Albanians from Kosovo. They said it. And they did it. Right at the beginning of the Kosovo air war, Serbian troops and local Serbian militias went into the Albanian towns and villages and did all they could to force the local inhabitants to flee southward into Macedonia. Milosevic's tactic was quite clear. He wanted to push the Kosovo Albanians into Macedonia to completely destabilize Macedonia and broaden and internationalize the conflict. This, he believed would lead to an international conference where a settlement would have to be imposed on all of the parties including the Macedonians, the Albanians, and the Serbs.

According to Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov, Milosevic had long planned, that, in the event of a Kosovo war, he would seek to destabilize Macedonia. His plan would be to push the Albanian's south. Divide Kosovo with Albania, cede the western part of Macedonia (and its Albanian majority) to Albania and take the remaining part of Macedonia back into Serbia proper. This seemed to be what Milosevic intended. His first response to the NATO bombing was to force the exodus of Albanians southward.

It was miraculous that Macedonia didn't come apart. One of the reasons they were able to withstand this onslaught was that were already at least semi prepared to handle it. There were British and U.S. troops already in Macedonia at that time. Both governments made a commitment to the Macedonian government that they would share the burden of the Albanian refugees and not allow it to fall alone on Macedonia. Handling the flow of Albanians across the Macedonian border became an international effort and played against Milosevic. Milosevic thought that the Macedonia would either be overrun, or seek to forcefully stop the refugees from entering. He believed that either scenario would cause an uprising among the Albanians in Macedonia.

The Albanians coming across the border we held in NATO run refugee camps close to the border. There was a commitment to return most them to Kosovo as soon as the fighting their ended. Others might be provided refugee status elsewhere. These commitments considerably lessened the pressure on the Macedonian government and assuaged the concerns of both segments of Macedonia's population.

The United States and other NATO countries provided the funds, the camps, and the logistics to handle the refugees. Ironically, the only really negative effect that this had was a perverse one. A lot of the Macedonians were upset that the Albanians were getting so much international support. Many of them felt that they did not receive their share of assistance or consideration from the troops stationed there.

The influx of Albanians into Macedonia and the continuing instability of Kosovo after the war did create or exacerbate a number of problems for Macedonia. It certainly increased tension

between the Macedonian Slavic and Albanian communities. Some of these problems were allowed to fester during the period after the Kosovo war. A group of disgruntled cross border Albanians sought to take up the work of the UCK in Macedonia. They formed their own National Liberation Army (NLA) and began to infiltrate into the mountains above the town of Tetevo. They hoped to attract strong Albanian popular support for their movement. This had all the appearances of setting of a new round of Balkan interethnic fighting.

But the NLA never really found the popular base they would need for such a conflict. They never received the same grass-root support that existed for the UCK in Kosovo.

The NLA uprising did, however, force the Macedonian government to come to terms with some of the legitimate Albanian demands. With some negotiating help from the United States and the European Union the Macedonian government made some necessary concessions in the Macedonian constitution that recognized certain rights of the Albanians that should have been there in the first place.

Both sides faced the precipice of inter-ethnic war and both sides realized that was not the course either community in Macedonia should follow. I hope that the country came of this threatening episode stronger and more coherent than before.

DAVID R. ADAMS
Deputy Director, European Affairs, USAID
Washington, DC (1998-2000)

Mr. Adams was born in Washington, DC and raised in Virginia and abroad. He was educated at John Carroll, William and Mary and George Washington Universities. Mr. Adams joined USAID in 1973 in Washington, DC. He served in Washington and abroad, dealing primarily with matters concerning Latin American countries and Kosovo. His foreign assignments include Bangladesh, Guatemala and Haiti, where he served as USAID Mission Director. Mr. Adams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: Well then you moved back to Bosnia.

ADAMS: Well I got recruited to the Europe/NIS Bureau; they were looking for a deputy director for European affairs, European country affairs, the desks for Europe. Now in AID that meant for all intents and purposes Eastern Europe.

Q: Well yeah because saying AID in Europe is like an oxymoron. I mean at least for a decade.

ADAMS: There are some liaison officers in France and Brussels. In fact one of the more interesting respites I had was they sent me over after I had been in the job for awhile, sent me over to open up a new office in the U.S. mission to the European Union that was overseeing sort of liaison with the World Bank office in Brussels and the European Union offices that dealt with

Balkans issues. The most interesting aspect of the job was in my portfolio basically as a deputy was supervising all the desk officers while the director did her thing at the high levels. I supervised the desk officers and was involved with recruitment and so forth, but also Kosovo began to get hot. Actually I was originally recruited to be the division chief for the Balkans, Bosnia and Croatia, Macedonia and one or two other countries. I had only been on the job a few weeks when the new director told me she wanted me to...

Q: Who was the new director?

ADAMS: Paula Feeney. She was married to an ambassador in Kazakhstan. He is now the president of one of these major beltway bandits. After being ambassador to Kazakhstan he was the NSC director for Russia. I am blanking on his name. Anyway what happened was I moved out to the deputy job. You know I still had a similar portfolio when I took on, also the administrative stuff, recruiting and supervision of all the desks. But not too long after that Kosovo began to get hot. The word came down from the administrator, the head of AID, that they wanted a Kosovo-focused operation, the word came through the head of my bureau, Don Pressley, the assistant administrator for what was later called Europe and Eurasia. He did both Eastern Europe and he had the former Soviet Union under him. He expressed an interest in setting up a structure to deal with Kosovo. So I wrote a paper, one of these if you have got an idea, write a paper. So I wrote a policy paper on what that structure might look like, offered myself to help run it or get it set up. He agreed and he gave the paper to the administrator. Initially the administrator wanted one of his protégées a very sharp man, Rick Barton, who is now over at Georgetown with strategic studies.. Rick Barton was running that office called transition initiatives that I mentioned awhile ago, the new quasi political effort. Overseeing programs between war and peace if you will, or crisis to peace. So Rick was the initial agency director for the task force on Kosovo. He just did it for about a month and then said he needed to move onto other things, so I took over. My chief function was, initially we were doing some forward thinking. This was before the war in Kosovo. Initially there appeared to be a chance that there would be a peace agreement that would preclude war. Even as the tensions rose between the Kosovars and the Serbs, I made a couple of trips over to Pristina and Belgrade to work on some of this stuff. Next thing you know the Serbs started bombing Kosovo. So of course we stood down and the transition strategy was put on hold. That is about the time I took over the task force, so we morphed into a humanitarian response. So once things calmed down and the Serbs had backed off, we started, or even before the Serbs had backed off we started rushing aid into Albania and Macedonia to get into Kosovo.

Q: You were pre positioning it.

ADAMS: Right.

Q: And also weren't you dealing with refugees in Macedonia/

ADAMS: Yeah, Albania too, that is what it was, so we hooked up with the UN and major NGOs like CARE.

Q: What type? These weren't starving people. These were people who from at least what I have seen they had cars and houses and small farms.

ADAMS: Yeah until they got kicked out.

Q: Well this in a way was this somewhat of a different type?

ADAMS: Well yes and no because the conditions were. They may have been better dressed and had brought more goods out from the country when they were forced out by the Serbs, but we basically had to with the UN and NGO's we established tent cities for them. So we were there just as with other refugee situations. Then to figure out how to cope with their flight and figure out how to do schooling for the kids and tutoring, provide health services, whatever could be done, that sort of thing.

Q: Did the air war have any particular impact on you at all? Were you seeing this?

ADAMS: We weren't in Kosovo at the time. We were on the border, so the air war basically got the Serbs to back down, and then after a time the refugees got to go back, so we went in with them trying to help them re-establish their lives in Kosovo.

Q: How did you find the Kosovars as a People? They hadn't had a lot of experience running things and all this, and also corruption and efficiency. How did you find them?

ADAMS: Right. Well it was they had not really governed themselves, although there were shadow governments, underground governmental structures during the years that the Serbs ran Kosovo. But there were issues with initiative and organization and a bit of a tribal mentality, more of a family against family type of thing. Honor my brother first and I don't care about my neighbor. So there was that and then big fighting between factions, Kosovars even within the Albanian ethnic community. There were gangs established. You had people who had not been disarmed, because while the air war was going on there were guerilla groups, Kosovar guerilla groups who were fighting hit and run types of strategy against the Serbs on the ground. Those folks' arms were not take away from them, at least not right away. I kind of lost track of what happened downstream because I kind of went back to my day job if you will, my former position as deputy director for European affairs, once we established a mission. In fact the guy that ran our mission in Bosnia, a fellow named Craig Buck came over to Kosovo to help put all that together. Then they sent Craig to Afghanistan later and he retired out of Afghanistan. He is a legend in AID for his work in post crisis environments.

Q: Well after we were able to respond positively to the Kosovo business and you say you went back to your day job of dealing with European affairs. What were some of the other concerns that you had?

ADAMS: Well I think it was after that experience, as a matter of fact after I finished as Kosovo task force director, I was sent over to help coordinate, set up a new office in Brussels to work with the European Union and World Bank office in the Balkans out of Brussels. I just did that for three months or so and then we hired somebody on contract to do it longer term, who then

actually went into Kosovo later to run the office there. So it was different. It was enjoyable because I hadn't had an overseas assignment for some time given my family situation. I think in terms of its utility I think Washington found it useful because I was feeding them information among other things on World Bank and the European Union strategy was for reconstruction in the Balkans, particularly Bosnia and Kosovo. Then also our ambassador to the European Union, Dick Morningstar, and I hit it off. I ended up being sort of a staff person for him writing cables and what have you given my experience in the State Department I had a little bit of a broader perspective than most folks in AID, and knew better what he wanted. Because we had a representative there, a fellow who was actually assigned to the ambassador for broader AID issues, and they weren't getting along for whatever reason. So I ended up actually taking some of that fellow's portfolio because the ambassador was growing impatient with lack of action. So he and I had a great time. He was very kind to me in his comments when I left. I enjoyed that. Then I came back to Washington.

Q: While you were still in Europe, what was your impression when all of a sudden you are in a big city dealing with the European Union and International Monetary Fund, back like in civilization. These are people who are responding and they are not Americans. Did you see a difference? What was your impression on the issues that you were dealing with?

ADAMS: Well the circles I traveled in we were all more or less focused on the same mission. So we didn't really have the kind of stresses, strains, differences that you find in bilateral relations. It was more OK, we do business differently. I tend to be a consensus building type anyway, and I was there relatively short term, so I wasn't looking to protect my turf or establish my own little legacy. I basically tried to organize common task forces involving membership by the different entities within that community who were focused on the Balkans, and look for ways to collaborate and to share information with our field missions in the various capitals in the Balkans, in Sarajevo. We had a big mission in Sarajevo. We had of course, the relatively new mission in Pristina, Kosovo, and in Croatia Zagreb. Then we have to interact with the folks in Hungary at the regional mission in Hungary in Budapest for AID that provides services, contracting and personnel and other services to the missions, and then also in Macedonia, Skopje as well. I did some traveling, although not so much, to those missions. But it was mainly setting up the operation in Brussels that could then on an ongoing basis serve the ambassador and my folks back in Washington as well as sort of AID liaison function with the various offices for the other international organizations in Brussels. NATO, we also had interaction with NATO.

Q: Well I think that if you found that the international organizations that you were dealing with for this relatively short time, by this time were pretty responsive. We were all working pretty much as a team wouldn't you say?

ADAMS: Well yes and no. I mean you had what was interesting was the European Union, and I think they'd tell you that themselves, was pretty hide bound. It was sort of like a mini UN, in that they had some ponderous procedures for approvals given the way that they were set up and the different country memberships, complementary members, and the fact that Germans aren't too fond of Frenchmen making decisions on how they should spend their money. That type of thing. One of the things I did was because there were complaints by member states about slow movement of the UN in Bosnia in particular, they asked me, they need representatives of the EU

office that dealt with parliament said, ‘Look we understand you have got a guy, this guy Craig Buck, or not so much a guy but Your mission in Bosnia has a reputation of moving quickly. In part because we had this OTI, office of transition initiatives. They had expedited funding authorities like the disaster folks did. So they didn’t have all the contrasting rules. They could move money quickly. So when it came to rebuilding roads and houses and what have you, they moved much faster than the European Union or the World Bank for that matter, because of the expedited funding approvals. So word had gotten back to some of the European capitals about how fast AID was moving in this environment. So they said, “What is your secret?” I said, “Why don’t I bring in this guy, Craig Buck, to testify before your parliament.” Kind of unusual. We hadn’t done that very often. So they said, “Good.” So they talked to people up the chain and they said, “Yes, we have a session on the Balkans, what has gone well and what hasn’t.” So I get ahold of Craig and he said Yeah. I helped him write his testimony. So he came in. I thought he was pretty well received by the Europeans. And this was not just because of our intervention but we helped. The practical effect, the European Union when it set up its mission in Pristina, Kosovo, gave that mission their folks there expedited funding authority. They could waive a number of their contracting regulations. So there was that type of cooperation I think, helped them to get their operation in a little bit better, more effective mode.

LEON WEINTRAUB
Coordinator, European Affairs Bureau
Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (1998-2000)

Mr Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: That is the war in Bosnia.

WEINTRAUB: Bosnia and Croatia, Slovenia, the Serbs -- you know, most of that had been solved or resolved to a point. But now what we were talking about, this was within the constituent Federal Republic of Serbia, specifically the Province of Kosovo. And this was starting to heat up just as I came in around August of '98. It was within the province of Kosovo, where a majority of the population was of Albanian ethnic identification. I'm not sure precisely how ethnically different they are from the Serbs but I guess they see themselves as separate, both groups do. The people that are known as the Kosovars are predominantly Muslim, they speak a different language from other Serbs, they speak Albanian as far as I can tell, and maybe they are ethnically different but I'm not sure.

Q: They do appear to be.

WEINTRAUB: Do they? Okay. The Serbs, of course, are Slavic, Eastern European, they speak Serbian and generally belong to the Orthodox church, the Serbian Orthodox church. There's a history of bad blood between these two groups. I guess the Serbs remember with infamy a defeat they had, a defeat that the-

Q: 1389.

WEINTRAUB: Yes.

Q: I spent five years in Belgrade.

WEINTRAUB: Yes. - that the Serbs suffered at the hands of the Turks.

Q: The Battles of Kosovo, yes.

WEINTRAUB: Yes. So Kosovo has a high resonance within Serbia and the fact that the province had now become majority Kosovar Albanian really rankled many Serbs. There were a lot of allegations of human rights abuses by the Serb authorities, by the police forces against the Kosovars. There was the start of the Kosovo Liberation Army, an underground movement which was starting to inflict some casualties on the Serb forces and things were not looking good at all.

Well, we called in once again Ambassador Richard Holbrooke who had knocked heads together to get the Dayton Agreement in the mid-'90s, and he made some trips to Belgrade. And finally Holbrooke and the Serb leader Milosevic hammered out an agreement whereby the OSCE would play a major monitoring role. So in the fall of '98 when I was fairly new on the job we, the OSCE, was called upon to start a KVM, Kosovo Verification Mission, with Ambassador Bill Walker as head of it. There was an agreement where the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission would monitor behavior on the ground, activities on the ground in Kosovo. The Serbian authorities, the police forces, paramilitary forces, other security forces were supposed to pull back to certain areas and then NATO was going to overfly to verify through imagery that forces were being pulled back. So there were a lot of very long days setting up the Kosovo Verification Mission; like many of these things, once a paper's signed everybody wants like 100 people out there in a week.

Fortunately, at this time, the Norwegians were assuming leadership of the OSCE. The OSCE is headed by an annually chosen "Chair in Office," as it's called, a CIO, selected from among the members. There is a secretary general of the organization, but the secretary general is primarily an administrative head. The political leadership, or CIO, is by a rotating chairman in office and we were fortunate to have the Norwegians doing this at this time. So they, with our support, they dedicated a lot of resources, a lot of time, to set up this Kosovo Verification Mission. And I don't think we could have wished for a better job than they did. They installed a lot of communications facilities, a lot of physical facilities to set up a verification mission in Pristina, the major city of Kosovo Province and other areas around it as well.

Well, Ambassador Walker could probably tell you much more about this than I can but there continued to be serious incidents throughout the fall and the winter of '98-'99. Things were not getting better. Slobodan Milosevic was kind of an obstinate guy, a cantankerous guy, and the Kosovo Liberation Army didn't make things any easier. Obviously their aim was independence or merger with Albania, either of which would be unacceptable to Serbia. So under Madeleine Albright's leadership we had another international meeting in Rambouillet, in France, where the Serbs, the Kosovars and major powers in the region all came together to see what could happen once again.

Now, I think what happened is that the outside powers wanted to put a stop to this so we put a proposal on the table: certain Serbian forces would pull back, the Kosovars would do other things; there'd be respect for human rights, etcetera, etcetera. At first point, neither side accepted it; neither the Kosovars nor the Serbs accepted it. I think this was in February. The common wisdom at the time then and afterward was that our side, the U.S. and others, leaned on the Kosovars to accept this. It didn't grant them autonomy, it didn't grant them independence. But we thought it was the best that could be available at the time. And I think we kind of leaned on them to accept it. Eventually they did, but the Serbs did not accept it and the conference ended without an agreement. And in the meanwhile the tensions between the two groups within the province are building and building. And then it was in March, I believe, that the bombing campaign by NATO began. Proposals to take stronger action by the UN went back and forth in the Security Council. Obviously we were quite certain that the Russians and the Chinese would both veto any call for action in the Security Council.

In addition to what was happening in Serbia and in Kosovo, there was an outflow of refugees from there, unsettling the region, particularly in Italy, which was the next country over after the former Yugoslavia. There were a lot of refugees coming into Italy and into Austria. And the decision was taken, in NATO, to bomb Serbian positions and bomb Belgrade as well.

Q: There was considerable human rights- essentially ethnic killing was-

WEINTRAUB: This was the term that started in the former Yugoslavia, "ethnic cleansing." There were, you know, very serious reports of atrocities.

Q: Yes.

WEINTRAUB: Very serious reports. And it was the kind of situation where years later -- how do you look at yourself in the mirror if you think there's something you can do about it and you don't? And this, of course, is five years after the massacres in Rwanda and, you know, people said the reason we didn't go into Rwanda is because memories of what went wrong in Somalia the year before, what happened there, in the "Blackhawk Down" incident. Now people might say, well, maybe the reason we did go into Kosovo is we're ashamed of what we did not do in Rwanda. These things have a cumulative effect.

So the bombing began in March of '99. I think there was a supposition it wasn't going to last too long. I think it lasted about six weeks. And we had that political incident where in error we

bombed the embassy of China in Belgrade, very embarrassing, of course, and also there were significant losses of life and losses of property as well.

So the bombing campaign did last, I think as I said, about six weeks. It did generate a certain amount of opposition. I think Secretary General Annan went on the record as not accepting it as a legitimate use of force, since it was not sanctioned or approved by the Security Council. I think that still rankled certain people who thought if ever there was a case where outside intervention was needed, just as it was in Rwanda, this was another one. But eventually we reached a situation where the Serbs sued for surrender and then we started working on a way to administer Kosovo. I think -- although the language is not out there in specific terms -- essentially the province of Kosovo is like a UN protectorate. It really has been, I believe, for several years after the bombing essentially run by the United Nations with other organizations as well, each doing certain jobs; the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) has certain responsibilities there, the European Union has certain responsibilities, the United Nations has certain responsibilities. So it's a somewhat unwieldy situation, and I think it remains so to this day. The majority of Kosovars probably would prefer, I think, number one independence, and number two integration with Albania. Obviously, Serbia would like neither of those outcomes. And it's now coming on six years after that campaign. I haven't followed it closely, but I don't recall seeing anything showing signs of a resolution of that situation.

Q: Well right now I'm interviewing Larry Rosen.

WEINTRAUB: Oh yes.

Q: Larry is out there, and we haven't come to that point yet but he's out there as an ambassador, I think, I'm not sure if he's working for the states or whether- the U.S. or whether he's working for the OSCE or what because he's retired but he's out there.

WEINTRAUB: Right. He was in the European Affairs Bureau as -- I think -- as the head of the Office of South Central Europe at the time, so we worked a lot with that office, of course.

Q: Well, during this time, what were you doing?

WEINTRAUB: Well, we were trying to make sure the OSCE had the support it needed and it did the job it needed to do. Basically, we interacted with our mission in Vienna to the OSCE; our ambassador was David Johnson, who I think is now DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) in London, to pull together -- we had work with other OSCE members, and particularly with the Norwegian CIO, to pull together a Kosovo Verification Mission in very short order. And like in any multi-lateral organization people often, when time comes to take action and allocate resources, people often look to the United States to follow our lead. So we had to make sure we knew what we wanted. So again, I worked a lot in tandem with our office right next door that worked with NATO, particularly during the bombing phase, and even before and after; we had to make sure our military track and the civilian track worked together. So there was a lot of time putting together the Kosovo Verification Mission, looking for people to staff it up, to be verification monitors of what was going on. Then when the bombing stopped, we had to make sure the OSCE was as active as possible in getting all the support people out there. So we were either

working very closely with the Norwegians or the next Chairman in Office – I forget who it was, it may have been the Dutch, I'm not sure. There was, in any case, a lot of organizing to do to get the people out there, to first do the verification mission and then -- post-war -- to help the major reconstruction efforts.

Q: Well, for the verification procedure, a cadre had been developed in Bosnia of election monitors run by the OSCE.

WEINTRAUB: Right, right.

Q: And, I did this for two times, you know, as an old Serbian hand. But there was a large number of retired Foreign Service officers brought into that. I know at least one, Harry Dunlap.

WEINTRAUB: That name sounds familiar. We had some of these people but of course, you know, the election monitoring period for OSCE monitors is usually only a week or two. But these requirements were for longer periods, these people would be there maybe for three or four months and under more difficult conditions, as there was a certain amount of tension in the countryside. So I had to try to staff up that monitoring function at the same time as we were staffing election monitors for elsewhere in Europe, particularly in the new emerging democracies in the post-Soviet countries. We needed to -- that was another one of my responsibilities with a staffer in my office -- to try to recruit a certain number of U.S. election observers to take part.

Q: Well, you mentioned that we were concerned that China and Russia would veto. What happened with them?

WEINTRAUB: Well, obviously they were not in agreement with our policy to act through NATO rather than through the United Nations. The Russians obviously were not part of the decision to start the bombing, certainly. But once it was over and we put our troops on the ground the Russians wanted to be there, and they were there. It was similar to the post-war occupation of Germany where we had U.S., British, French, and Russian zones. As far as I can recall, I think we had similar zones in Kosovo. I don't think they were as rigid and not as

Q: No, there were areas-

WEINTRAUB: There were certain areas. I believe there was - at one point, Ambassador Walker may remember better than I would or others might, there was a bit of tension when the Russians arrived earlier than we expected them to.

Q: The Russians pulled a brigade or something out of Bosnia and did an end run and headed for Pristina.

WEINTRAUB: Yes, I think they got to the airport.

Q: Where their people in Moscow were saying oh no, we're not doing that. And they were, you know. And there was, in fact, a little bit of concern that, was this a rogue element. I mean, was the military, was the Russian military running things and putting stuff in. As it turned out, the

British happened to be in Pristina when they arrived and they just let them sit and they eventually- And we also stopped attempts by the Russians to supply this group by air, we wouldn't-

WEINTRAUB: Right, right.

Q: They couldn't get over flights. And they just sort of, I won't say withered on the vine but they had to depend on the kindness of the French, the British and the Americans.

WEINTRAUB: Right, right. So that supply situation finally ended. Yes, I remember for a period of maybe 48 hours or maybe 72 hours, there was a little bit of an element of angst there about what this Russian advance element was doing. As you said, we couldn't get clarification from Moscow of just who had ordered them there. But once we got over that action, things kind of settled down and I just don't know what the status of Kosovo is now, but as far as I can tell, it's still unresolved, still for the most part under a United Nations mandate.

Q: Yes and no give on either side.

WEINTRAUB: No, by neither the Serbians nor the Kosovars.

Q: Well, what, how did you find the OSCE as an instrument?

WEINTRAUB: Well, it certainly has been derided as a talk shop. It does not have the range of active elements of the United Nations, which can also be a talk shop. But the United Nations has, you know, a high commission for refugees, a development program; it has a lot of other active elements as well. The OSCE, for its active elements, has fielded missions in certain of the countries and again, if you look at the map of Europe, it's in the former Soviet states or former members of the Warsaw pact where in fact we - there are the most concerns about the development of democracy.

So for example, there was a mission in Estonia because we had -- we wanted to make sure the Russians would fully withdraw as they had agreed to and, at the same time, from the point of view of democracy and human rights, we were concerned about the treatment of ethnic Russians in all the Baltic States. I mean, these are people really in a bind. In the Stalinist period they were shipped in there to flood the Baltic States with ethnic Russians to make sure they'd be subservient to Mother Russia; the Soviet Union did its best to fully absorb those countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, although obviously no other states recognized that. Then when they finally did regain their independence, obviously these new governments in the Baltic States did not have a great feeling for the ethnic Russians who were seen as representatives of the state that controlled them for so long. But yet most of these people were sent there unwillingly. Yet they were there, often they were second or third generation families there -- typically the older people never learned to speak the local language, they didn't see a need to. The children might have gone to local schools, but they were a hard group to integrate. And we wanted to make sure that the three Baltic republics did a reasonable job of fostering integration -- as far as instruction of the local language, making these people eligible to vote if they didn't go back to Russia and

they wanted to stay, establishing a procedure by which they could acquire citizenship without unduly harsh procedures.

So we had OSCE missions there to, on the one hand, monitor the Russian withdrawal but on the other hand to see that these new governments would treat their Russian ethnic population as best as we could hope for. In other countries like Ukraine and Belarus, we had OSCE missions there just to keep a watch on the state of freedom of speech and freedom of the political process. We always, of course, sent OSCE-sponsored election observers there whenever there were elections. And as well as in Central Asia, the five Central Asian republics also. There was a feeling that these -- all these countries could very easily backslide into or, in fact, never emerge from the totalitarian style of rule which had been present there ever since they were a part of the Soviet Union. I think in all the Central Asian states the initial rulers, the people initially elected as president, wore the party hacks that were in control under rule of Moscow. They just now suddenly became nationalists, and they won the election, but it was pretty much a top down rule by a ruling party, not called the communist party but pretty much a ruling party.

So we had missions in most of these countries and we tried to encourage fledgling NGOs, fledgling civil rights groups, private associations, businesses, civil society groups, the bar, labor unions. These groups were sponsored to do the same kind of things we had typically done in Eastern Europe before, supporting a movement that might become a "Solidarity" movement like they did in Poland, for example. So there were a lot of activities going on. We had to staff these missions, obviously not exclusively with Americans but we wanted to get Americans in where we thought they had a good opportunity. But there was obviously a wealth of talent throughout Eastern Europe. I took a fair number of trips to Vienna to attend various senior level meetings of the OSCE. Typically there were senior level meetings each November, occasionally at the summit level, occasionally at the ministerial level. There was a meeting in November '98 in Oslo, there was a ministerial meeting, but we couldn't get Warren Christopher- was it Warren Christopher, was he still there?

ALPHONSE F. LA PORTA
Political Advisor to Commander of NATO Forces in Southern Region
Naples, Italy (2000-2003)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: Well, Al, when you arrived and as it developed, what were the major issues, countries, I mean I immediately think of the former Yugoslavia. Did you have Kosovo and all that and then build up to the Iraq business? What was the situation before 9/11 and then after 9/11?

LA PORTA: During the first year our overwhelming preoccupation was the Balkans. We always said to the admiral that he was also CINC Balkans, the commander in chief of the Balkans, but that he had other things to do in the region besides just tend to the Balkan crisis of the day. During the first year we had an outbreak of ethnic warfare in Macedonia and the POLAD office was running a 24 hour a day watch on that situation. I had to bring in extra officers from NATO in order to support our political military watch.

During that operation we functioned very much like the political-military action team or PMAT does today in the Political Military bureau in State. After 9/11 this office was stood up to run a reporting system on the conduct of the war, incorporating intelligence and other kinds of information to deal with all aspects of the conflict. We did this in the spring of 2001 for Macedonia where fighting between the Macedonian Slavs and the Albanian population broke out in earnest. It was a successful model of what we could do from the POLAD standpoint because in practicality the few of us in the POLAD office were able to get information quicker, more directly and hopefully better than was coming through the regular command and Intel channels which had to go through several levels before the information found its way to the commander.

Q: How did you get it, did you essentially have your man or talk directly to our embassy in Skopje?

LA PORTA: One of the things we did was put an officer in Skopje. We had a succession of officers, starting with a Belgian lieutenant colonel, take up residence in Skopje in the NATO office there, but he worked as an extension of our office, so he was reporting to us rather than waiting for information to go through the various NATO hands or national headquarters. We put our person on the ground very quickly.

We also worked directly with not only the U.S. mission in Macedonia and the NATO combat command organization was stood up there, but also we were in direct contact with the non-American NATO POLAD. He was, initially I think a Dutchman. We also worked bilaterally with other diplomatic missions, especially the British, to find out what was going on. We established contact with their attachés, and with my British officers we worked a pretty wide information effort in terms of collecting open source information, newspapers and other kinds of reporting.

Q: But other than getting information, what was NATO doing?

LA PORTA: Well, in the beginning NATO had a senior diplomat who along with a senior EU diplomat were trying to negotiate a stand-down between the Albanian dissident forces. It was always difficult to characterize the Albanians; you certainly didn't want to call them freedom fighters because they didn't necessarily have that as their objective. They were always vague about questions of autonomy or regional autonomy. You really couldn't call them terrorists because they did have an organization, they did have declared goals, they did have people who entered into negotiations so we usually called them just simply the dissidents because they were

just unhappy with the way they were being dealt with by the Macedonian Slavic majority government. Eventually there was an extended negotiating process that lasted about two and a half months from June 2001 until roughly the middle of September in which there were numerous levels of negotiations. They finally got an agreement called the Ohrid Agreement which is named for a lake in Western Macedonia on the Albanian border.

Q: Beautiful.

LA PORTA: A lovely place and all kinds of nice hotels. The Albanian fighters and the Macedonian government agreed on a comprehensive plan for confidence building measures, including multiethnic policing, recognition of the Albanian language, using the Albanian language in the government and in parliament, conducting a real census prior to elections that were to be held in late 2001, and a range of other measures in education and social areas. The number of Albanians in the police and the armed forces was to be incremental. This negotiation occupied a number of international organizations, not only NATO and the EU, but the International Organization for Migration and even some of the UN agencies in minor ways.

We also had to cope with the refugee flow of Slavs living in Albanian majority areas or Albanians wanting to get out of the fighting. It was quite a challenge and it was one of the more successful models for diplomatic intervention and crisis resolution. There was very little loss of life, mostly people killed in sporadic incidents, and the number of NATO forces on the ground was minimal. It was only a couple thousand.

It was the position of NATO, representing all of the allies, that there was solid agreement among the allies as to what needed to be done. Once the Macedonian government as well as the Macedonian Albanians understood that this was the full weight of NATO opinion coming down on them as well as the EU, they began to honor their agreements and behave in a more civilized fashion toward each other.

Q: Now, did you accompany Admiral Ellis to Skopje and talk to the various parties and all?

LA PORTA: Constantly. I arrived in Naples on January 2nd, two days later I was on the plane with Admiral Ellis headed for Skopje. We used to get to Macedonia about every six weeks during the crisis period which lasted most of 2001 and generally speaking to other areas in the Balkans at least every two months. Admiral Johnson established the policy, after things wound down in Macedonia, of trying to get to Macedonia about every two months, and visiting with his NATO commanders in Kosovo and Bosnia at least once every six weeks, either in those capitals, in Naples or another location.

The Kosovo situation likewise was one for which there were no easy answers. It was a perfect example of all sides behaving badly and typified the old prayer book rubric of "there is no health in us" because there sure wasn't. It was the case of whether it was Slavs or different Albanian factions or the UN failing to measure up or acting out in the worst possible ways to preclude coming together or development of a genuine consensus. Consequently it was the force of NATO action backed up politically/diplomatically by the EU. NATO was really on point to keep

the factions and parties who didn't like each other one bit at least engaged in some kind of effort to create a unified government.

Q: Well, Al, I'm speaking as somebody who spent five years in Yugoslavia. Did you have a Balkan hand who could take you back to 1358 or 1398? That's their modern history. But bring you up, keep you up to date who was whom and who was doing what to whom?

LA PORTA: There were a lot of Balkan watchers. We worked with the POLAD office in KFOR, the NATO command in Pristina. The POLAD office there had two officers. Sometimes they were Americans, sometimes not. They had a staff and access to people locally. By and large they did a good job of keeping up with the other diplomatic missions and serving as a channel for us in Naples and also for the POLAD in Brussels.

The question of Southern Serbia was a running problem in early 2001 through about early July. We had an American POLAD in the area, Sean Sullivan, and his deputy who was a U.S. navy lieutenant commander, Wayne Porter, who were intimately engaged in negotiations with the Albanian and Serb factions to get a truce and some confidence building measures in place. Everything from building village roads and sinking new wells in remote villages, establishing a code of conduct for politicians, obtaining a better deal for Albanians in the local educational system, getting Albanians into the medical service were some of the things that were done.

Southern Serbia, or the Presavo Valley, was a precarious situation and there was great fear that the situation, which was aggravated by parties in Belgrade and exploited by some Albanian hypernationalists in Kosovo over the border, could have erupted into a general Balkan war. I think that it's to the credit of NATO diplomacy that that situation was not allowed to get worse.

The other issue of course was in Bosnia. While I wouldn't characterize the situation there as unstable, it was certainly fragile. Over the three years I was in Naples I sensed a progression in terms of increased confidence on the part of the ethnic communities in Bosnia toward each other and the BiH government after a series of national and local elections demonstrated that Bosnia-Herzegovina could indeed hang together. In Croatia, another area of concern, the question in 2001 is whether the radical Croat nationalists would "seize" the government legally or provoke a renewal of the conflict with Bosnia. That didn't happen either. I think there it was a case not so much of NATO active diplomacy, although certainly in Zagreb that was very important, but a kind of moral suasion. NATO and the EU combined to tell the Croatians that they had to behave, especially if they were to be accepted in the Partnership for Peace, which they wanted very much, and to gain legitimacy vis-à-vis Belgrade which was looking for any way it could to minimize or humiliate in some cases the elected government in Zagreb. This is the post-Tudjman government. We had close relations with the OSCE mission in Zagreb and kept in close contact with our embassy as well as SFOR, the NATO command in BiH. All of us worked on the government in Zagreb to play it straight and helped it to mature.

Q: I was just thinking that you were blessed with having the Balkans and then those two firm friends Greece and Turkey to deal with. I was consul general in Naples back when Admiral Crowe was CINC and he would roll his eyes when you talked about Greece and Turkey. You know, when you think about the rest of Europe, I mean they settle things in marble halls and do

things in a traditional way. As soon as you move into the Balkans and Greece and Turkey, here you've got people who are kind of allies at each other's throats.

LA PORTA: If I could just finish up with a footnote on the Balkans before going to that other Balkan country, Greece.

Q: I have to point out that I was consul general in Athens and I remarked to somebody, well, you know, Balkan justice referring to the Greeks, is not like the justice in the United States and it was a headline thing in the papers. The American consul general had called Greece a Balkan country.

LA PORTA: Well, you talk about Balkan justice today and CNN had a headline that I saw while eating lunch an hour or so ago, was the assassination of the sports editor of a newspaper, I believe it was in Athens, who apparently was responsible for collecting some evidence on Greek doping scandals during the Olympic games. Balkan justice was meted out to him.

Let me point out one small paradox. If you can believe it, the country that probably showed steady, not always consistent, improvement over the three years I was in Naples and since has, believe it or not, been Albania, as faction-ridden as that country is between the warlords, Sali Berisha and his rivals, and its very low economic base. I used to compare the level of development in Albania with the least developed parts of Indonesia. The Albanians managed to create several governments that did cooperate not only with their neighbors, but also within the coalitions they formed. They began to provide more better government than not.

They put a lot of the worst tendencies beside them, including corruption, and they have begun to do some very useful things militarily. They allowed NATO and U.S. forces to use Albania for training exercises en route to Iraq and Afghanistan. They have been extremely responsible in the kinds of diplomacy that they pursued in the region, including the tripartite relationship between Croatia, Albania and Macedonia, in trying to get more responsible governments together to look at issues of border security, transnational crime and a few other things. In a funny kind of way, Albania which during the decade of the '90s was driven by two periods of severe inter-ethnic conflict, they now are beginning to show signs of being respectable. Remarkable.

Q: I take it Slovenia was a rather benign spot, was it?

LA PORTA: Slovenia was benign, but they also took pains until about the middle of last year not to involve themselves very much in the former Yugoslavia, as the people who considered themselves the most Western, closest to Italy and sophisticated. That is how they viewed themselves, calling Slovenia the Alps of Southern Europe and looking northward and westward as opposed to southward. The place where they have recently come into trouble with some of their neighbors has been the revival of some territorially inconsequential border issues with Croatia. I don't know why, and I'm not an expert in this area, it was pandering to some domestic hardline sentiment or just simply out of spite that they decided to revive some of these arguments, but it seems to me that if NATO and the EU combined to sit the two down, lock them in a room and come out with an agreement that will be binding to settle these minor disputes, they could probably do it.

End of reader