

The US-NATO Plan for Macedonia: Keep Serbia Down and Russia Out

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The role of the United States in the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is often overlooked by people who are critical of Washington's intervention in the internal affairs of independent, sovereign countries.

For it was in the former Yugoslavia that the precedent was set for future American intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo provided the launch pad for the West's concept of humanitarian intervention, which, in reality, is a pretext for safeguarding and enhancing US global hegemony.

However, intervention by Washington in the Balkans in the 1990s served a more immediate objective for the Americans. While Otto von Bismarck, the legendary first Chancellor of Germany, scoffed at the notion of intervening in the Balkans, having said that the region is "not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier," the US took a decidedly different view on the matter.

For Washington, helping to break up Yugoslavia would not only create client states for the US but would also, at best, keep Russia out of the Balkans, or, at worst, limit Russian influence in the region (historically, Russia has close connections there based on pan-Slavism and the Orthodox faith). An American presence in the Balkans would also allow US policy-makers to project American power beyond the region, as Camp Bondsteel, in Kosovo, has been helping to do for nearly twenty years now. Incidentally, it is one of the largest overseas US military bases in the world, hosting up to seven thousand soldiers and an array of military equipment.

Today, Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo are American client states. But the process of Washington colonizing the Balkans is not yet complete. Standing in the way of the US achieving full mastery over the region are Serbia and Russia.

Throughout its history, Serbia has resisted foreign occupiers, from the Ottoman Empire to the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the German Empire to the Third Reich. However, since the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic, in 2000, in an election which the Americans played a decisive role in, Serbia has begun to be colonized by the US. Today, there are NATO supervisory offices in key Serbian institutions, from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the judiciary to the civil service. The former is all the more ironic and humiliating for Serbs given that NATO representatives sit in the very building that NATO partly destroyed during its bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999.

Further to that, to weaken Serbia and ensure that it does not resist the diktats of

Washington, the US encouraged and recognized Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, as well as having instigated and overseen the fraudulent independence referendum result in Montenegro in 2006. As a consequence of both illegal actions, Belgrade lost control of Kosovo and Montenegro, reducing Serbia in size and in clout.

But despite Washington's penetration of Serbia, assisted by the European Union, and accelerated under the current prime minister, Alexander Vucic, more and more ordinary Serbs are coming to realize the tremendously damaging effects of American influence in their country – politically, economically, militarily and socially – and thus anti-Western sentiment in Serbia is now widespread.

Buoyed by its emphatic return to the international arena, and by its foreign policy successes in the Crimea and in Syria, Russia has begun to show increasing interest in the Balkans. Moscow understands the geostrategic importance of the Balkans for Russian national security and, like Tsarist Russia is starting to capitalize on pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia, Montenegro, the Republika Srpska (the Serb entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Macedonia. And it is Macedonia that today the US regards as constituting an effective means of keeping the Americans in the Balkans, the Serbs down in the Balkans and the Russians out of the Balkans.

Washington, which is actively seeking both NATO and EU membership for Macedonia, is acutely aware that political, economic and cultural relations between Russia and Macedonia have been steadily progressing in recent years, demonstrated by the construction of the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church in Skopje, in 2015. That groundbreaking event was presided over by Archbishop Stefan, the head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, who also blessed the site.

While Macedonia has been independent for 26 years now, it is a very fragile country, and this is due in large part to its restless Albanian community, which makes up a quarter of Macedonian's population. Enter the US.

Since the US bombed Serbia in support of the Kosovo Liberation Army, an ethnic Albanian terrorist organization with powerful links to organized crime, Washington has cultivated an extremely strong relationship with Albanians in the Balkans – in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia. US pre-eminence in the region rests, to a large extent, on the fervent support it receives from Albanians there (indeed, Albanians are one of the staunchest supporters of America in the world). It is a mutually beneficial relationship, too, as the Albanian goal of wresting Kosovo away from Serbia has been realized, due to the NATO bombing of Serbia and the subsequent withdrawal by Belgrade of its army and police from the Serbian province, while the immense political power which ethnic Albanians in Macedonia today wield, is due to the Ohrid Agreement which NATO imposed on Skopje in 2001, following an Albanian terrorist campaign in the country.

Under American patronage, the foundations for a Greater Albania have begun to take shape. And the areas which fall under a Greater Albania include Kosovo, parts of Macedonia, such as Tetovo, the Presevo Valley in Serbia, and parts of Montenegro, such as Malesia.

With historic ties between Serbia and Macedonia (pan-Slavism, the Orthodox faith and a wariness of Albanian territorial ambitions in the Balkans), and developing ties between Russia and Macedonia, and with anti-Western sentiment rapidly increasing in Serbia, and

with a resurgent Russian on the international stage, the US has begun to take action to preserve its dominance in the Balkans. And by what means? By playing its trump card in the region: the Albanians.

Currently, in Macedonia, there is an internal crisis, in which the two opposing sides are the Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov and the leader of the opposition Zoran Zaev, who is backed by ethnic Albanian political parties. Mr. Ivanov will not grant permission to Mr. Zaev to form a government, rightly fearing that Albanian secessionists in Macedonia will take advantage of this and sever links with Skopje in pursuit of a Greater Albania.

Outside proponents of a Greater Albania have clearly demonstrated their involvement in the crisis in Macedonia. The self-proclaimed president of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, has called on ethnic Albanians in Macedonia to “take the destiny of their rights into their own hands.”

Responding to the crisis in Macedonia, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has accused the US and EU of interfering in the internal affairs of the country and of supporting “the Greater Albania project which includes vast areas in a number of Balkan states.”

By Washington playing the Albanian card in Macedonia, the country could cease to exist or could be reduced significantly in size, thus limiting any future Russian presence there. The Albanian-dominated parts of Macedonia could unify under a single entity and replicate what Kosovo did: become de facto independent and then one day unilaterally declares itself independent. That would also serve as a warning to Serbia: namely, if the Serbs continue with their current anti-Western sentiments, then Greater Albania could extend into Serbia, by the Americans encouraging and arming secessionists in the Presevo Valley, which could reduce the country even further in size.

Despite there being a new US administration, there is very little chance of President Donald Trump changing Washington’s policy in the Balkans and abandoning the Albanians there. Indeed, Mr. Trump demonstrated his full support to Kosovo this February when he sent a message to the self-proclaimed Kosovan President Thaci (a man with historical links to organized crime) congratulating Kosovo on its so-called independence.

In the letter, the US President wrote that: “On behalf of the United States, I am pleased to congratulate the people of Kosovo on your independence day on February 17. The partnership between our countries is based on shared values and common interests. A sovereign, multi-ethnic, democratic Kosovo’s future lies in a stable and prosperous Balkan region that is fully integrated into the international community...We look forward to continuing our broad and deep cooperation.

Mr Trump, who, like Thaci, has links to organized crime, is not going to relinquish America’s hold on the Balkans, for continued American dominance of the region will help to achieve the US President’s goal of ensuring American global power remains preeminent, together with his pledge to increase the already bloated US defense budget and to make the American nuclear arsenal the largest in the world.

Macedonia is the country where Washington’s determination to remain dominant in the Balkans is beginning to play out in. The American-Albanian alliance is a lethal one for the security and stability of that historically volatile region. Yet, for the Americans and the Albanians, it is a win-win situation. With the help of the Albanians, the US will remain the leading outside power in the Balkans. And with the help of the Americans, the Albanian goal

of realizing a Greater Albania will take another leap forward.

President Trump is starting to play Washington's trump card - the Albanians - in Macedonia. Making "America great again" is beginning to take on another dimension.

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