

KOSOVO AND KURDISTAN:

TWO PAWNS AT THE SERVICES OF THE USA FOREIGN POLICY

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The USA foreign policy is undoubtedly playing a predominant role in the formation of balance of power in the Balkans and the Middle East. Kosovo and Kurdistan are two most vivid examples of the USA interference in the regional security.

For many, Kosovo and Kurdistan are considered organised projects of Washington in order to control energy reserves and pipelines in Middle East and Balkans, respectively. The collapse of the Soviet Union changed dramatically the balance of power and revealed new territories in the geopolitical map; the absence of balance created new geopolitical priorities and needs on the complex map of global security and energy: Central Asia, Caucasus, Black Sea, Balkans increased their geostrategical importance, either as producers of vast energy resources or as transporters of energy via pipelines.

In the case of Kosovo and Kurdistan, Washington has been using a policy of "double standards". On the one side, Washington promoted the full independence solution to Kosovo, moving to the sidelines and securing the viability of new small state of Kosovars. The United States have built a huge military base, Camp Bondsteel, in Kosovo, covering 360,000 sq.m.¹ On the other side, there are some 30 million Kurds still without a country.

Eventually, Kosovo's existence is proven to play a strategic role on the security of planned oil pipeline AMBO (Bulgaria-FYROM-Albania) that aims to reduce energy dependence of Europe from Russia. According to the Guardian "the project is necessary, according to a paper published by the US Trade and Development Agency... because the oil coming from the Caspian Sea will quickly surpass the safe capacity of the Bosphorus as a shipping lane".²

Looking back in time, the countdown for Kosovo's independence began in 1999 during the presidency of Bill Clinton and the bombing of Serbia by NATO. The target of Washington's strategy was the former President of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic. The official reason for the NATO bombings was the ethnic cleansing

¹ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/camp-bondsteel.htm>

² <http://www.commondreams.org/views01/0215-05.htm>

against Albanian-Kosovars by the Yugoslav national army and the paramilitary units. The pretext has been given and the unfinished business left from the Yugoslav's civil war in the 1990s was finally settled. Working closely together, "in 1998 and 1999, the United States and its NATO allies engaged in collective action to end escalating violence in Kosovo".³ Finally, the offspring of the US diplomacy, Kosovo declared unilateral independence on 17 February 2008 ignoring the risk to strengthen separatist movements in the entire world. There were fears that Kosovo example could be used as a precedent for other territorial disputes, but the U.N., the USA, and some European officials contended that Kosovo's situation is unique.⁴

Recently, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) declared that Kosovo's independence complies with international law. Kosovo's independence has been recognised 69 countries - USA and 22 of the 27 member- states of European Union. The ruling of ICJ is non- binding. In contrast, Russia, China, Brazil, India and several states of the EU have denied to accept Kosovo's new status. The major concern is whether the flood of Balkanisation may lead to new separatism movements and recognitions after the International Court of Justice decision; however a possibility like this is not remote.⁵

On the other side, Washington maintains Kurdistan as part of Iraqi sovereignty, giving Kurds self-autonomy through Kurdistan Regional Government. The control of oil reserves in Iraq have been one of main reasons for USA military intervention on March 2003.⁶ The alleged possession of weapons mass destruction (WMD) by Saddam proved a groundless accusation. The Kurdistan Regional Government's Representative to the USA, Qubad J. Talabani has underlined "Americans should be proud of where Iraqi Kurdistan is today. He further lauded the Obama Administration's decision to deepen and broaden relations with the Kurdistan Region through opening a consulate in Erbil, the capital of the Region".⁷

The creation of independent Kurdistan is viewed as a major threat especially by Turkey and the neighbouring states of Iraq: the Iran and Syria. The hot topic is the big numbers of Kurds population who the above states have within their borders and the fear of Kurdish uprising in order to create a Greater Kurdistan. So far, there are no immediate plans for granting autonomy to the nation of the Kurds. In contrast to the case of the Kosovo where the international community created out of thin air a nation of 1.8 million people, the possibility of redrawing the borders of Middle East seems possible (for the moment at least) only if the Kurdish populations revolt; one has to

³ CRS Report for Congress, "Kosovo and U.S. Policy: Background to Independence", June 2008, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL31053.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/kv/c24701.htm>

⁵ http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2010/07/icj_ruling_kosovo

⁶ Irene Gendzier Oil, Iraq and US foreign policy in the Middle East, Situation Analysis, Issue 2 Spring 2003, <http://manghani.free.fr/sa/issue2/gendzier.pdf>

⁷ http://pr-usa.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=483635&Itemid=29

bear in mind that there are some 27 - 36 million Kurds living in neighbouring regions in the Middle East.⁸

The cases of Kosovo and Kurdistan are a good example of how the powerful centres of power can influence the international balance of power in crucial geopolitical issues with regional consequences. It also shows that the balance still leans westbound, as the East still lacks clear strategic vision. Nonetheless, beyond the statements of officials in the mass media in order to influence public opinion (regarding spreading of democracy, protecting the weak etc), for those who know, the US priorities have been always clear and, in a way, honest: The reinforcement of their national interests and the vital access to energy sources.

The president of US Barack Obama have initially pledged for return to traditional diplomacy from the neo-conservative “military diplomacy” of the Bush government. But, in reality, the war in Afghanistan has evolved into a full military engagement by the American coalition against the Taliban. In addition, Washington maintains an aggressive rhetoric towards Iran and the option of a military strike against Tehran is possible if diplomacy be unsuccessful.

⁸ Ralph Peters, Blood borders , How a better Middle East would look, *Armed Forces Journal*, June 2006 <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/06/1833899>