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Intelligence and Balkan Instability: Repeating the Past or Moving in a New Direction?

Over the centuries intelligence has been a key instrument of statecraft. But intelligence information can be a double-edged sword. If correctly analyzed and applied, it may show leaders how to avoid calamities and arrive at

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optimal decisions. In some cases, it can avert a fight and provide the ground for compromise. But when misused and manipulated to advance political aims and preconceptions, it can lead to irreparable disaster and long-term suffering.

Therefore, leaders and practitioners must be vigilant, especially since, by nature, intelligence attempts to crystal gaze the unknown, an exercise fraught with risks of the unexpected. Currently, decisionmakers and intelligence assessors face the added test of data overload due to the deluge of information from electronic classified surveillance and the monitoring of myriad open sources. Finished intelligence products are only as good as those who make the final operational decisions after weighing the uncertainties and warnings provided by intelligence collectors and analysts.

The intelligence analyst thus approaches the Balkans, a theater pregnant with instability and a permanent risk of war, with great trepidation. More than two decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the savage ethnic conflicts thereby provoked, the Balkans are again on the cusp of reignited ethnic hatreds and religious conflicts. While the eastern part of the peninsula (namely, Bulgaria and Romania) remains relatively quiet—if the illegal immigration crisis that began in summer 2015 and particularly affected Bulgaria is overlooked—the “Balkan East” is no imminent cause of concern. Not so with “Balkan West,” a region in great distress containing Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro.¹ Meanwhile, Greece, to the south, has earned the dubious distinction of “stability” as both a semi-collapsed, reduced-sovereignty state and an unofficial protectorate of the European Union (EU) and its creditor lobbies.²

The tortuous history of the Balkans as a hotbed of repeated crises has been told often enough to eliminate the need of detailing it here. Instead, the goal is to analyze the current resurgence of potential Balkan war against the backdrop of events, both recent and more distant, in briefly answering questions that may provide the impetus for developing a rational, accurate and, above all, predictive Balkan political intelligence scheme for today:

- a. What makes Western views of Balkan disorder historically “special” as Westerners try to comprehend the causes of irresolvable cyclical instability and violence in the “soft underbelly of Europe?”
- b. Why do the Europeans continue to so miserably fail to address the Balkan crisis in their own backyard?
- c. Why won’t today’s Balkans fit into the tested models of crisis management familiar to Western intelligence analysts and strategic specialists?

PREDICTABILITY VS. PROBABILITY

Though intelligence analysts strive for predictability they are always obliged to work on probability. In the case of the Balkans, situational assessments

possess the “luxury” of predicting the worst with a high degree of probability. The Balkan West condition is characterized by strong permanent elements guaranteed to produce conflict provided the right mix of triggering elements develops. During the past two decades Balkan West “stability” has been maintained largely due to American efforts at mobilizing European initiatives in the area. But these American exertions have failed mainly because the “EU has muddled through in the region without the sufficient political will needed to transform it. The Western Balkans has never been a priority for the EU in comparison with other EU problems such as the Euro-crisis.”³ Twenty years’ worth of EU and American promises have cultivated expectations in Balkan West which cannot be met. This state of affairs is a strong predictor of conflict as popular dissatisfaction and frustration are funneled back into ethnic strife, religious hatred, social isolation, economic malaise, and political impasse.

In light of all this, the intelligence analyst, charged with providing “prediction,” faces a challenge. Should an alarm be raised or held back because the analyst might feel that his/her apprehension might be perceived as weak? After all, analysts may be conditioned by years of inaction “from above,” prompted by the hybrid period of Balkan West “stability,” to adopt a routine which makes easier the overlooking of sensitive indicators of impending trouble. Nobody would blame an analyst for being cautious, at least among colleagues, for not trying to be a prophet and, in the process, providing stylized “safe” products but little or no prediction. Routinization weakens analytical sensitivity and, in turn, may provide a false sense of security to those charged with final decisionmaking.

With both media and academic pundits delivering apprehensive stories of the “coming Balkan war,” intelligence analysts must cope with higher-ups who have come to dislike unpopular viewpoints. Iraq, Afghanistan, and, more recently, Syria have rattled Western societies and reduced the political acceptance of direct intervention. Trying to convince the various national leaderships of the need for immediate concerted Balkan action could run into resistance because of the political cost involved in launching yet another preemptive “humanitarian” mission in an area which public opinion majorities in the West consider beyond hope. Yet, Russia’s meddling and, more recently, that of Turkey’s in the Balkans should be strong inducements for Western political leaders to start thinking again about a Balkan imbroglio. Still, with Europe in various states of turmoil, and the United States in transition to a new international relations narrative, acting on intelligence warnings may be hesitant, at best.

CONCEPTUALIZING HISTORICAL CONFLICT

In her groundbreaking cultural and social study of (former) Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Dame Rebecca West admitted in her Prologue that “Violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans: all I knew of the South Slavs.”⁴ Attempting to learn about the Balkans, West continued, was a messy, imprecise job, searching through a “jungle of pamphlets” and “the dustiest corners of junk-shops,” and also learning “from the prejudices of the French, who use the word “*Balkan*’ as a term of abuse, meaning a *rastaquouère* type of barbarian.”⁵ While learning about the Balkans has eased considerably since the publication of West’s volume, her perspective is still relevant. Many outsiders attempting today to “rationalize” the Balkans conclude with reason that this appendix of the European continent is submerged in irreversible permanent chaos—at times “controlled” and at times far beyond any limits of political reason and levelheadedness.

Balkan history is too complex for the average intelligence analyst to command with confidence. The collapse of Yugoslavia brought to the surface with a passion both this knowledge gap and a host of ahistorical “analyses.” Europeans and Americans, who rushed to stem the deluge, fluctuated in their approaches between two extremes: not-too-veiled indifference (Europe) and sledgehammer interventionism (United States). Rapidly developing events left simply no time to leisurely address the enormous bad blood separating Balkan ethnic communities or the impact of the residual World War II grievances upon the developing conflict.

Thus, the “spray-wipe-done” approach won the day amidst utter confusion and war fighting as the Europeans retreated and the Americans wielded air power in the absence of a better option. The diplomacy that followed the suppression of Serbia, although feted at the time as a singular act of shrewd statesmanship, was anything but. Carving Kosovo out of Serbia, and accepting its unilateral declaration of independence, provided the assured detonator of future trouble.⁶ Similarly, the Dayton Agreement, and the creation of an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina, added another layer of instability, as the new construct failed in every respect of “state building” and exists under permanent threat of another violent spasm.⁷

Having built its hopes on such a dubious post-Yugoslavia past, the West is again staring down the barrel of “the next Balkan wars.”⁸ Failing to historically and politically conceptualize Balkan conflicts produced the only possible outcomes of the West attempting to “manage” the southeast European crisis: outraged local minorities, seething ethnic tensions, unresolved territorial grievances, empowerment of openly criminal godfather regimes as “pillars” of the West, stagnant economies, and attempts by the not-so-united Europe to impose upon the locals numerous

issues that Brussels bureaucratic mandarins find crucial (e.g., legal reforms, gender rights, environmental standards, judiciary organization) but that Balkan societies do not see as priorities, if at all.⁹

To ignore history by arguing against its relevance in modern times is impossible. Even worse, rejecting history as a too troublesome ingredient to inform policies seeking “conflict resolution” is certain to produce a playbook that is flawed, if not downright disastrous.¹⁰ Simmering nationalisms cannot be “managed” with bureaucratic fire extinguishers.

COMPLEXITY, REALITY, PLANNING

Balkan West’s current upheaval has yet again exposed Europe’s inexcusable vagueness on what exactly fuels the re-emergence of South European conflict. Europe (as the EU has grandly come to call itself) continues to treat Balkan West as the land of abstract inducements. The most significant such incentive is the classic promise of eventual EU association if the potential candidate behaves and follows the path of “adjustment” as defined by Brussels. Other bonuses include promises of visa-free travel, inclusion in economic aid programs, “pre-candidacy” talks on educating local bureaucracies, and regular dialogue on how to help necessary reforms (which are expected to also bring economic assistance).

These inducements address neither the complexity of local survival problems, such as unemployment, economic stagnation, poor health care, domestic and cross-border crime, nor past academic discussions of the need for financial aid to buttress the flimsy structures of Balkan West state “wellness.”

While Europe and the United States see pernicious Russian attempts to influence local states (and statelets), both Brussels and Washington continue to deliberate about how to win local support. In the absence of a better signature alternative, and since EU enlargement is on hold, the American option on offer is membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); thus, in Balkan West “NATO has outmuscled Russia.”¹¹ While drawing local elements into the alliance fulfills U.S.-defined strategic objectives, it nevertheless sidesteps complications that could be dangerous and destabilizing. What would happen, for example, were Albania, a NATO member, and FYR Macedonia, a NATO hopeful, to come to blows over a Tirana attempt to push for a “greater Albania?”¹² How would NATO address an Albanian Article 5 invocation of collective defense if full-scale war developed between Albanians and FYR Macedonia’s Slavs? What about Albania’s frequent rekindling of its territorial claims on Greece? What would Greece—a NATO member—be

expected to do in the face of Albanian infiltration aiming at “liberating” territories that Tirana considers “rightfully” to be parts of “greater” Albania?

These questions must be on the table when officials fiddle with NATO membership as a way of ensuring “stability” in one of the world’s most unstable parts. But, as already experienced with Montenegro’s accession to the alliance, “broader” geostrategic targets again trumped local stability concerns. Thus, NATO’s Montenegro today rubs shoulders with its former state partner Serbia, a country harboring deep resentment toward Euro-Atlanticism and NATO’s “humanitarian bombing” during the Yugoslav civil wars.

FAILED STATES

Marko Prelec, commenting on Balkan instability, has noted:

The trouble in the Balkans today is not Russian meddling, though there is some of that, but a special case of the malaise afflicting Eastern Europe: unchecked executive power, erosion of the rule of law, xenophobia directed at neighbours and migrants and pervasive economic insecurity.¹³

Of the six Balkan West countries—Albania, FYR Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro—only Albania and Serbia may claim a measure of borderline stability that allows them to function as states. FYR Macedonia is “faltering Macedonia,” already on its way to serious domestic conflict.¹⁴ Kosovo, independent in name only, lingers in a hybrid protectorate form and “suffers from a crippling array of problems, and bears the hallmarks of a failed state.”¹⁵ Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), more than twenty years after the Dayton Agreement, is also referred to as a failed state.¹⁶ And tiny Montenegro, until recently led by Milo Djukanovic, 2015’s Man of the Year in Organized Crime,¹⁷ is racked by bitter domestic divisions.

While “faltering Macedonia” is the primary focus of international attention,¹⁸ BiH has equally troublesome internal ethnic and religious divisions that threaten the late U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke’s “major diplomatic victory that ended the [Bosnian] conflict and established the foundations of a viable state,”¹⁹ i.e., the Dayton Agreement. Holbrooke’s handiwork emerged from the conscious decision to essentially ignore the unbridgeable rivalries separating Bosnia’s warring factions and the imposition of a “technocratic” arrangement complete with ineffective international overseers that all parties involved either resented or rejected outright, not to mention a NATO “stabilization” contingent that was eventually supplemented by a European Union Force.

Holbrooke’s labyrinthine arrangements bypassed the source of trouble: Bosniaks demanding a unitary sovereign state, and Bosnian Croats and

Bosnian Serbs demanding unification with their respective fatherlands. Bypassing something, however, does little to correct or defeat it. For more than two decades BiH has been buried under billions of dollars and euros in aid money,²⁰ but crippling unemployment, corruption, poverty, and a depressed economy form the net result.²¹ And, as early as 2009, scholarly observers had already begun to predict “The Death of Dayton,” although “On a per capita basis, the reconstruction of Bosnia—with less than four million citizens—made the post-World War II rebuilding of Germany and Japan look modest.”²²

BiH, as an example of unmitigated failure of democratic “state building” experiments, is the perfect model (or the perfect nightmare) for intelligence analysts struggling to make sense of the Balkan condition. Seeking to produce advice on how to avert another war, analysts will constantly run into the failed state conundrum. Inevitably, any new analysis will necessitate re-introducing the conditions which Holbrooke’s “major diplomatic victory” set aside in favor of a confusing multi-centered mechanistic state model.

Ethnic and religious conflict won’t “behave” (meaning end or moderate) by extending, or attempting to impose, upon troubled lands Western concepts of modern statehood. Instead, Western politicians, and their respective intelligence communities, need to adjust themselves to the alleged “primitiveness” of the locals and create analytical models that make this aspect and its impact on dialogue and compromise their core point of departure. Only then could working concessions be fashioned by abandoning the didactic tendency of outsiders and their insistence on ostensibly “universal values” and other such furniture of the neoliberal exegesis as foundations of “state building.”

TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME

Perhaps the gravest failure of outside “democracy builders” in the Balkans, both European and American, was discounting or even ignoring the certainty of terrorism and organized crime taking root in the new “states” created in the aftermath of the “humanitarian bombing” of Serbia.

Against the backdrop of an unprecedented demonization of Serbia by the mainstream press in Europe and the U.S., and the bombing campaign that followed, the creation of Kosovo brought into life a criminal construct that specializes in arms and narcotics smuggling under the direction of Hashim “the Snake” Thaci. A notorious former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) leader who, among others, was accused of running a criminal network smuggling human organs in addition to weapons and drugs,²³ Thaci is now President of Kosovo with an Interpol arrest warrant for war crimes still pending against him.²⁴ He and his criminal confederates are

trying to stop a joint EU–U.S. initiative to launch “a special court to undertake prosecutions stemming from allegations that Thaçi and other commanders and soldiers of the Kosovo Albanian insurgency—the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)—were involved in about 400 cases of kidnapping, forced displacement, illegal imprisonment, and murder after NATO’s bombing of Serbia in 1999.”²⁵

The Thaci case is only one example of the deliberate misrepresentation of the facts by the EU and the U.S. in pushing for the secession of Kosovo from Serbia. In a preamble to the NATO bombing campaign, high- and low-level officials in Western capitals miraculously discovered that Kosovo was the site of a “genocide” against Albanians. Great Britain’s then–Prime Minister Tony Blair, among others, declared that Slobodan Milosevic’s Yugoslavia was “set on a Hitler-style genocide equivalent to the extermination of the Jews in World War Two” against Kosovar Albanians. However, hearings before the International Criminal Court during the subsequent trial of Milosevic for war crimes gave the opportunity to over one hundred prosecution witnesses to reject the allegations of genocide leveled against the accused Serbian strongman.²⁶

Eventually, the genocide claim was exposed as “fake news,” to use the recent term of choice, but its purpose had been achieved.²⁷ According to James Bisset, Canada’s former ambassador to Yugoslavia,

The NATO intervention, ostensibly for humanitarian reasons, ended up creating a human rights catastrophe. In every respect it has been a disaster We have shown ourselves to be no better than our former communist adversaries—quite prepared to use violence and force to gain our ends. Prepared as well to wrap these ends in the cloak of high purpose and humanitarian principle.²⁸

NATO’s “humanitarian” intervention not only encouraged the rise of organized criminals as “leaders” in both Kosovo and BiH, it paved the way for increased Islamic *jihadi* involvement in both of these new states. FYR Macedonia completes the trio, with violent Albanian ethno-religious agitation again threatening its stability and long-term survival.

The West’s partiality toward the Muslims during the disintegration of Yugoslavia sent the wrong signals to both local elements sympathetic to Islamism and outside Islamist powers. The sluggish regional economy that shows no signs of recovering,²⁹ and increasing evidence of Iranian³⁰ and Turkish³¹ penetration of Balkan West, have provoked increased fear of expanding Islamist influence and activities in these unstable areas. These concerns are compounded by the spreading influence of Islamic State as it adjusts to territorial losses elsewhere by increasing the flow of jihadi fighters back into Europe³² and substantially expanding its information

warfare activities.³³ Neither the EU nor the U.S. has so far found effective countermeasures to this expanding Islamist threat, a situation not expected to change anytime soon.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

In an ideal world, rethinking the intelligence approach to Balkan instability would require intellectual and political leaps of faith that may be almost impossible in today's "real world." Since the present methods of estimating the course of Balkan events appear locked in a bunker-mentality of preconceived notions, a return to established themes of how the Balkans have historically evolved should be adopted. At this point an elaboration on the questions posed earlier is warranted.

What Makes Their Views of Balkan Disorder Historically "Special" as Westerners Try to Comprehend the Causes of Irresolvable Cyclical Instability and Violence in the "Soft Underbelly of Europe"?

Balkan violence throughout the 20th century was treated as peripheral to the geopolitical interests of the Great Powers. Before 1914 European capitals focused mainly on attempts to exert raw political influence upon the newly independent Balkan states that were emerging from the retreat of the Ottoman Turks. The Balkans possessed little appeal as an economic territory, the peninsula's geographic location being its only noteworthy asset in Great Power calculations.

The Austro-Hungarian empire, which administered Bosnia-Herzegovina, looked down on the Serbs as semi-barbarians waiting to be taught a lesson for fomenting ethnic separatist troubles. This spirit of condescension and imperial hubris led Vienna to declare war on Serbia after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Igniting World War I remains the most prominent, if unenviable, global distinction of the Balkans in the 20th century.

This tendency to keep the Balkans at arm's length, despite the peninsula's geostrategic importance, has been attributed to a variety of reasons: fatigue with the tribalism of Balkan conflicts; Western cultural aversion toward "primitive" Balkan societies; an almost instinctive dislike of recognizing the importance of religious politics in Balkan affairs; and an overall Western frustration with the region that has led to the unique term "Balkanize" entering dictionaries in all major European languages.

The image of the Balkans as a cauldron of tribal chaos resurfaced with the breakup of Yugoslavia. Little evidence suggests that the European powers and the U.S. of the 1990s possessed, or sought to develop, a more sophisticated and nuanced picture of the Balkan situation.³⁴ Yugoslavia's

success as a multi-ethnic state, offering benefits unknown to the then Soviet-tethered “socialist” countries, and cherished by the majority of Yugoslavia’s citizens, went largely unnoticed in the flurry of “expertise” that attributed all the post-Tito country’s breakup troubles to social, cultural, and religious baggage that goes back centuries. This “ahistorical way of thinking,” noted Vedran Kuljanin, “dismisses the [Balkan] people as genetically, in a political sense, inferior to the Western world” and ultimately makes Westerners “unable to fathom that such a war-torn region was once a thriving part of the world.”³⁵ Hence, the perennial Western confusion with what to do next with “those Balkan troublemakers.”

Why Do the Europeans Continue to Fail so Miserably to Address the Balkan Crisis in Their Own Backyard?

When in March 2017 Federica Mogherini, the EU’s foreign policy chief, addressed the Serbian parliament she was booed and confronted by posters reading “Serbia doesn’t trust Brussels.”³⁶ Mogherini brushed aside these less than welcoming expressions of Serbian ire and, as expected, focused on the positive actions which, according to Brussels, were bringing Serbia closer to EU membership negotiations.

Few in or out of the Balkans expect EU officialdom to accept publicly that membership in the European Union, as an ultimate national goal, has lost its luster among many in the Balkans. Following the illegal immigrant crisis of 2015–2017, Britain’s vote to leave the EU (Brexit), and the rise of Euroskepticism across the Continent, the *Financial Times* reported that “countries in the [Balkan] region no longer believe the EU can offer a serious prospect of membership, leaving the bloc’s credibility severely dented.”³⁷

The status of Greece, the pariah Eurozone country and a debtor’s prison victim under Germany’s brutal creditor demands, has not gone unnoticed in other Balkan countries. The illegal immigrant crisis has also demonstrated how weak and divided are EU members in a major crisis, another less than positive highlight of the implementation “more Europe” as a final objective for both EU members and those aspiring to join them. Greece’s neighbors rushed to seal their borders, ultimately with the EU’s blessing, in order to stop the flow of the uninvited from reaching the rich European North. Turning Greece into an unwilling holding camp for these flows, and thus saddling Athens with insurmountable problems, further chilled those in the Balkans watching the ease and utter apathy with which “central power” EU members shackled Greece with the holding facility role. Those EU countries which resisted illegal immigration—particularly Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic—were quickly ostracized by the EU’s leadership.

Eurocrats, and other leading Western European politicians, are unprepared and unwilling to understand and accept the social attitudes in countries, such as those in the Balkans, which reject the globalized model of admitting large groups of alien religionist foreigners under the idealized push for a “multicultural” society. The EU’s high command insists on “integration” and co-existence based on “universal values,” which are neither universal nor self-evident outside the glass bubbles occupied by Western European political elites. That the attitude of these elites, obviously hailing the prospect of half the populations of the Middle East and Africa, not to mention Southwest Asia, attempting to cross into Europe in the next thirty years to establish residence and “rights” without any legal or other “fundamental” basis for sustaining such claims, strikes the “less developed” Balkans as self-defeating folly is no surprise.

Western European politicians also express worries of increasing Russian influence in the Balkans. These worries emerge from a mono-dimensional “strategic” rationale mixing Cold War thinking and post-Soviet muddle on how to deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s alleged “imperial expansion” plans. Western European analysts construct complex narratives on how Russian influence could “destabilize” the Balkans; yet few, if any, of them care to develop a comprehensive analysis on why substantial Balkan majorities are committed to Russia as their only external source of help in a world of increasingly real threats. Without such analysis, the Eurocrats are unlikely to be able to fashion convincing counter-arguments to limit the Russian “threat” in the Balkans. Furthermore, the Eurocrats have proved over the years that they reject the right of “insubstantial” countries to choose as friends those who do not populate the approved list held in Brussels. Meantime, Russia is continuing to build political bridges in Serbia and elsewhere, thus feeding Western worries about Moscow “regaining sway in the Balkans.”³⁸

Why Won't Today's Balkans Fit the Tested Models of Crisis Management Familiar to Western Intelligence Analysts and Strategic Specialists?

Intelligence, like any other craft, develops “habits” over time. The application of tested hypotheses to crisis management is accepted as the first step in interpreting the dynamics of a newly developing situation. As Balkans West again veers toward turbulence, the likely tendency is to review methods and interpretations developed in the 1990s during Yugoslavia’s breakup. And while the old adage that “the more things change, the more they remain the same” may occasionally be true, the current crunch requires a substantial adjustment in the knowledge about

the Balkans acquired over time through harsh experience but then largely shelved thanks to such “miracles” as the Dayton Accords.

The Balkan tendency toward violent spasms remains unaltered, yet broader external trends having a critical influence over the region are rapidly changing. Contrary to claims from Brussels, the EU is losing its grip. Surrounded by billowing popular dissatisfaction over the Continental economy, pressured by its own fatal errors on illegal immigration, with the resulting harsh rift between the “core” wealthier states and those on what is contemptuously described as “the periphery” widening by the day, the EU is wobbling in uncertainty.

As Germany continues its monomaniacal insistence on “integration” its refusal to accept a federal—meaning EU—budget is a self-inflicted wound that has created the logjam Berlin supposedly wants to avoid. The United States under President Donald Trump, still largely adulated in Albania, Kosovo, and among Bosnian Moslems, but less so elsewhere in the world, faces multiple internal and external challenges, and is growing distant from Southeast Europe. Seeing an opening, Russia has escalated its efforts to influence forces that are sympathetic to Moscow for historical, ethnic, and religious reasons. Russian inroads will continue as Western policy presses ahead with establishing (tenuous) control over local satraps, who ironically are “trusted” to promote “democratic stability” in their domains and deliver their territories as parts of Euro-Atlanticism.

Under the circumstances, the “wisdom” gained in the 1990s is of limited help in trying to assess the current situation. And local Balkan strongmen, sensing the West’s political and strategic weaknesses and inattention to their domains, are escalating their efforts to gain and secure power by sidelining or eliminating the opposition, thus again defeating “democratic politics.” Such pressures contribute toward the expansion of political and religious “radicalization,” the current Class A bogeyman in every Western intelligence analyst’s casebook, with all of its ramifications for stability and peaceful politics.

Against this backdrop, Western intelligence needs to re-invent its Balkan West wisdom, although the use of this term sounds incongruous when reminiscing about the 1990s. The iconoclastic beginning of such a reassessment project would be to downgrade the “incentive” of eventual EU membership as a primary tool of stabilizing the Balkan situation. Yet, such a proposition would raise the hackles of European traditionalists pushing for “more Europe” at a time when calls for the dismantling of the European project, in its present form, are increasing. With the EU enlargement experiment riding dead in the water, and with miniscule hopes of the experiment being resurrected, continuing to tout the “stability” offered by a rapidly dis-uniting Europe may be counterintuitive.³⁹ As an alternative, the prospect of the EU27 (i.e., the EU minus the

United Kingdom) developing into something like “an airline loyalty programme with different levels of membership”⁴⁰ could be a possible starting point for “thinking outside the box” about how to build a secure link between the Balkans and the rest of Europe.

Other changes to conventional 1990s wisdom should include the recognition that trying to satisfy Islam in the Balkans, in the name of a “balanced approach,” is a dangerously mistaken political assumption; that insisting on a non-negotiable acceptance by local societies of social myths cherished by the West is counterproductive; that forgetting and forgiving the unpaid debts of World War II is the correct way to move forward; and that tolerating and not confronting war criminals as national leaders is the inevitable price of “stability.”

THE DAWN OF DARKNESS

Gregory Treverton has called intelligence the craft of solving puzzles, mysteries, and complexities.⁴¹ The Balkans offer all three in abundance. Outside forces are at work, sometimes quite openly, in efforts to co-opt dissatisfied domestic non-state entities. They manipulate them to create threats to incumbent political leaders, then later profess that they are the saviors of central government power, thereby securing a manipulation advantage to pursue their own politico-strategic aims. These complex transactions result in “wicked problems [that] are ill-defined, ambiguous and associated with strong moral, political and professional issues.”⁴²

The formation of predictive formulas for anticipated renewed Balkan turbulence that could lead to warfare is conditioned by the inability of accepted Western intervention strategies to cajole local elements into acting “constructively.” More than two decades after Dayton, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo are still without strong and effective central governments despite enormous amounts of Western aid and massive international security forces sent in to keep the peace.⁴³

In the current global environment, Balkans West may descend into war with no immediate possibility of Western “peacemaking” military intervention. With the United States busy elsewhere, and with the Europeans struggling to bring order to their increasingly disunited European “union,” the risk of a rapidly expanding conflagration in Bosnia and FYR Macedonia is real. Firefighting in such a case will be limited to the usual semi-paralyzed diplomatic deliberations serving the public relations need for Europe to do “something” by saying “something.”

Russia is biding its time while the West, having been burned by its expensive “democracy building” experiments, ponders, deliberates, prognosticates, and quietly pulls away from the cauldron. With no effective anchor points in political and economic development, only a

borderline civic society, and ancient grievances that are still alive and boiling, the Balkan future is darkening by the day.

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- ⁷ Bosnia has “defied one of the most intensive, multilateral nation-building efforts ever attempted,” in Edward P. Joseph, “Europe’s Balkan Failure,” *Foreign Policy*, 14 May 2009, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/05/14/europes-balkan-failure/>. The Dayton architects were well aware of Bosnia’s inherent dysfunctions. But they felt they had a quick fix solution able to control the potential for conflict. What followed proved them predictably wrong.
- ⁸ Timothy Less, “The Next Balkan Wars,” *The New Statesman*, 6 June 2016, <http://www.newstatesman.com/world/2016/06/next-balkan-wars>
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ On this crucial point of forming a historically rational strategy before choosing intervention see, for example, Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
- ¹¹ “In the Balkans, NATO has Outmuscled Russia,” *The Economist*, 11 December 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21683967-montenegros-accession-fills-one-few-remaining-gaps-western-alliance>. As a military alliance, NATO offers, however, only non-performing investment.
- ¹² Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama has a clearly stated goal: “The unification of Albanians in Albania and Kosovo, Albanians that live in two Albanian countries, is unavoidable and unquestionable. The question is how it will happen.” The EU immediately labeled this statement “provocative” and “not acceptable”; Andrew

- Rettman and Ekrem Krasniqi, "EU says Albania Comment on Kosovo Unification 'not Acceptable,'" *EUobserver*, 9 April 2017, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/128273>
- ¹³ Marko Prelec, "New Balkan Turbulence Challenges Europe," *Express*, 28 April 2017, <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/en/news/new-balkan-turbulence-challenges-europe-172488/>
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Aidan Hehir, "How the West Built a Failed State in Kosovo," *The National Interest*, 31 August 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-the-west-built-failed-state-kosovo-17539>
- ¹⁶ Mirela Zarichinova, "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Twenty Years on from Dayton," *openDemocracy*, 5 October 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/mirela-zarichinova/bosnia-and-herzegovina-twenty-years-on-from-dayton>
- ¹⁷ Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, <https://www.occrp.org/personoftheyear/2015/>; see, also, Theodore Karasik, "Senate Should Fix NATO's Montenegro Problem," *The Hill*, 24 July 2016, <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/288896-senate-should-fix-natos-montenegro-problem>
- ¹⁸ At the time of writing, May–June 2017.
- ¹⁹ James Lyon, "Is War About to Break Out in the Balkans?" *Foreign Policy*, 26 October 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/26/war-break-out-balkans-bosnia-republika-srpska-dayton/>
- ²⁰ "It has been calculated that BiH has received more per capita aid than any European country under the Marshall Plan"; see Lana Pasic, "Bosnia's Vast Foreign Financial Assistance Re-Examined: Statistics and Results," *Balkananalysis.com*, undated at <http://www.balkananalysis.com/bosnia/2011/06/21/bosnia%E2%80%99s-vast-foreign-financial-assistance-re-examined-statistics-and-results/>
- ²¹ BiH's economy has been subject to exhaustive "analyzing" with little concrete corrective effect. Despite recommendations galore little, if anything, can be implemented given BiH's domestic tensions; for a "balanced" analysis see, for example, Ellen Goldstein, Simon Davies, and Wolfgang Fengler, "Three Reasons Why the Economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina is Off Balance," Brookings Institution, 5 November 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2015/11/05/three-reasons-why-the-economy-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina-is-off-balance/>. The true monument of data and analyses accumulation, which produces little, if any, "actionable" initiatives, can be found at the World Bank's page on BiH: *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bosniaandherzegovina>. The page is rich in information, like "Gender disparities in endowments" and "The economic benefits of LGBTI inclusion," which most BiH inhabitants, witnesses of local conditions will tell you, approach with noted indifference.
- ²² Patrice C. McMahon and Jon Western, "The Death of Dayton: How to Stop Bosnia From Falling Apart," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2009, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/bosnia-herzegovina/2009-08-17/death-dayton>. The authors also noted: "By the end of 1996, 17 different foreign governments, 18 UN agencies, 27 intergovernmental organizations, and about

- 200 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—not to mention tens of thousands of troops from across the globe—were involved in reconstruction efforts.”
- 23 Paul Lewis, “Kosovo PM is Head of Human Organ and Arms Ring, Council of Europe Reports,” *The Guardian*, 14 December 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/14/kosovo-prime-minister-like-mafia-boss>. See also, Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, “Inhuman Treatment of People and Illicit Trafficking in Human Organs in Kosovo,” [provisional version] *AS/Jur*, 2010, 46, 12 December 2010, http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20101218_ajdoc462010provamended.pdf. Such charges have not influenced Thaci visiting the White House as a legitimate political leader; see the photograph with President George W. Bush at <https://cdn1.pri.org/sites/default/files/thaci-bush-july-2008.jpg>; and the photograph of former U.S. Vice President Joseph R. Biden embracing Thaci at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/image/8197322-3x2-940x627.jpg>
- 24 Interpol has announced that the warrant won’t be served as long as Thaci has immunity as head of state; see “Thaci Won’t be Arrested as Long as He’s Kosovo President,” *b92*, 15 June 2016, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2016&mm=06&dd=15&nav_id=98328
- 25 Chuck Sudetic, “The Bullies Who Run Kosovo,” *Politico.eu*, 21 July 2015, <http://www.politico.eu/article/kosovo-hashim-thaci-un-special-court-tribunal-organ-trafficking-kla-serbia-milosevic-serbia-ramush/>
- 26 Neil Clark, “Blair’s other Illegal War,” *The Guardian*, 18 January 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/jan/18/blairsearlierillegalwar>. Others seconding Blair included top American officials: “The number of victims was inflated to 100,000 by both David Scheffer, US ambassador at large [for war crimes], and William Cohen, secretary of defense; to 225,000, by Scheffer later; and as high as 500,000 by the Department of State. Scheffer called it ‘genocide’”; see Paul W. Lovinger, “Bill Clinton’s War,” *warandlaw.org*, 20 September 2016, <http://www.warandlaw.org/files/ClintonsWar.htm>. Eventually, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) exonerated Milocevic, finding that “[he] was not part of a ‘joint criminal enterprise’ to victimize Muslims and Croats during the Bosnian war”; see Andy Wilcoxson, “The Exoneration of Milosevic: The ICTY’s Surprise Ruling,” *Counterpunch*, 1 August 2016, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2016/08/01/the-exoneration-of-milosevic-the-ictys-surprise-ruling/>
- 27 Daniel Pearl and Robert Block, “Despite Tales, the War in Kosovo Was Savage, but Wasn’t Genocide,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 December 1999, <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/pearl123199.htm>
- 28 James Bisset, former Canadian Ambassador to Yugoslavia, “Kosovo and Human Rights,” Speech to the Canadian Hellenic Federation of Ontario, <https://www.antiwar.com/orig/bisset2.html>
- 29 The Economist Intelligence Unit, “Why Are the Western Balkans Lagging Behind?” 24 March 2015, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1113009895&Country=Romania&topic=Economy&subtopic=Regional+developments&subsubtopic=Economic+growth>

- ³⁰ Gordon N. Bardos, "Iran in the Balkans: A History and a Forecast," *World Affairs*, January/February 2013, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/iran-balkans-history-and-forecast>
- ³¹ Alida Vračić, "Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans," SWP Research Paper, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, December 2016, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2016RP11_vcc.pdf
- ³² "Islamic State Returnees Pose Threat to Europe," *Jane's*, content preview, undated.
- ³³ Harleen Gambhir, "The Virtual Caliphate: ISIS's Information Warfare," Institute for the Study of War, December 2016.
- ³⁴ Yugoslavia's breakup brought to the surface virulent historical disputes which had been silenced by Tito's regime. None of these questions have satisfactory answers to this day. They all date back to the Ottoman Empire, with the intervening disasters of the two world wars. Perhaps the best demonstration of Balkan intractability is the so-called "Macedonian Question"; see, for example, the analysis in Igor Despot, *The Balkan Wars in the Eyes of the Warring Parties: Perceptions and Interpretations* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Kindle edition, 2012), pp. 230–238.
- ³⁵ Vedran Kuljanin, "What the West Doesn't Understand about the Balkans," *NAOC*, 16 May 2016, <http://natoassociation.ca/what-the-west-doesnt-understand-about-the-balkans/>
- ³⁶ Neil Buckley et al., "EU Struggles to Regain Credibility in Western Balkans," *Financial Times*, 8 March 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/bc829a82-03e4-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9>
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ "Moscow is Regaining Sway in the Balkans," *The Economist*, 25 February 2017, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717390-aid-warplanes-and-propaganda-convince-serbs-russia-their-friend-moscow-regaining-sway>
- ³⁹ There is understandable and thinly veiled desperation in the ranks of pro-Europe Balkan liberal thinkers; see, for example, Vedran Džihic, "EU Enlargement—Dead Man Walking in Dire Need of Resurrection," *European Western Balkans*, 9 December 2016, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2016/12/09/mle-eu-enlargement-dead-man-walking-in-a-dire-need-of-resurrection/>
- ⁴⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, "Brexit and the End of EU Enlargement," *Financial Times*, 1 July 2016, <http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2016/07/01/brexit-and-the-end-of-eu-enlargement/>
- ⁴¹ Gregory F. Treverton, "The Future of Intelligence: Changing Threats, Evolving Methods," in Isabelle Duyvesteyn, Ben de Jong, and Joop van Reijn, eds., *The Future of Intelligence: Challenges in the 21st Century*, Studies in Intelligence Series (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2014), p. 28.
- ⁴² Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 30.
- ⁴³ Roger D. Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 5.