
The Superpower Superiority Grandstanding: The Rehash of the Cold War Politics in the Kosovo Crisis

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Abstract

Cold war politics that characterized the Russo-American politics following the World War II rehashed following the crisis that erupted in Kosovo which led to its declaration of independence in 2008 bringing to fore the Super power grandstanding aimed at out-staging each other in superiority competition and for sphere of influence in the region. This paper is focused on the foreign policy of the United States of America cum NATO alliance and Russia in what was seen as perhaps an attempt by Russia to reassert it's in what was left of its influence following the fall of the Soviet Union in the wake of Gorbachev's institution of the policy of perestroika. The objective is to descriptively analyze the dynamics of this relation in attempt to showcase the undying role of power as the major motivation in statecraft. Material for the study is generated from qualitative sources while analysis is descriptively qualitative. Theory employed in the study is "power" politics as espoused by Hans Morgenthau whose realism paradigm continues law a strong foundation as well as validation for this theory in the study of international politics. The study concludes that besides the seeming penchant of states to advocate non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, national interest objectives will continue to play a major role in the superpower politics and there will continue to be hegemonic tendencies by super powers as each attempts to realize a unipolar international system in its favor.

Key Words: *Hegemony, Cold War, Intervention, Hegemony, Power, Sphere of influence.*

Introduction

The Kosovo war was an armed conflict in Kosovo that lasted between March 5, 1998 and June 11, 1999, however, the climax of the ethnic skirmishes ended in the declaration of independence by Kosovo in 2008 with the tacit support of and recognition of the United States. Before this stage, the war in Kosovo was fought by forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (by this time consisting of the Republic of Montenegro and Serbia) which controlled Kosovo before the war, and the Kosovo Albanian rebel group known as the Kosovo Liberation Army (Kosovo War). But the phenomenon of Cold War itself which pitted the western capitalist bloc against the eastern socialist bloc led by the United States of America and Russia, respectively, following the end of the Second World War reared its head again over this Kosovo conflict even at a time the Soviet Union could be said to have dispersed.

The event of the Cold War itself was a grandstanding organized around perhaps, the two most powerful security alliances ever known to man in the contemporary world history. These alliances of the western capitalist and the eastern socialist nations, respectively, came to be known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO and the Warsaw Pact (now disbanded).

The Cold War itself was said to be “cold” because of the absence of physical confrontation in the form of military combat or the use of any material instrument of warfare between the ‘warring’ parties throughout the length of its existence. However, it was a war where the use of propaganda and half-truths, driven by contending ideological dispositions was fought – all these, to whittle down the strength of the opponent by not only denying it and its cause the legitimacy, sympathy and/or support it might have desired from other non-aligned states. It can also be described as a ‘war’ aimed at shaking the down the ideological bases or fulcrum upon which the activities of either of the opponents around the world were rested.

The events that followed the World War II (WWII), giving birth to Cold War can be said to have sprung out of mutual suspicion between the western capitalist states and the Soviet Union where each side suspected the other of attempting to establish a universal empire - something Chinese statesmen referred to as an attempt to *hegemonize* the world (Ekemam, 2015).

When the crisis began in Kosovo, Russia saw it as an attempt to reassert itself as a power to be reckoned with in the global politics on the one hand, and on the other, in order not to be viewed as standing by while the west established a preponderant influence in an area and over the people it has considered historically as friend and ally – a situation that could further whittle its influence in the East.

On her part similarly, the United States saw the crisis as an opportunity to legitimize its favorable position in the structure of global politics that has become seemingly unipolar. Hence attempts were made by each contending power to legitimize such mentalities.

Perhaps the most suiting of the events of the Cold War, according to Eneka (2015, 17) is that:

Cold War was unique in that the fear of escalation to global nuclear war was an inhibiting factor for both super powers. The rules of the road evolved that limited the direct use of force by both countries, not only in Europe, but also in the regional conflicts anywhere, lest they create circumstances where direct confrontation between them could arise. These rules also placed limits on what either super power could safely do in situations where the other had clear stakes.

Throughout the decades following the Cold War, it seemed as though the super powers had shielded their sword and began to normalize their relations until the Kosovo crisis where each mobilized its military in sympathy for the warring Serbia and Kosovo in their “ethnic” conflict that subsequently led to the declaration of independence by Kosovo supported and recognized in a flash by the United States.

Problem Statement

Much as the world heaved a sigh of relief that nuclear war was averted between the Soviet Union and the Western capitalist bloc led by the United States when the Berlin Wall came tumbling down in the aftermath of the Gorbachev’s policy of *Perestroika*, the seeming mentality or syndrome of ‘organizing’ a uni-polar world where either of the super powers would be dominant or preeminent appeared to have taken only a break. This thinking found expression in Kosovo in 2008 when what the western mainstream media branded “humanitarian crisis” provided cover for American cum NATO intervention. Hence, when war broke out in Serbia between ethnic Albanians and Kosovars, critical observers saw a rehash of the Cold War politics that characterized the US-Soviet relations of the post-World War II era.

Much of the rehash of the Cold War alignment and realignment in Kosovo goes back into a deep-seated history of ethnic nationalism that traces back to the days of Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia whose death in May 4, 1980 saw a breakdown of diverse ethnic cohesion and hence the development of secessionist or separatist movements and finally the disintegration of Yugoslavia on April 27, 1992.

The break up took a process in which the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was broken up into constituent republics and over the course of which the Yugoslavian wars started (Timeline of the Breakup of Yugoslavia).

According to Gibbs (2009 cited in Enuka, 2015), it was the succession of the Milosovic era and evolving ethnic nationalist consciousness which helped in no small way to hasten the demise of Yugoslavia. "From the time of his rise, Mulosevic emerged as an advocate for the rights of ethnic Serb minorities who lived outside of Serbian Republic proper to exercise self-determination while maintaining their potential rights to citizenship in Serbia."

What is important to note however is that the political atmosphere of self-determination and/or democracy led to the Slovenia's independence on June 25, 1991 which was soon followed by Croatia was a military repression campaign by Belgrade which did not forestall the independence of the these "republics" due to the United Nations intervention. Similarly in October 1991, Leaders of Bosnia declared independence but ethnic Serbs in Bosnia subsequently declared their own independence claiming they would be outnumbered in an independent Bosnia thus calling themselves the Serb Republic of Bosnia (Kegley, C. & Raymond, G. 2003).

In the Kosovo which was a province of Serbia under Yugoslavia proper, what seemed to have happened in the post-communist Yugoslavia erupted between the Serbian government and the Albania-dominated Kosovars? The mainstream media account which is disputed strongly by radical scholars is that the immediate cause of Kosovo crisis which called the attention of the United States was Milosevic's oppression and high-handedness towards Kosovars ethnic group of Albania. This led to the formation of the Kosovar Liberation Army (KLA) and subsequent violent opposition against the Serbian government.

It has been argued by Enuka (2015) that what gave impetus to KLA attack against the Serbian military was its realization that on the basis of the Dayton Accords which in line with Rugova and many Kosovar Albanians favored peaceful resolution of their disagreements with the government and the majority ethnic group, the west may not come to their aid in their war for self-determination. In fact, it was on the basis of this thinking that radical scholars argue that because of the Russian sympathy for a United Serbia which its influence has been dominant, it made ideological sense that the United States considered supporting the independence of Kosovo as a way of whittling Russia's control over greater Albania – the ethnic Albania and the nation of Albania.

Objective of the Study

This study is aimed at analyzing the seeming rehash of the Cold War politics that pitted the United States against the Soviet Union, by critically examining their respective disposition in the Kosovo conflict. It is also aimed at highlighting their possible fears in light of the fact that while the United States seems to have an edge in the *balance-of-power* equation, Russia would want to reassert itself into reckoning within the global political system considering what seems to have been a shock emanating from the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, the Power theory is found to be appropriate as it tries to view the super power intervention in the Kosovo crisis as a manifestation of *power politics* that characterized East-West relations of the cold war era. It was Morgenthau (1965) who views power in international politics as “end all.” Hence he observed that “... whenever (nations) strive to realize their goals by mean of international politics, they do so by striving for power” (p. 25). He went on to observe that:

The statement that A has or want political power over B signifies always that A is able, or wants to be able to control certain actions of B through influencing B's mind. Whatever the material objectives of a foreign policy, such as acquisition of sources of raw material, the control of sea lanes, or territorial changes, they entail control of the actions of others through influence over their mind... The aspiration for power being the distinguishing element of international politics, as of all politics, international politics is of necessity power politics (pp. 28-29).

Power, therefore is appropriate for this analysis when we consider that the Russo-American historical rivalry, so to say, and more so in the post-WWII eastern Europe, and Kosovo in particular, can be explained by their respective interests to become not only the domineering force in the region but to restructure the international political system in their respective favor. On her part, the United States was trying not only to consolidate its favorable position within the context of the new structure of international politics that has become unipolar, but it sees a great opportunity in Kosovo with the benefit of the faltering old Soviet empire, as its former republics are realigning to the advantage of the Western capitalist enclave which she (the US) its undisputable leader. On her own part, Russia was grandstanding to forestall the remnant *sphere-of-influence* in its backyard as well as to flex the muscle that brings it into super power reckoning in the aftermath of the disintegration of its former republics. *Power* therefore is a useful paradigm for this analysis.

Brief History of Kosovo

Friedman's (2008) account is instructive if a background could be laid about Kosovo. Kosovo, he noted, historically has been a part of Serbia; indeed Serbs consider it the cradle of their country. Over the course of the 20th century, it has become predominantly Albanian and Muslim (though the Albanian version of Islam is about as secular as one can get).

The Serbian Orthodox Christian community has become a minority. During the 1990s, Serbia – then the heart of the now defunct Yugoslavia - carried out a program of repression against Albanians. Whether the repression rose to the level of genocide, as was claimed by the western press, has been debated. But it should be noted in any case, that the United States and other members of NATO conducted an air campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999 until the Yugoslavians capitulated, allowing the entry of NATO troops into the province of Kosovo (Friedman, 2008)..

Since that period, Kosovo, for all practical purposes, has become a protectorate of a consortium of NATO countries but has formally remained a province of Serbia. After the Kosovo war, wartime Yugoslavian leader Slobodan Milosevic who was facing charges of “human rights violations”, died in detention at The Hague. Subsequently, a new leadership took over in accordance with the western wishes, it would seem, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

ultimately dissolved giving way to the new Republic of Serbia. In essence, the proclamation of independence by the former Yugoslavian autonomous province of Kosovo put a death knell on what had been ever known as Yugoslavia.

The Super Powers Rehash of the Cold War Politics in Kosovo

Before the escalation of the skirmishes in Kosovo, several international attempts to quell the gathering cloud over it had been taking place. Enuka (2015, 85) observed that:

Right from the 1990s when relationship and security situation in Kosovo turned tenuous, so many diplomatic moves were made to salvage the situation. In 1991, the Council of ministers of the European Community appointed France's former Minister of Justice, Robert Badiner to the Arbitration Commission...it concluded that anything that occurred within the borders of Kosovo were considered to be an internal issue.

Even when Madeleine Albright, an American diplomat of the Clinton's White House years and the Allied Supreme Commander, Clark met with the Contact Group on Yugoslavia consisting of France, Italy, German, UK, Russia and the United States in 1992, it was believed that Yugoslavian crisis was not going to end with some kind of ideological superiority consideration. The group, in unison gave Milosevic some kind of order to deescalate the crisis as the group demanded for a political solution with the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo crisis instead of resorting to war. On this basis was a United Nations, UN resolution 1160 which placed armed embargo on Yugoslavia of Milosevic on March 31, 1998.

Because the UN resolution, like in the past, had no enforcement mechanism, crisis continued, leading to the United States pledging aid as refugees continued to pour out of Kosovo as Kosovo turned into an orgy of destruction.

Though Russia was all the while in support of negotiated settlement, it nevertheless opposed the use of military solution given the expression of military intervention by all the NATO allies of the United States. It was when the U.S. maintained that it would not be deterred from the use of military force against the Russian opposition to same, that the curtain for Cold War politic reopened in Kosovo crisis. Subsequently, NATO agreed to what it referred to as "ACTWARN" under a serious pressure from the United States, signaling its poise to deploy air forces of NATO for possible airstrikes codenamed Operation Allied Forces against Serbia.

Reasons for Russia's Opposition to Military Solution in Kosovo

It should be noted that the UN did not approve of any unilateral military intervention in Kosovo. Russia saw this intervention action of NATO as:

- a. To have been instigated by the United States, but also feared that
- b. A precedence would be set if the United States particularly with its NATO allies, some of whom enjoy the veto privileges at the United Nations Security Council were allowed to undermine the veto principles.

Besides these, Russia has significant measure of economic, cultural, and religious links with the Serbs. These relationship traces far back into over a century. Carpenter, (2000) argues that Russian people have great cultural and religious affinity with the Slavs and Eastern Orthodox coreligionists. Furthermore, there are simmering ethnic discontentment and secessionist movements in the far-flunged Russian federation such as Chechnya. Thus, Russia views that its

non-action in the Kosovo crisis would create a picture of its total abdication of its long existing responsibility towards its *own*, thus giving room for a reverse *domino effect* - which characterized America's fear leading to its pronouncement of the *containment policy* of the cold war years. In essence, Russia feared that should she acquiesce to the US-NATO intervention, she could have sent a wrong signal with which the US and its NATO allies could feel free to encourage and support similar moves by any ethnic group within the Russian federation.

Though not our major focus here, China on its own who supported Russia's stance on Kosovo felt that allowing NATO to get away with the intervention into what it considered an internal affairs of a sovereign state, was an unacceptable validation of its Cold War accusation of the United States as gradually becoming a global hegemon, but which could further embolden her (the US) to attack at will where rightly or wrongly it views its foreign policy interest as threatened.

In light of the above concerns, Russia responded by:

1. Recalling its military officers from their liaison roles at NATO Head Quarters in Brussels
2. Expelling NATO counterparts from Moscow
3. Denouncing the attack with vehemence that characterized the Soviet-American cold war regime, and followed by
4. Large anti-NATO demonstrations in Moscow (Eneka, p. 147).

The Rehash of the Cold War in Kosovo Conflict: The Role of the Media

What is presented below is the western mainstream media account of the immediate origin of the Kosovo conflict which has been disputed and characterized as simply propaganda to legitimize US/NATO intervention in Kosovo.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (2016), Kosovo, a disputed territory and partially recognized state in Southeast Europe, declared independence from Serbia in February 2008 as the Republic of Kosovo. It is landlocked in the central Balkan Peninsula. Its capital is Pristina. It is bordered by the Republic of Macedonia and Albania to the south, Montenegro to the west and Serbia to the north and east (Ludwigzhou, 2016).

In 1989 Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the ethnic Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo, initiated a policy of nonviolent protest against the abrogation of the province's constitutional autonomy by Slobodan Milosevic, then, president of the Serbian republic. Milosevic and members of the Serbian minority of Kosovo had long objected to the fact that Muslim Albanians were in demographic control of an area held sacred to the Serbs. Tensions increased between the two ethnic groups, and the international community's refusal to address the issue lent support to Rugova's more radical opponents, who argued that their demands could not be secured through peaceful means. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) emerged in 1996, and its sporadic attacks on Serbian police and politicians steadily escalated over the next two years (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

By 1998 the KLA's actions were considered as armed uprising. Serbian special police and, eventually, Yugoslav armed forces attempted to reassert control over the region. Atrocities committed by the police, paramilitary groups, and the army caused a wave of refugees to flee the area, and the situation became well publicized through the international media. The Contact Group - an informal coalition of the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Russia - demanded a cease-fire, the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo, the return of refugees, and unlimited access for international monitors.

Milosevic, who had become president of Yugoslavia in 1997, agreed to meet most of the demands but failed to implement them. The KLA regrouped and rearmed during the cease-fire and renewed its attacks. The Yugoslav and Serbian forces responded with a ruthless counter-offensive and engaged in a program of ethnic cleansing. Despite the United Nations (UN) Security Council's condemnation of the use of excessive force and imposition of arms embargo, the violence continued (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

Confident that Kosovo situation calls for humanitarian intervention, the US and its NATO allies braced for action. In doing so, the principles of its 1947 founding as a collective defense alliance was to be expanded to inaugurate its new Strategic Concept that NATO had a moral responsibility to intervene outside its original scope of operation where a humanitarian calamity was imminent (Enuka, p.101). Thus, prevention of *ethnic cleansing* – a typical cold war selling point - became a more logical language employed by the United States and its western alliance to curry global sympathy for its intervention in Kosovo (The U.S Military Intervention in Kosovo).

Discussion and Conclusion

Super power politics of the post-World War II era can be said to have reached its apogee during the Cold War but its ferment fizzled in the aftermath of the fall of Berlin Wall. Berlin Wall was not only a symbolic representation of the East-West divide of the Cold War era but, in fact, its practical expression.

Cold War period was an era of extreme tension, suspicion, verbal hostility, armed race, and ideological-based use of misinformation to whittle down the influence, prestige, and the followership enjoyed by either of the “warring” parties within the international community (Ekemam, 2015) . The post-Cold War era was seen within the scholarship of international relations as the arrival of the ‘expected’ *unipolar moment* as the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 seemingly crowned the United States the *de facto* lone super power whose favorable position in the balance of power equation means the capacity to influence the international political system in its interest.

The nationalistic cum separatist movements of the late 1980s and 1990s for self-determination amongst the Yugoslavian republics that saw Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and later Kosovo as self-governing brought with it a rehash of the Cold War grandstanding between the United States and its NATO allies on the one hand and Russia (this time) on the other (Break Up of Yugoslavia).

The climax of their differences came to a head with the eruption of ethnic crisis in Kosovo where each powers took opposing sides (as in the Cold War years) Russia claiming that NATO military intervention did not enjoy the blessing of the United Nations through its Security Council, while the U.S. played a moralistic card by insisting that its intervention was justified on the account of the need to avert a clear and present humanitarian crisis. For Moscow, allowing the United States such unilateral freedom of action would have meant establishing a precedent within the Russian federation and perhaps permanently leaving Russia to continue to play a second fiddle in the post-Cold War politics of global relations – a scenario it did not find acceptable. In addition, Moscow as well as China, by the way, saw a situation where “...bypassing of the United Nations Security Council ... (would mean that the)... possession of veto power as permanent members of the Security Council would have little relevance” (Enuka, p. 145).

Finally, this study can be viewed more as an expository analysis than an attempt, like all research works, to resolve some contradictions. It simply highlights the undying relevance of

Morgenthau's theoretical as well as the *realist* conception of *power* – its nature and its role in the relations of states. As national interests for which nation states embark upon foreign policy are generally incompatible, attempts to realize them within the international political arena will in most cases be achieved with power political strategies, particularly among the hegemonic states who often consider *soft power* as mostly ineffective.

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