

## Chasing a Balkan Mirage

By Kay Bailey Hutchison

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On the first anniversary of the beginning of NATO's Operation Allied Force, the bombing campaign in

Serbia, there is little to celebrate. In Kosovo, Serbs and ethnic Albanians have traded outright violence for

a covert war of armed intimidation. Our European allies have not provided promised funds and police.

American generals in the Pentagon are objecting to decisions made by American generals at NATO to

assign U.S. forces to patrol in violent cities such as Mitrovica. Although the allies prevailed in the

bombing campaign, the sad truth is that we cannot afford many more victories like this.

Soon Congress will consider yet another supplemental spending bill to provide yet more millions to our

unending peacekeeping mission in the Balkans. When the Senate Appropriations Committee, on which I

sit, takes up the bill, I will work with others to condition future disbursements on a requirement that the

administration reconvene the parties to the Dayton Peace Accords, which ended the Bosnia conflict, those

involved in the Rambouillet talks, which failed to avert the conflict in Kosovo, and other regional actors.

We must review progress to date and begin developing a long-term settlement based on greater self-

determination by the governed and less wishful thinking by the outside powers.

This would inevitably involve tailoring current borders to fit the facts on the ground. Such actions

will create the conditions for genuine stability, reconstruction and prosperity, and will allow us to

turn the peacekeeping responsibility over to our European allies.

America stepped into the Balkans when Europe refused to act. The continuing lack of progress demands

our leadership once again. We should consider helping establish Albanian, Serbian, Croatian and secular

Muslim states. Freedom of movement between these states should be guaranteed by international treaty.

There would be regions where clean divisions are not possible, and international peacekeepers could

guarantee safe passage.

The mission would be easily defined and relatively safe, the type of low-risk, limited-force peacekeeping mission for which there are many successful precedents. Neighboring Bosnia is already 90 percent divided along ethnic lines. We should accept that reality as the basis for a region-wide peace accord. The current policy wagers America's reputation, prestige and will on the mirage of multicultural democracy in the Balkans. We're trying to create governments that ignore history, ethnicity and nationality. Elections have been held in which refugees have been bused into disputed regions to vote for elected officials who cannot serve because they are unable to return to their pre-war homes. American officers spend their days deciding which vehicles can travel down which roads and other details of military governance that are doomed to fail. This effort is diverting the United States from its global responsibilities. We occupy a unique place in the world today, standing astride history's path as the most powerful nation that may ever have existed. Our super-charged economic engine and magnetic cultural dynamism are reshaping the world.

History tells us that national greatness can be eroded not only by external threats but also by complacent domestic policies. Our Balkans policy has revealed two: inattention to the maintenance of military strength and indiscretion in its use. A superpower's core responsibility is not to attempt to right every wrong but to preserve its strength for those challenges only a superpower can address. The United States must know when to encourage capable allies and proxies to address contingencies that fall short of that standard. Instead, time and again our military's readiness to address potential threats--North Korea, mainland China, Iraq--has been diverted into contingency missions at the periphery of our nation's security concerns that bear little hope of resolution. Our peacekeeping burden in the 1990s has caused two of our Army divisions to report themselves unfit for combat. Our resources are finite, and we must begin to reverse this trend. We can achieve more in the Balkans than a peace enforced at bayonet point. We ought to tie our continued financial support to a comprehensive regional settlement, substantial military withdrawal from the region and a firm policy of encouraging the Europeans to do for themselves--with appropriate U.S. support.

Any NATO member can patrol the Balkans. But only the United States can defend NATO. And it is about time we realigned our national security policy to make sure we remain capable of doing so. The writer is a Republican senator from Texas and a member of the defense Appropriations subcommittee.

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