

Preventive Diplomacy? Demographic Shifts and the Kosovo Conflict

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Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a striking trend of increasingly violent conflict between ethnicities within newly founded democracies. Rwanda and Burundi, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Chechnya are all examples of territories that have suffered massively due to disagreements along ethno-political lines. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of territorially based conflicts (especially after the Cold War) are deeply rooted in ethnic tensions.

Many of these conflicts have seen third party intervention as a means for a resolution of violence, often with marginal success at best. As a result, an increasing cry for more "preventive diplomacy" to avert these conflicts is emerging. The problem then becomes identifying factors that would cause a population's tensions to escalate to the point of violence.

Often, the cause of many problems in this world can be linked to the simple inability to properly manage changes within societies, and this concept can certainly be linked to ethno-territorial conflict. Specifically, changes in demographic trends can have a striking effect on inter-ethnic relations if not handled properly, especially in newborn democracies. In a state with its populace voting upon ethnic rather than ideological party lines while lacking a stable political structure to compensate for these xenophobic tendencies, it is easy to see how changes in the makeup of the population can cause political strife. This is especially the case considering that each person in a democracy equals one vote. With that in mind, this paper will analyze ethno-territorial conflict through the lens of demographic trend changes, focusing specifically on the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo. In addition, this essay will suggest a means of creating an effective preventive diplomacy through recognition of population shifts.

Defining the Conflict

To begin a proper analysis of this situation, one must first understand the type of conflict that exists in this particular Balkan region. It is important to note that the situation being discussed is, in fact, what is known as an "ethno-territorial" conflict; one that is generally based in a historical attachment to a certain piece of land. Few would dispute the notion that both the Serbs and Ethnic Albanians possess this attachment.

However, there are many ethno-territorial conflicts within the world which have not erupted into the massive displays of violence (Canada and Quebec, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) that have been witnessed in the Balkans. To further understand this phenomenon, it is imperative to be aware of the idea that this is a situation largely based upon the existence of "homeland societies." These are defined as "groups which are longtime occupants of a particular territory and therefore claim an exclusive as well as moral right to rule it."¹ To relate this concept to Kosovo, the Ethnic Albanians have lived

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¹ Rajat Ganguly and Raymond C. Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict, the International Dimension* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998): 9.

there throughout the Serbian migrations in and out of the region, while Serbians claim the region as theirs because of the historical sites (such as the Kosovo Polje) and national treasures contained within Kosovo's borders. Since both groups within the region could be described as "homeland societies," (or would, at the very least, describe themselves as such) the question of political leadership within the region becomes very critical.

To further explore the situation, it seems that the Serbian population could also be characterized as the "dominant group" within the region—not only in Kosovo, but in the whole of Yugoslavia. Turton writes that such classifications are given to "traditionally dominant, well-entrenched ethnic groups [which] may think it worthwhile to try and defend its hegemony under new political circumstances." Interestingly enough, he further notes that dominant groups "might be tempted to embark on a road of forced assimilation, declaring its own history, culture and tradition to be that of the nation." Therefore, Serbians, with their tradition of political and economic advantage in Kosovo, could certainly be described as a "dominant group," and indeed, one needs to look no further than the country's website to see that Turton's latter statement also applies to the Serbians.²

Yet, because these aggravating factors paint a very dismal picture of the Balkan situation, it seems that the mainstream media, as well as many popular scholars, have taken the theoretical "easy route" by explaining the conflict through a primordialist approach. Ganguly and Talas describe the primordialist approach as one that has its main focus "on ethnic identity and consciousness that it treats as 'the essential independent variable that leads to political assertiveness and militant separatism, regardless of the existence of inequality or dominance.'" ³ The primordialist approach suggests a digression into a quasi-Hobbesian condition of violence—irrational and inevitable—as nationalist tendencies become the primary aggravating factor in conflict, rather than factors such as economic or political inequality.

Given the common understanding of the Kosovo conflict, the primordialist approach certainly presents itself as an appealing interpretation. For instance, there was a great deal of discussion within the United States about the futility of NATO intervention due to the long history of conflict in the region. Popular sentiment seemed to conclude that the peoples of the Balkans had always been fighting, and would return to these violent tendencies in the future, with or without U.S. involvement, simply because they have known nothing else.

Yet to blame the violence in Kosovo on the nature of the Balkan environment is to greatly oversimplify the situation. The peoples of the former Yugoslavia are not born into a bloodthirsty hatred; many are tired of the conflicts and crave stability within the region.⁴ Further, David Turton writes:

There is nothing pre-ordained about ethnic conflicts. They do not derive from the supposedly primordial structure of ethnic groups . . . There are always specific thresholds to be crossed and there are always political profiteers—ethnic entrepreneurs, ideologues and warlords—who will exploit the opportunities which result from political failure and political mistakes.⁵

² The language and literature on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's website (www.fry.gov) clearly demonstrates the Serbian's assertion of their cultural dominance. As the website allows the FRY government to assert their claim to the Kosovo province to anyone in the world, this author feels that it is quite a valid example of Serbian "forced assimilation."

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rudolph, Joseph, *International Intervention in Ethnic Conflict Lecture*, (2 December 1999).

⁵ Turton, David, ed., *War and Ethnicity: Global Connections and Local Violence*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1997): 156.

Indeed, Yugoslavia was once described as resembling “a marble cake, with most ethnic groups mixed in among each other rather than isolated in different parts.”⁶

There have also been historical periods of harmony in the region. Although the popular belief concludes that there has been fighting between Serbs and Albanians since 1389, Robert Howse and Payam Akhevan write:

It should be noted that prior to 1389, where Serbs and Albanians lived side by side, they lived in considerable harmony. As late as the 15th century, the large majority of Albanians were Christian . . . Even today there are Albanians who can recall that their fathers would never begin any project on Tuesday, the day of the Serbian defeat at Kosovo.⁷

The various ethnicities in the region were also able to live in a fairly stable manner during the Tito years. The mere accomplishment of this suggests that there is an ability to overcome the competing ethnicities' primordial tendencies. Indeed, Sarajevo was so championed as a city of ethnic harmony, within a country that was able to triumph over its ethnic tensions, that it was chosen by the international community to host the Olympic games.

These were not the inevitable conditions of ethnic violence that would correspond to a world according to the primordialist paradigm. This is because the nationalist tendencies of the various groups in Yugoslavia did not have their flames fanned until they were triggered by factors other than a sudden realization of ethnic hatred. The major shortcoming, therefore, of the Tito regime was its inability to erase concepts of ethnic identity within Yugoslavia, and so it became easy, once the crumbling political structure was faced with new situations, to fall back into extreme ethnic politics. In regards to Kosovo, this aggravating factor could be the shifts in the demographic makeup of the region, and the consequent economic and political strife caused by the population changes.

Population Shifts

The problem of demographic stresses on an environment or territory is not a new concept in conflict theorization. Many scholars have followed in the footsteps of Malthus, but instead of relating population growth to food shortages, many have explained at length the sanitary, economic, and environmental stresses that population increases cause. Although these are very valid reasons for disharmony within a region, this essay seeks to reveal a much more basic reason for friction.

When the communist system in Yugoslavia fell, it was quickly replaced by the opposing ideology of the Cold War—democracy. In 1991, the United States, as well as other powerful first world countries supported a unified Yugoslavia, provided that it was a democratic unification. Warren Zimmerman, the last United States ambassador to Yugoslavia, wrote, “But I would add that the United States could only support unity in the context of democracy; it would strongly oppose unity imposed or preserved by force.”⁸

⁶ Kaufman, Jonathan, “Shrewd, ruthless strategist carves out a ‘Greater Serbia.’” *Boston Globe* 28 (November 1991, final edition).

⁷ Akhevan, Payam and Robert Howse, *Yugoslavia: The Former and Future*, (H.R. Donnelly and Sons, CO.: Harrisonburg, VA 1995), 172.

⁸ Zimmerman, Warren, “The Last Ambassador,” *Foreign Affairs* (New York: Times Books, 1996) 3.

The international community at this point clearly recognized the "ethnic entrepreneurship" of Milosevic, and pursued a policy aimed at quelling his nationalist movements.

Although democracy throughout the republics was the ultimate goal of the international community for the whole of Yugoslavia, the pursuit of the policies chosen could perhaps have been better thought through. U.S. policy, with its vague interest in the region, did not take into account the instability of the newborn Yugoslav democracy. Communism, by definition, attempts to eradicate all forms of cultural and social frameworks, and upon its demise, left many of its former subjects in a near anarchical situation. In comparing Eastern to Western concepts of democracy, George Schöpflin writes:

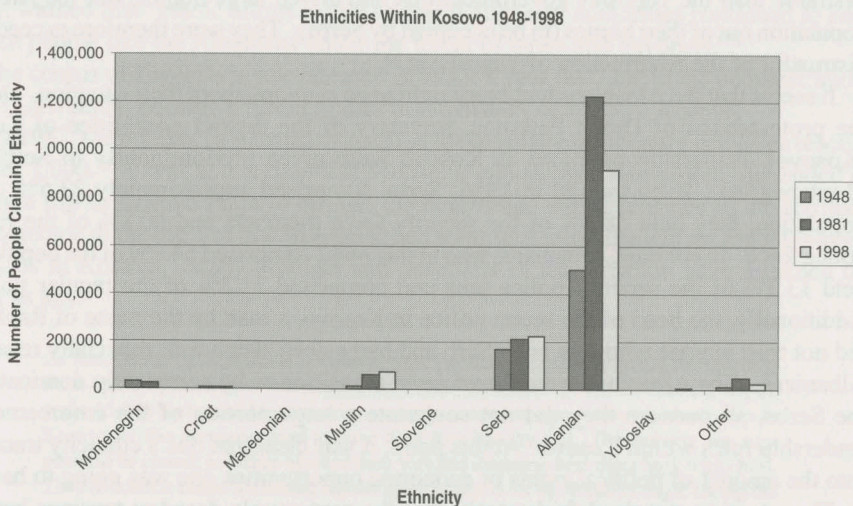
Whereas in the West, citizenship has been defined in such a way as to allow ethnic pressures some play within the political system and offer them a degree of representation in that system, the newly emerging democratic systems in Central and Eastern Europe have yet to construct a sufficiently sound institutional basis to make a parallel definition of citizenship feasible.⁹

This difference is crucial; if the former Yugoslav republic had had a stable political structure, perhaps the large-scale violence would not have occurred. The absence, however, left a vacuum that was unable to compensate for the changing face of the republic. In response to the growing autonomy question for Kosovo (highlighting increasing political and economic inequalities), Milosevic ensured that ethnic Albanians would have no say in the leadership of the region by revoking the autonomous status of Kosovo. The question of autonomy therefore became vital; in a fragile democratic environment where policy is dictated along ethnic rather than ideological lines, the refusal of Serbia to grant the Albanians a mechanism for political involvement meant the complete suppression of the Albanian voice.

Yet why did Milosevic feel the need to assert Serbian authority in the region? Milosevic, champion of Serbian nationalism and warrior for Serbian causes, felt that Serbia was about to lose the jewel in the crown that is his nation. Serbians within Kosovo were also feeling threatened by the Albanians of the region, and the Albanians were very close to making their final pushes for republic status, which many felt would lead to a strong independence movement.¹⁰

⁹ Schöpflin, George, *Nationalism and Ethnic Minorities in Post-Communist Europe*, Europe's New Nationalism, 151.

¹⁰ Schöpflin also writes that, "In post-communist Europe . . . autonomy is universally interpreted by majorities as a covert demand for secession. The proposition that a particular area should enjoy special status is anathema to members of ethnic majorities, who reject minority claims as an attack on the integrity of the state." (Ibid, 157)



Before proceeding further with this analysis, it is important to review the demographic trends within the region.¹¹ As clearly demonstrated in the above chart, the population increase of Ethnic Albanians proportionately soared above the increase of the Serbians. In 1948, Serbians constituted 23% of the population, while Albanians comprised 68%. The 1981 census, however, revealed that Albanians rose 9% to reach the figure of 77% of the population of Kosovo, while the Serbians saw their portion of the population decrease to a mere 13%.

If we extend the surveyed period further back in history to 1921, the data shows that the area of Kosovo contained 3.5% of the population of the area comprising Yugoslavia. Again, the 1981 census showed that the province of Kosovo contained 7.1% of the population of Yugoslavia—Kosovo represented by far the largest increase (in terms of republics/provinces), as it doubled its share of the total population of Yugoslavia.¹² Therefore, not only did Kosovo witness the further numerical domination of the Albanians, it also saw a dramatic increase in its overall population.

Developments in Modern Kosovo

After having reviewed the demographic data of ethnicities within the territory, it is now possible to proceed to incorporate this information into our account of the history of modern Kosovo. During the Second World War, Kosovo was united with Albania, and most Albanians within the territory were satisfied with this arrangement. The Albanians felt that even though they were being united under a very Italian Albania, it was more

¹¹ The information for this chart was gathered from the Statistical Yearbook of Yugoslavia. Although the year 1998 is included in this analysis, the numbers are biased, as they come from a Serbian, rather than an unbiased source. Most estimates of the Albanian population before the conflict in 1999 show that they constituted 90% of the population in Kosovo. The last census taken in Yugoslavia that is seen as reliable was published in 1981.

¹² Dragnich, Alex N., *Yugoslavia's Disintegration and the Struggle for Truth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 215.

desirable than the Yugoslav government that had driven large numbers of the Albanian population out of their homes (to be occupied by Serbs). They were therefore exceedingly distrustful of the resurrection of Yugoslavia.¹³

It seems that the Albanians had every right to be cautious about their situation. Despite the protestations of Djoko Pajkovic, secretary of the district committee of Kosmet (Kosovo), leadership positions in Kosovo were given predominantly to Serbs and Montenegrins. Even though in 1956, Serbs comprised approximately 23.5% of the population, they held 58.3% of the security force members and 60.8% of the regular police force. In contrast, Albanians, who at this point comprised 64.9% of the population, held 13.3% of the security police jobs and comprised 31.3% of the regular police.¹⁴ Additionally, the head of the secret police in Kosovo, a man by the name of Rankovic, did not trust anyone who was not a Serb and had a deep skepticism especially regarding Albanians. The Albanians were therefore in a position to be completely dominated by the Serbs, all because they did not constitute a large portion of the enforcement or leadership roles within Kosovo. At this point, it was clear that one's ethnicity translated into the amount of political rights or economic opportunities one was going to have.

The situation remained fairly static over the next couple decades; tensions between the two ethnicities were still building, but no major incidents of violence occurred. In 1968, the University of Pristina was released from Belgrade University and became a haven for Albanian nationalism. The university turned some 10,000 graduates per year, many coming from a peasant background onto the Yugoslavian job market. Frictions were further created as there became a vast shortage of employment for Albanians with an university education.¹⁵ The Serbians, on the other hand, "still held a disproportionate share of the senior positions in the professions, especially in technology, medicine and law."¹⁶ To compound the problem, the monetary aid for development in the region was squandered on instant prestige projects, rather than the development of the infrastructure (in areas such as communications and the exploitation of mineral wealth) of the community.

It should be noted at this point that although friction existed during this period, there were certainly opportunities to ease the tension within Kosovo; the capacity for harmony was once again witnessed in the region. There were also, up until this point, relatively few incidents of ethnic violence.

The Serbian mismanagement and policies of neglect finally began to catch up with them upon the death of Tito in 1980. Immediately after his death, there were signs of unrest. Albanian nationalist leaders, calling for Kosovo to be given republic status within Yugoslavia, were arrested. The conflict simmered until March of 1981, when students of the University of Pristina demonstrated against poor food and housing conditions in hostels and against declining job opportunities for graduates. Approximately 300 were arrested for "counterrevolutionary activity,"¹⁷ as Serbian forces exerted more control over Kosovo. In November of that year, Enver Hoxha, leader of the Albanian Communist

¹³ Ramet, Sabrina P., *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia 1962—1991*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992): 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁵ Singleton, Fred, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 273.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁷ "Fuse in the Balkans," *The Economist*, 3 October 1981, 18.

Party, warned that "ethnic unrest would spread if Yugoslav authorities continued to keep valiant people like the Albanians under the threat of tanks and bayonets."¹⁸

The census of Yugoslavia was released in 1981, a year that, due to the demonstrations at the University, became a turning point in the history of modern Kosovo.

By 1987, the number of Albanians arrested for counterrevolutionary activities reached at least 1,000.¹⁹ It was at this time that Milosevic had stepped into power, and ended up taking a trip to Kosovo Polje to discuss the heightened ethnic tensions in the territory. The outcome of the trip was that Milosevic had solidified anti-Albanian sentiments among Serbians in Kosovo. Many scholars and observers of the situation have regarded the event as key.

As head of the Serbian party, Milosevic went [to Kosovo Polje] to attend the meeting; most of the 300 delegates were, however, ethnic Albanians. When the meeting began, some 15,000 Serbs and Montenegrins—mostly locals but also a few who had come to Kosovo for this purpose—tried to force their way into the hall. The meeting was supposed to be closed, so police blocked their way and started to beat them back with clubs. Then Milosevic raised his hands, signaling the police to let the Serbs through, telling the Serbs, "Nobody, either now or in the future, has the right to beat you." These words assured Milosevic of a place in Serbian mythology. Milosevic stayed in the building until dawn—some thirteen hours—listening to hundreds of Serbs tell him of their troubles and blame the Albanian leaders of the provincial government for allowing the situation to deteriorate.²⁰

The Serbians were losing their grasp on their power in the region; their apartheid-like institutions were crumbling as Albanian unrest began snowballing, so the Serbs turned to Milosevic for an answer.

The answer turned into the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy, by means of eliminating the independent education system, law enforcement, and the court system.²¹ Milosevic seized the opportunity to consolidate his own power by cementing his grasp over Kosovo and making sure that the only elections held were those of the greater Serbia. This appeased his fellow Serbs, while effectively taking away the political rights of the Ethnic Albanians. The language of his nationalist propaganda included accusing the Albanians of "demographic genocide" against the minority Kosovo Serbs, referring to their high birth rate.²²

On July 5, 1990, Pristina's parliament was dissolved by Milosevic's decree,²³ which was promptly followed by a purging of the news media, to ensure that only Serbian news sources were attainable.²⁴ Schools were forced to teach Serbian rather than Albanian

¹⁸ "Albania Leader Scores Ethnic Policies," *Facts on File World News Digest*, 31 December 1981. p. 998, A3.

¹⁹ Gruber, Ruth, "Economic Woes, Ethnic Rivalries Tear At Yugoslavia," *Toronto Star* 26 July 1987.

²⁰ Ramet p. 227.

²¹ Stets, Dan, "Yugoslavian Pressure Cooker: Kosovo Province Ethnic Tension Near Flashpoint," *Toronto Star*, 2 August 1990, final edition.

²² Cohen, Roger, "Crisis in the Balkans: Prologue: Chronical of a War Foretold Years Ago," *New York Times*, 11 April 1999, final edition.

²³ "Serbian Police Crack Down in Kosovo," *Toronto Star*, 7 July, 1990, final edition.

²⁴ "Serbian Communist Leader Vows to Reign in Rebel Province," *Toronto Star*, 17 July 1990, final edition.

²⁵ Stets, A21.

history,²⁵ feeding more fuel to the conflict. To further escalate the hostilities, Milosevic forced the removal of more than half a million Albanians from Kosovo, with the aim of enticing Serbs to move into the impoverished territory, thereby altering the demographics to favor the Serbs.²⁶ Facing the extermination of their culture, the Albanians fought the Serbian oppression through protests, and resorted to terrorism which culminated with the intervention of NATO in the conflict.

The Role of the International Community

There are many post-war analyses at this point regarding the conflict in Kosovo which attempt to resolve whether or not the NATO peacemaking operation was effective. Rather than focus upon whether or not the goals of the military intervention were achieved, this paper will seek to identify what an effective preventive diplomacy would have been.

First and foremost, careful attention should have been paid to the demographic status of the ethnicities within the region. It has been shown how population buildups can lead to conflict in a new democracy like Yugoslavia. In a region that is particularly vulnerable to nationalism-preaching demagoguery, a population buildup can cause suspicion and paranoia in groups that fear that their way of life is being threatened. This creates a downward spiral that exponentially increases in depth and complexity.

Upon recognition of population shifts, the international community should perhaps wield a stronger hand when "suggesting" acceptable domestic policies rather than leave the rivaling ethnic communities to sort out their own differences. This translates into increased supervision over economic aid to the country in question; in Kosovo, Ethnic Albanian nationalism could have been quelled significantly had there been sufficient economic opportunities for the many newly educated Albanians. Rather than have international monetary assistance fund glamour projects, monies should have gone towards creating a stable economic infrastructure in the region. If a solid economic base had been built in Kosovo, the inevitable increase of industries, and therefore job opportunities, would have presented themselves to all ethnicities in the region, not just the Serbians.

The countries in question also have the option to request, upon democratization, peacekeeping troops and election observers. The international community should not hesitate to provide the troubled state with an overwhelming number of such requested third parties. Such a large presence within the region would make the populace directly aware of the international interest in their fragile situation.

Finally, in a region as economically depressed as Kosovo, great emphasis should be placed on the education of the populace. "As late as 1971, 36% of Kosovo's Albanians were officially illiterate . . . even in the 1974-75 school year, 564 Kosovar towns and villages lacked elementary schools, and many were hampered by the lack of good roads to bus children."²⁷ Although the development of a comprehensive education system is generally considered to be a part of building the infrastructure of a region, separate, as well as significant, funding needs to be devoted to the education of the people. Extra

²⁶ Brey, Thomas, "Milosevic Planned Forced Removals in name of Greater Serbia," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 4 April 1999, final edition.

²⁷ Ramet, 189.

attention must be paid to the development of a multicultural curriculum with which people of various ethnic backgrounds will be able to identify. In order for a democracy to function, the society in question must be able to move beyond ethnic party lines and into the realm of ideological policy discussion. The only way to do this is to develop an educated people while building the infrastructure of the community so that economic innovation and political enlightenment (using cost-benefit analyses rather than ethnicity to make political choices) can occur *before* violence erupts.

Conclusions

The figures that a census reveal can provide policymakers with clear warning signs that a large-scale ethnic conflict may occur. Witnessing shifts in the demographic makeup of a region such as the one discussed in Kosovo should signal that the area in question should be closely analyzed, rather than tacitly ignored, as has happened in recent history. The above study shows that even the most cursory of investigations into demographic trends provides a strong enough correlation so as to warrant further study into this phenomenon, and in so doing, perhaps provide enough insight on which to base an effective course of preventive diplomacy. In situations such as the one in Kosovo, rather than resigning to the notion of the inevitable, primordial nature of ethnic conflict, the proactive external investment into the development of a strong economic infrastructure, as well as a comprehensive, multi-ethnic education system could perhaps have contributed towards quelling the tensions between the ethnicities in the region.