



American Leadership and the End of Genocide in the Balkans

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“Peacemakers: American Leadership and the End of Genocide in the Balkans” offers an insight into America’s diplomatic engagement in the Balkans, more particularly after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. Ambassador James W. Pardew recollects in his memoir the variety of crucial moments and negotiations, starting from the finalization of the Dayton agreement in 1995, and ending with Kosovo’s proclaimed independence in 2008. Pardew’s masterpiece combines the historian narrative with the vast diplomatic overview of events that help us to better understand the political logic of decisions taken by policy-makers, the way how the Europeans struggled to find a peaceful solution for the Balkan crisis in the 1990s and why America was obliged to diplomatically and militarily intervene to stop the humanitarian tragedy after Yugoslavia’s collapse.

At the outset of the 1990s, most of the former Soviet satellite-states grasped the historic moment’s significance (fall of Communism in 1989) and started reforms towards market economy, free competition, democratization, establishment of transparent and functional institutions, rule of law, and opted for European values. Conversely, other Balkan leaders choose violence over peace and threatened in this way Europe’s stability. It was Europe’s myopia and lackadaisical attitude during the 1990s that led to a situation in which simmering ethnic tension transformed into carnages with tens of thousands of people killed and millions displaced.

The lack of vision for a democratic, European future by local leaders has been illuminated by Ambassador Pardew as the primary reason for the outbreak of violence in the former Yugoslavia. The zero-sum thinking, combined with the persistent reluctance to come to a compromise—“except under very specific and almost mathematical conditions”—was deeply rooted in the political mindset of leaders such as Milosevic, Tudjman, Izetbegovic, etc. Moreover, the “new world order”—adage, proclaimed by President George H.W. Bush, which should have led the world after the Cold War to peace, stability, and prosperity, failed dramatically, if we use the example of Yugoslavia.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the American political commentator Charles Krauthammer coined the phrase “unipolar moment” which referred to the unchallenged US power after the Cold War and the responsibility Washington bears as a country whose mission is to spread and to defend freedom and democracy in the world. The US was once again (after WW I and WW II) called upon)—through international engagement—to take charge of restoring peace and stability to Europe. And because of the US engagement in that forgotten and often portrayed as backward European region, seven new nations had received the right of legal existence, and apart from Kosovo which still fights for its international recognition, the rest (save Croatia that is already EU and NATO member and Albania which joined NATO in 2009) has been slowly moving towards EU and NATO integration.

The Srebrenica genocide in July 1995 was the decisive turning point which has convinced even the last sceptics in the Clinton administration that Washington cannot stand idly by when human lives are in peril. The Dayton Agreement signed in Paris, December 14, 1995 that put an end to the Bosnian war, would not have been possible without the relentless and strenuous diplomatic and logistic support provided by the US host at the Wright-Patterson Air Force base near Dayton, Ohio. The three-week negotiations (1-21 November 1995) underwent several ups and downs and were almost on the brink of collapse because neither side was willing to make significant concessions. Finally, the breakthrough was achieved as the warring parties agreed on a peaceful solution which temporarily ended the bloodshed in former Yugoslavia. But Kosovo and Macedonia were the next former Yugoslavia-remnants in disarray and only years later will the US be taken aback and engaged in another round of back-breaking negotiations which will prevent a war in FYROM (2001) and terminate a potential warfare in Kosovo (1999).

Ambassador Pardew portrayed Milosevic during the negotiation marathon as a flexible negotiator and President Tudjman was according the author the major winner of the Dayton Accords. Not only succeeded the Croats in resolving the Eastern Slavonian stalemate but they also received a considerable international credit for being flexible on territory. The Bosnian leadership saw itself as the major loser and on several occasions Mr. Izetbegovic described the Dayton Accords as a bitter and unjust peace. Although the Bosnian team longed for peace, which has been achieved during the negotiation process, what the Bosnian state did

not receive was the eagerly awaited justice and viable government. The Agreement's flaws, which have prevented Bosnia from becoming a functioning and viable state until these days and which have been also at the core of Bosnia's institutional fragility, are deeply rooted in the complete inability of the negotiating parties to see the forest for the trees: the bevy of compromises "did not grant the central government sufficient power to overcome the individual parties' divisive strategies." Based on his long-lasting experience as diplomat, Mr. Pardew proceeds on the assumption that all the flaws incorporated in the Dayton Agreement could be resolved if the Bosnian leaders, and especially the Republika Srpska's representatives were interested in improving the fragile and unstable conditions in their country. First, they have to express their commitment to the Bosnian nation and, secondly, they must heavily invest in making Bosnia a fully functional state, opines James Pardew.

Ambassador Pardew quotes in his paperback extracts from his personal memos and reveals his personal efforts and those of President W. Clinton and Secretary Christopher to convince the Bosnian leadership to refrain from relying on Muslim foreign fighters coming from outside the region. Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps personnel was beyond debate America's biggest concern which, along with the various mujahedeen volunteers, posed a direct threat to the internal stability of the country. The potential danger coming from radicalized Islamic groups remaining in Bosnia was seen by the US administration as a main source of instability and mayhem. Due to American pressure chiefly, Mr. Izetbegovic concurred with the US proposal and opted for demobilization of those fighters by granting some of them permission to stay in Bosnia under humanitarian circumstances.

Another interesting point which can be read in the book is a feisty and forward-looking discussion between Ambassador Pardew and his Russian long-time colleague from the Contact Group Mr. Sasha Botsan-Kharchenko. The conversation took place in the end of 2007 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow and it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy in August 2008. Knowing that the Russian Federation has neither the power nor the instruments to prevent the US from supporting Kosovo's unilateral decision to declare independence, the Russian counterpart expressly pointed out to Mr. Pardew that the price for America's stance on Kosovo will be paid in Georgia. The youngest European state declared, therefore, independence on February 17th, 2008 and in August 2008, during the Olympic Games in Beijing, the Russian military supported by locals intervened in Georgia and seized South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Another personal observation of James Pardew which can be found in the book refers to the public-media aspects of negotiation processes in which he had been involved during his time as diplomat and negotiator. First thing to remember is that the negotiator has to remain cautiously positive and keep modest expectation in media interactions; secondly, from US point of view, it is of crucial importance to interact with international media outlets by being even-handed and demonstrating profound knowledge of actors, events, and ongoing pro-

cesses. Thirdly, envoys and negotiators must be prepared to ward off local media attacks. The frenetic media environment in the Balkan region, as Mr. Pardew has observed, can easily spin out of control and inflict a devastating damage to all parties involved in the process. Lastly, local media outlets in the Balkans were controlled by political figures who had sufficient leverage to exert control over decision-makers without paying any attention to professional journalist standards. Thus, media in the hands of regime's cronies obstructed occasionally the mediation's political progress. One example given by James Pardew is the case of Ambassador Robert Frowick, a career US Foreign Service officer, involved in brokering a peace deal between the Macedonian-Albanians and the central government in Macedonia, who fell prey to a media leak in the newspaper "Koha Ditore" and was forced to leave Macedonia.

The most compelling evidence of Ambassador Pardew's determination to prevent a creeping war in Macedonia was his perseverance and commitment to pre-emptively stop a bloody conflict which might have spread outside Macedonia. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), signed on August 13, 2001 in Skopje, ended the ethnic fighting in Macedonia and since then has been at the core of the democratic political system which zeroes in on human rights and respects cultural identity and language diversity in Macedonia. And although there have been resentments towards the Ohrid document inside the Macedonian political establishment, Macedonia was preserved as a unitary nation only because of both parties' readiness to seek and find a mutually acceptable compromise. From today's perspective it is obvious that the Ohrid Agreement "preserved Macedonia as a nation." The OFA stipulates for both parties that they are obliged to recognize the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Macedonia as one nation. In fact, the document contains a direct reference to the Macedonian territorial integrity mentioning that "there are no territorial solutions to the ethnic issues." Avoiding the territorial separation of Macedonia, ceasing hostilities between the Slavic-Macedonians and the Albanian-Macedonians, disarming the National Liberation Army (NLA) and offering the chance to their members to return to civil society by simultaneously granting the right that any language spoken by over 20 % of the population must become co-official with Macedonian on municipal level were the final outcomes of the treaty. The objective of the Ohrid Treaty was to create a formula for power sharing between the two major ethnic groups. Furthermore, based on the European experience the document includes the concept of qualified majority which is used as common practice elsewhere in Europe to ensure the protection of minority rights in specific areas.

In addition to the conflict in Macedonia, Ambassador Pardew dedicates one chapter of his book to the American diplomat Mr. Holbrooke who is perceived by Mr. Pardew as the diplomatic engine of the Dayton Accords. This historical achievement would not have been possible without Holbrooke's leadership and diplomatic stamina. In sync with other US diplomats, Mr. Holbrooke managed to broker a peace deal among the warring factions in Bosnia. By the time the Dayton Agreement was cut and dried, Richard Holbrooke was one of the most prom-

inent American officials in the globe, probably second only to President Clinton. Being ambitious and fast on making snap decisions about people and events, R. Holbrooke did not manage to achieve his ultimate goal – becoming a Secretary of State. For that nomination his personality was too strong, his dominance in meetings with other senior officials too evident and the political environment in Washington was not conducive to his promotion for the State of Secretary profile.

In one of the chapters of his book, Ambassador Pardew looks into the factors that predetermined the US engagement in post-Cold-War Yugoslavia. He underlines the fact that only the mix of force and diplomacy (“speaking softly but carrying a big stick” principle which is often attributed to President T. Roosevelt’s foreign policy view) was able to stop the humanitarian crisis in former Yugoslavia and to restore peace and stability in the Balkans. And precisely because the US has been portrayed as the major power in the Western world which has been championing democracy and fundamental rights, it was impossible for the top brass in Washington to turn a blind eye on atrocities and manslaughter in the Balkans. Had the US failed in its efforts to stop the bloodshed and hatred in this part of Europe, human suffering in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia would have been far worse and even having a devastating impact on the stability of the European Union. One should not forget that we Europeans have been deriving the most benefit from the US intervention in the 1990s and this can be noticed in the 2018 EU Commission strategy towards the Western Balkans: “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans.” It was the US engagement in former Yugoslavia that forced the Europeans to start thinking about the Western Balkans by offering the affected countries the perspective to join one day the European Union.

The US did not intervene in former Yugoslavia in 1995, 1999, and 2001 because it was “looking for monsters” (John Quincy Adams) but rather because vital US interests were put at risk due to the messy and gory disintegration of former Yugoslavia. The US has for sure a plethora of national interests in other regions of the world (the “pivot to Asia” for example) but none of them is as crucial to the US security as the relationship with the other Western democracies. One should always bear in mind that Europe is the most influential and powerful region across the globe outside of the US which means nothing more than the following quote with which James Pardew addressed the US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations in 2000:

History has proven that America is not secure without a stable Europe, and Europe is not stable if its south-eastern corner is not at peace.

James Pardew’s book elaborates also on the intricate relations between Russia and the West and how those relations worsened gradually. Ambassador Pardew mentions the intensive cooperation with Russia, especially regarding the 1995-1996 negotiations on Bosnia and the constructive role played by Moscow. But as time went by, the high-water cooperation between Russia and the West

deteriorated and the level of partnership achieved in mid-1990s has reached an absolute low point in the aftermath of the Crimea crisis. James Pardew shows in an exemplary way in his book based on the EU-NATO-Russia relations by the end of the 1990s how the leading partners and friends in the Balkans have become enemies.

In a similar manner, the author focusses on the importance of multilateral diplomacy and uses the example of the Contact Group, NATO and other international organizations to emphasize the importance of multilateral engagement. The Contact Group, for instance, had been the crucial instrument with whose help Post-Soviet Russia and the West worked hand in glove on the development of international policy towards Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The Contact Group was also of great importance to the West and it helped better understand Russian concerns. Additionally, the NATO Alliance—which struggled to find its identity after losing the Soviet ideological and military nemesis—was the first adequate tool for military policy in the region. And it was exactly the Balkan experience that had transformed NATO as an intergovernmental organization into an international security alliance by expanding its area of responsibility and creating the fundamentals of the so called R2P (responsibility to protect) doctrine which allows military intervention on humanitarian grounds under certain circumstances. When confronted with ethnic cleansing, mass killing, gross and systematic violation of human rights, NATO could not sit idly by, notes James Pardew.

Together with NATO's engagement, Mr. Pardew put emphasis in the book on the relations between the US and Muslims in the Balkans. The author debunks the myth about the cabbala between Washington and the Muslim communities in the Balkans. Very often American envoys had been accused by their opponents of taking sides and clandestinely supporting the Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. Nothing could be further from the truth, narrates Ambassador Pardew. The driving force for the US engagement (military and diplomatic) in the Balkans in the period 1995-2008 was not to support one group but to expeditiously react to situations and events of compelling and pressing needs for human protection. Given these points, Mr. Pardew recaps his take on the US-Muslim relations by pointing out the positive aspects of secular Islam in the Balkans. If the Balkan nations in this region—which host large Muslim populations—orientate themselves towards the EU, adopt EU values, and abide by European law, they will be embraced by the mainstream of Western democracies. In short, Muslims living in the Balkans can be regarded as role models for accommodating Islam, good governance, civil societies which are run by transparent institution and accountable leaders. The Muslims in the Balkans have been practicing a moderate type of Islam for many centuries and the tight-knit bond they can forge with other religious groups (the so called inter-religious dialogue) will serve as a counterweight to extremists who have been long interested in creating divisions between Islam and Western democracies.

On a final note, Ambassador Pardew can be regarded as a proponent of the Wilsonian School in the US foreign policy tradition. Like President W. Wilson, Ambassador Pardew advocates the spread of democracy, puts emphasis on the self-determination of peoples, opposes isolationism and non-interventionism, favors US military and diplomatic commitment to stop the outbreak of crisis and potential wars. Ambassador Pardew's book represents a first-hand record of US policy making on the Balkans during the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. It combines various discourses related to diplomacy, military history, memoirs, personal observations and talks with decision-makers from former Yugoslavia. The conclusion he draws from the experience in the Balkans underscores the importance of a high-profile diplomacy backed by military force (activist diplomacy) and multilateral cooperation which includes the involvement of Western allies, key players like the Russian Federation, and the value of international organization for successfully resolving major international conflicts.

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