



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE www.usip.org

SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Ten years of intervention in the Balkans—beginning with European monitors in 1991, extending through the ill-fated humanitarian efforts of the UN Protection Force in Bosnia (1992–95), to the current multi-purpose interventions in Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999), and Macedonia (2001)—have provided the most extensive post-Cold War experience in international community efforts to stabilize a conflict zone. Where do the Balkans stand now? What more needs to be done there? What has been learned? What lessons should be applied in other conflict areas like Afghanistan?

The United States Institute of Peace, beginning in 1996, has focused resources from its programs (training, grants, fellowships, rule of law, education, virtual diplomacy) first on Bosnia and later on other republics of the former Yugoslavia and on the region as a whole. Throughout this period, the Institute has convened a Balkans Working Group (BWG) to discuss specific issues and policy options. The BWG consists of Balkans experts from nongovernmental and international organizations, the administration, Congress, think tanks, academia, and the media. The group met January 22, 2002 to discuss lessons learned and how they might be applied both in the Balkans and to future international interventions. This report was prepared on the basis of that discussion by Balkans Initiative director Daniel Serwer.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policies.

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Taking Stock and Looking Forward Intervention in the Balkans and Beyond

Briefly . . .

- The Balkans are in better shape than at any other time in the last 10 years, and the region is no longer at the top of America's international agenda.
- But the job there is not yet done.
- Nothing less than viable states will satisfy U.S. objectives of drawing down NATO and ensuring that the region does not become a haven for terrorists.
- Europe should increasingly take the lead as its capacities develop; the United States needs to remain engaged and learn how to play a strong supporting role.
- The goal is to make the Balkans part of Europe, where they belong.
- This will require raising standards of political, economic, and judicial behavior throughout the region, a process that will take many more years.
- The international community will need to focus in a more disciplined way on establishing the rule of law, including controlling extremists and organized crime and bringing war criminals to justice.
- The Balkans interventions suggest that the international community needs far better preparation for its civilian responsibilities, better coordination between political and military objectives, and a deeper appreciation of the challenges on the ground.
- The United States has comparative advantages in military capacity and in building democratic institutions and civil society that it should use in future interventions.
- Mechanisms for coordination with Europe will be increasingly important in ensuring effective performance in international interventions.

Time for Europe

While a great deal remains to be done in the Balkans to make peace self-sustaining, the international community has had significant successes there over the last few years. All the republics of former Yugoslavia are now governed by leaders elected democratically and committed to resolving peacefully their remaining disputes. Serbia is increasingly a partner and a source of stability rather than a source of war. All Balkans countries are

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committed to moving into Europe and towards NATO. Moreover, Europe is committed to including them and is increasingly capable of leading the diplomatic, reform, and security efforts needed to keep the peace. Membership in the European Union (EU) for Balkans states is still far off, but the European Stabilization and Association Process, which is designed to pave the way for integration into EU structures through political and economic reforms as well as regional cooperation, provides a clear sense of direction and a means of pushing Balkans states to meet high standards and complete their democratic transitions. The time has come to stop talking of Dayton implementation and to focus instead on European integration. Likewise, NATO and the Partnership for Peace, which provides the practical basis for cooperation between NATO and non-member states, play a crucial role in raising expectations, and standards, for Balkans armies and defense establishments.

While Europe should be at the center of institutionalizing democracy in the Balkans, the United States plays an indispensable role. Because the United States led the NATO interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, America has unique standing and influence in both places. U.S. rumblings about leaving the Balkans are neither credible nor in the U.S. interest. They are even counterproductive, since they put Bosnians, Serbs, Albanians, and West Europeans on high alert, creating resistance to even modest proposals for reconfiguring the U.S. presence. Talk of U.S. withdrawal also boosts the influence of hardliners opposed to rule of law and peace processes in all ethnic communities. Whatever the U.S. troop levels, occasional high-level U.S. attention is crucial, both to the peace process in the Balkans and to protecting vital U.S. interests. Islamic extremism in Bosnia and Kosovo would be much worse but for the U.S. efforts, which have all but eliminated the vestiges of Iranian and other efforts to gain a foothold in Europe in the 1990s. The recent transfer from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Guantánamo Bay of Algerian members of al Qaeda with the cooperation of the federation police, despite local protests, demonstrates how important it is to U.S. national interests to maintain influence in the Balkans and to build effective state structures.

Europe and the United States will need to rebalance their respective roles in the next few years. European capabilities have improved dramatically since the failures of the 1990s, but there is still doubt about whether they can handle the situation. Javier Solana, the EU high representative for the common foreign and security policy, and Chris Patten, the EU external relations commissioner, have made great strides in exercising Europe's political clout and improving its speed and performance in delivering assistance and providing access to European markets and institutions. But Europe still lacks credibility, unity, and resolve. It may also be overloading its newly established capabilities. The United States needs to help create the conditions in which Europe will succeed in the Balkans. This includes ensuring that European views on critical issues—like final status for Kosovo and Montenegro's independence push—can be supported by the United States. It also includes resolving differences between Europe and the United States on issues like whether to arm international police units in Bosnia and how to handle those who seek to establish de facto ethnically pure areas. It is particularly important for the United States to understand better how it can influence the European Stabilization and Association Process, which provides crucial leverage throughout the Balkans by offering market access in exchange for reform.

The main threat to peace in the Balkans now comes from those who impede the movement of the Balkans towards Europe. There are serious risks of backsliding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Kosovo, and in Macedonia, caused by small groups of extreme nationalists opposed to European standards of democracy and rule of law, often involved in criminal enterprises, and bent on blocking progress. The international community is not well-organized for an assault on these groups. Its failure to capture and transfer Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic to the international tribunal in The Hague is symptomatic of a more general failure to deal effectively with "spoilers." The capture of indicted war criminals is an absolutely necessary step within the overall effort of weakening extremist

forces. Karadzic and Mladic should be in The Hague well before the October elections in Bosnia. It is also necessary to focus on the sources of financing for extremist groups and to deprive them of their resources. An effort of this sort contributed to the fall in October 2000 of Slobodan Milosevic. A similar effort should now be undertaken to weaken others who pose extremist or criminal threats to integrating the Balkans into Europe.

Neutralizing the extremist threat in the Balkans will require reform of the international institutions in Bosnia and Kosovo.

In Bosnia, where the Dayton agreements created a very loose civilian implementation structure, international civilian authority should be centralized under the high representative. Extremists cannot be countered with an uncoordinated effort that lacks firepower. The high representative should be given direct control over substantial armed police forces and investigatory capability. He should also be made more accountable to the Bosnian public. Once the extremist threats to Bosnia's continuing existence have been countered, the goal of the high representative should be to transform his organization into something more like a normal European assistance mission.

At the same time, the NATO force in Bosnia needs to remain there but it can be reduced and given a more focused mission. The conventional military threat in Bosnia today is minimal. While continuing deterrence is required, the main NATO task today should be focused on integrating the three Bosnian armies and preparing the defense establishment for eventual membership. NATO should also be considering its own long-term interests in remaining in Bosnia and utilizing military facilities there. There is no reason why the NATO footprint should not continue to include training, exercises, and possibly bases in Bosnia.

In Kosovo, the peace is less firmly established but the international structure, led by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on the civilian side, is better coordinated with the military side as well as better organized and equipped. UNMIK is correctly focusing on building provisional institutions and creating an indigenous foundation for the rule of law. The difficulty in electing a president and prime minister and forming the first government in Kosovo raises questions about capabilities for self-governance that will have to be answered by more consistent and capable performance on the part of the Albanian political parties in the future. UNMIK will also have to enhance cooperation with Belgrade and integrate Kosovo Serbs into the provisional institutions, while providing much improved protection for the Serb and other minority populations as well as establishing UN authority in Serb-majority areas. The question of Kosovo's final status cannot be put off forever. UNMIK will have to begin processes, including dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, that can lead eventually to replacing the international protectorate and the provisional institutions now being created with a more permanent solution.

The most immediate threat to the peace in the Balkans may come this spring in Macedonia, where violence could resume after a winter break. Reestablishment of government authority over Macedonia's territory and borders is progressing, but extremist Albanians and Macedonians still need to be isolated. The best way of doing this is full implementation of the Ohrid framework peace agreement, with the European Union in the lead.

Serbia's European vocation is an essential element in the overall Balkans picture. Serbia should be a partner and source of stability, an opportunity rather than a problem. Unfortunately, divisions between Yugoslav president Vojislav Kostunica and Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic are slowing reform in Belgrade and making it likely that the reformers will be blamed for the pain but get little credit for the gain. With hardline Milosevic supporters still in place in the army, the police, and the courts, there is a serious risk of major setbacks. While the Yugoslav/Serbian economic team is virtually without equal in its preparations for the reform challenge, the political situation threatens to nullify their efforts. The United States and Europe need to press Yugoslavia and Serbia to move ahead; those who stand in the way of reform should not be counted as friends and partners. Reform of the military, including the removal of the Milosevic-era

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Army chief of staff, is critical before Serbia can enter the Partnership for Peace. Transfer of additional indictees to The Hague is also essential to freeing Serbia from Milosevic's legacy and establishing the rule of law.

All the countries of the Balkans will move faster towards Europe if they move together. While the Stability Pact, the 1999 agreement in which 40 partner countries undertook to strengthen the countries of Southeastern Europe, has served useful purposes, additional regional arrangements may be needed. Resolving Kosovo's status will almost surely require more extensive regional arrangements than exist today. So too will countering organized crime, which has already established its own regional networks that are unhindered by ethnic differences. The United States and European Union need to begin consultations on confederal and other proposals in preparation for discussions with countries in the region.

There is a serious risk that some policymakers will conclude that the relative absence of violence in the Balkans means that the task is done. This is definitively not the case. The balance between the United States and the European Union may need to be adjusted so that the EU takes more of the lead, but both need to remain strongly engaged if the region is to continue in the right direction. The United States has particularly strong capabilities in building democratic institutions (especially political parties and judicial systems) and civil society. It should use them, coordinating closely with the European Union. New mechanisms for this coordination may be required.

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Lessons Available: Will We Learn Them?

The "international community" was ill-prepared for intervention in the Balkans; its performance has improved over the past decade, but there is still lots of room for further improvement.

Neither international organizations nor the U.S. government came to the Balkans enterprise without defects. The United Nations lacked effective command structures and political consensus when it went into Bosnia. NATO suffered from an enormous capability gap in wartime between the United States and the Europeans, and it is ill-equipped to deal with "spoilers" or to take on long-term custodial care. The European Union was sluggish and absorbed with its own internal problems. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) lacked institutional clout. The U.S. government also had internal coordination problems and hesitated to use its full power for lack of perceived domestic political support.

The international community also suffered from misunderstanding of the problems with which it was dealing. It failed to appreciate the degree to which ethnic conflict in the Balkans originated not only in grassroots antipathies but also in leadership efforts to establish dominance, fueled in part by foreign support and intra-group rivalries. Moderates who might have avoided war were shoved aside and rendered powerless. Humanitarian law proved not to be self-executing and provided little counterweight to nationalist political ambitions.

The problems proved particularly difficult on the civilian side, where the scope of the challenge the international community faced in the Balkans was vastly underestimated. State-building is crucial if peace is to be made self-sustaining and U.S. counterterrorism and anti-crime objectives are to be achieved. Military intervention forces plan and prepare well before the signing of peace agreements, but their role is necessarily limited. Military needs may even be antithetical in the short-term to the overall goal. In Bosnia, for example, the military goal of establishing the Zone of Separation between the warring parties contradicted the overall goal of establishing a single Bosnian state. There was no preparation on the civilian side for the intervention in either Bosnia or Kosovo. The civilian implementers were therefore unable to take advantage of the early window of opportunity provided by initial military dominance.

The civilians are particularly unprepared in the public security area. There are no standing police forces ready to deploy immediately in post-conflict situations. Even if there were, the lack of courts and prisons would nullify much of their effectiveness. None of the several models so far used for international police forces has proved entirely satisfactory. Unarmed monitors in Bosnia, lightly armed but small forces in Kosovo, and special police units under military command in both Bosnia and Kosovo have all had serious shortcomings. Moreover, the doctrine under which these international police forces operate needs clarification. They have too often found themselves trying to choose between “good guys” (often the international community surrogates in the war that preceded the international deployment) and the “bad guys” (former enemies) rather than establishing the rule of law.

Once on the ground, international intervention is necessarily a political as well as a military process. Peace in the Balkans has proved to be war by other means. The international community needs to coordinate its military and political efforts, even if they are under separate commands. This was done better and earlier in Kosovo than in Bosnia. While the international community requires clarity about overall goals—to create a single state (as in Bosnia) or simply to create a state (as in Kosovo)—the parties on the ground may not be ready to acknowledge those goals. They need realistic, intermediate goals. Just avoiding chaos may be a more appropriate immediate task, one to which the parties can more readily agree. Too much was spelled out in the Dayton agreements on Bosnia, which limited the flexibility of the international implementers. The Kosovo agreement spelled out in UN Security Council resolution 1244 appropriately left more ambiguity and no time limit, as well as creating a stronger political manager for the peace process.

That process needs to strengthen moderates and delegitimize extremists. There is no avoiding the tough task of removing those for whom violence has been a legitimate political instrument. Ignoring this task both in Bosnia and Kosovo undermined the respective international missions. The jury is still out on the situation in Macedonia, but extremists there may still have the upper hand; moderates in Macedonia are not firmly in power. The international community needs to have the means—military, police, investigatory capability, laws, and procedures—to defeat extremist forces as early as possible after deployment, when military dominance is at its peak.

This is particularly important for economic development. In the immediate post-conflict period, those with weapons control the economy as well as politics. If they are allowed to maintain that control, the prospects for legitimate economic prosperity will dim. Economic growth needs to take place within an institutional and legal framework. While some “gray market” activity may be legalized, it is a mistake to think that warlordism will lead in a market economy direction. It is much more likely to turn in the direction of organized crime. Foreign investment will follow if good conditions for domestic investment, including a functioning banking system, are established.

Conclusions

The United States and its partners in Europe did not seek to intervene in the Balkans but found themselves repeatedly compelled to do so. This was not only a humanitarian question but also a strategic one, in particular for Europe. Europe's interest in Balkans stability is clear and compelling. Neither Europe nor the United States can afford to have the Balkans become a haven for terrorists or a center for organized crime.

That said, European capabilities have improved since the 1990s, while the United States finds its interests at risk in many other places and its security challenged by global terrorism. Without abandoning the Balkans, the United States needs to look to Europe for more leadership, as it has already done with good results—at least for the moment—in Macedonia.

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The lessons available from the Balkans are compelling: effective international intervention needs better planning, especially on the civilian side, and better coordination between military and civilian efforts.

For more information, see our website (www.usip.org), which has an online edition of this report containing links to related websites, as well as additional information on the topic.

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The challenge will be to keep the United States and Europe reading from the same music, even if they are playing different parts. This will not be easy. There are important divergences in thinking between Europe and the United States, and within Europe as well, on issues like Kosovo final status, how to push reform in Belgrade, how far to go in reintegrating Bosnia, and how important it is to capture Hague indictees. These divergences can be narrowed and their consequences managed, but it will take a conscious and continuing effort.

The lessons available from the Balkans are compelling: effective international intervention needs better planning, especially on the civilian side, and better coordination between military and civilian efforts. The challenges on the ground in post-conflict societies are enormous: separating combatants, providing humanitarian relief, returning people home, resuscitating the economy, capturing war criminals, countering organized crime, establishing the rule of law. The management of international intervention requires a political process under a clear, coordinated structure. The United States and European Union need to share common objectives and to agree on a division of labor. Even if the overall goals are far-reaching, the effort needs realistic, short-term benchmarks. Perfect democracy is unlikely to emerge quickly. State-building on foreign soil is not what most governments want to be doing. They would rather intervene and get out as quickly as possible, funding assistance but leaving the tough issues to the people most directly affected. It would be nice if it worked, but it did not in the Balkans and is not likely to work elsewhere. A longer term commitment is required in those places where U.S. and European interests are most at stake.



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