

Ten years later



Tuesday marked the tenth anniversary of the bombing of the nation formerly known as Yugoslavia – an act of aggression that prefigured America's post-9/11 rampage and set the stage for our endless "war on terrorism" in many more ways than are at first apparent.

To begin with, the Yugoslav war, like the Iraq invasion, was predicated on a lie: that as many as 100,000 Kosovars and others were either killed or "ethnically cleansed" from Kosovo, and that this was the conscious plan of the Yugoslav military and political leadership. The 100,000 figure was casually thrown around in the run-up to the bombing, and "Stop genocide!" was the battle-cry of the War Party – a curious agglomeration of the usual neocons and the liberal-Left. This Bill Kristol-Susan Sontag popular front was greatly aided by the personal intervention of Hillary Clinton, who hectored her husband, then the president of the United States, into launching the U.S. attack.

Yet what took place was not genocide but the random brutality of a typical civil war, and the 100,000 figure is very far from the truth. That number didn't hold up for very long, at any rate, and was subsequently revised downward several times: 50,000, 25,000, 10,000. The final body count: less than 8,000, and these included both sides, military as well as civilians. This is not good, but it is hardly genocide.

Yet people believe the myth of the Yugoslav "genocide" to this day, just as a great many Americans continue to believe Saddam Hussein was responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A lie has only to be repeated often enough before it enters the popular consciousness as "truth" – that's the first lesson in any good war propagandist's lesson book. Surely the War Party had a crack team of liars working overtime back then to put one over on the American people, beaming nonstop misinformation 24/7, as U.S. warplanes bombed one of the oldest cities in Europe at 20,000 ft. – an act of cowardice that underscored the sheer venality of those

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who launched the conflict. We went to war without UN sanction at the behest of a domestic lobby with a dubious agenda, one that ran directly counter to the national interests of the U.S. and yet was pursued, to the end, with disastrous consequences for all concerned. Does any of this sound familiar?

Neocon grand strategist Bill Kristol declared, in the Weekly Standard, that we ought to "crush Serb skulls." He threatened to leave the "isolationist" Republican Party, which was voting against war funding in Congress. Meanwhile, the Democrats were questioning the patriotism of war critics and demanding that the nation stand united behind a "wartime president." The somewhat hapless Slobodan Milosevic was portrayed as the reincarnation of Hitler, just as Saddam Hussein was later made into this larger-than-life despot whose evil achieved Hitlerian dimensions.

History repeats itself: the first time as tragedy, and, in this case, the second time as an even greater tragedy – with prospects of more to come.

In the former province of Kosovo, the ethnic cleansing that supposedly occurred – in which Serbs turned out Albanian Kosovars – has been put in reverse gear, and the few remaining Serbian inhabitants cling tenaciously to their enclaves in the north, albeit in greatly reduced numbers. The Serbian population has been almost entirely driven into Serbia proper, after a reign of terror that included church burnings and outright murder. All of this occurred under the noses of the NATO/American forces, who stood by and tacitly encouraged the rape of what many Serbs regard as the birthplace of their nation.

On this shameful anniversary, it seems somehow fitting that news is breaking of Richard Holbrooke's promise to alleged Serbian war criminal Radovan Karadzic that he would be left alone if he withdrew from politics and abandoned all efforts to ensure the survival of the Republika Srpska, in what is now Bosnia. According to Charles W. Ingrao, co-editor of a new study of the Balkan intervention published by Purdue University, a trio of current and retired senior State Department officials have direct knowledge of Holbrooke's pledge.

While Milosevic was ritually tried and condemned and the authors of the anti-Serbian ethnic cleansing campaign lorded it over Kosovo, Karadzic was on the run. For over a decade he disguised himself as a health expert and holistic healer, living under a pseudonym and a bushy growth of beard, putting up his shingle in Belgrade and Vienna as Dr. Dragan David Dabi. His arrest in Belgrade raises the issue of the Kosovo war once again. The tenth anniversary of the

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bombing was hailed by Kosovo "president" and accused war criminal Hacim Thaci as commemorating "a great historic day." Liberals of the Clintonian persuasion and neoconservatives agree.

Holbrooke was recently appointed diplomatic czar and envoy extraordinaire for the "Afpak" front, what the Obama team has always termed the "central front" in our eternal war on terrorism. The Purdue study and further revelations unearthed in a Times piece undermine his credibility at a crucial time.

It was Holbrooke, you'll recall, who played the key role of the diplomatic arbiter during the Balkan aggression, insisting on the complete prostration of the Serb minorities in Bosnia and Kosovo and authoring the Dayton Accords, in effect the death warrant of the former Yugoslavia and the beginning of the re-balkanization of the region. Just the man for the job of sowing chaos in the tribal regions of Pakistan and environs.

Holbrooke wisely refused to put his promise on paper, yet there is apparently plenty of evidence that such a deal was struck – and that the capture of Karadzic and his subsequent trial is taking place precisely because he didn't keep his part of the deal. The Times Dayton Accords reports the testimony of an American involved with the peacekeeping effort in the region, who spoke to Holbrooke on the eve of the 2000 Bosnian elections:

"Holbrooke was angry; he was ranting,' the American recalled. He quoted Mr. Holbrooke as saying: 'That son of a bitch Karadzic. I made a deal with him that if he'd pull out of politics, we wouldn't go after him. He's broken that deal and now we're going to get him.'"

Well, they got him, but they can't admit the existence of the deal, just like they can't admit the deal made by George Herbert Walker Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, as the Berlin Wall was falling. Gorbachev agreed to let East Germany go on the condition that NATO would not advance eastward – and Bush I signed on. Today, NATO has advanced to the gates of Moscow and American-made "missile defense" in Poland and the Czech Republic has the Kremlin looking down a gun barrel. When it comes to dealing with the Slavs, no agreement is taken seriously by the Americans, and that includes the INF treaty signed by Reagan and violated by his successors until, today, we have a new arms race in the offing, and the prospect of a new cold war as well.

The Kosovo conflict was in many ways but a dress rehearsal for the massive U.S. military interventions of the post-9/11 era. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is merely the Balkan version of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) – an American-financed-and-armed exile group that provides intelligence of dubious provenance and a political front to lend U.S. military action an aura of legitimacy. The chief difference is that, unlike the KLA, the INC was never a real fighting force and never amounted to anything politically, either.

When it comes to the Kosovo war, the liberal interventionists who inhabit the foreign policy councils of the Obama administration, such as Holbrooke and Hillary, can crow that their version of imperialism is more pragmatic and effective – and even tout it as a "model" for what is being planned in Afghanistan and Pakistan. That's what this new emphasis on "multilateralism" is all about: not a softening of the U.S. approach, but a smarter and more "pragmatic" militarism, one that involves a long-term "nation-building" approach that deploys political and economic weapons as well as bombing campaigns and boots on the ground. The extension of NATO into the wilds of Central Asia and the Caucasus will carry this essentially anti-Russian campaign to a new level.

Kosovo, like Iraq, is riven with ethnic and religious warfare that threatens to break out at any moment into full-scale civil war, which could bring in Serbia and prompt action by NATO – and you can guess on which side they'll intervene. This could well be the arena where Obama takes on Putin and gets to pose as a tough guy even as he launches a diplomatic blitz in the Middle East aimed at Iran.

On the Russian question, the Obama administration promises to be even more belligerent and aggressive than the Bush administration. During the presidential campaign, Obama came out for admitting Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. John McCain's exhortation, during one presidential debate, that we "watch Ukraine" is advice well worth taking.

This is one civilizational war that all factions of the War Party can agree on, and certainly the groundwork has been laid with all the anti-Russian stunts and rhetoric of the past few years. From the Litvinenko affair to the Yushchenko "poisoning," the propaganda war against the Kremlin has taken on a novelistic air – pulp fiction, to be sure, and for that reason very effective.

The Kosovo war was essentially the first shot fired in a new cold war against what is invariably described as "resurgent Russia," i.e., a Russia without the oligarchs and Yeltsin, who

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plundered and weakened the country to the point of complete collapse. Coupled with inevitable allusions to Stalin and overblown charges that the country is backsliding into totalitarianism, the Russophobes have been on the march for the last decade or so, urging in effect a war of civilizations – not against Islam, as in the neoconservative version, but a struggle pitting the West against the Slavic East, supporting wars of "liberation" from Georgia to Chechnya and beyond. Right now, the odds are better than even that we'll allow ourselves to get dragged into yet another such righteous and harebrained crusade.

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