



Review Article

PROPAGANDA, NATIONAL INTEREST, AND FOREIGN POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF RUSSO-AMERICAN CONTENDING DISPOSITIONS TO THE CONFLICT IN KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

This study revolves principally around the role of national interest in the pursuit of foreign policy by nation states with special focus on the Russo-American contending dispositions to the Kosovo conflict. It is premised on the ground that the ethnic crisis in Kosovo leading to the declaration of self-determination by Kosovo and subsequent U.S./NATO intervention was instigated by a self-serving American propaganda. The legitimacy of the Kosovar declaration was sold to the international community through the creation of a picture of an impending humanitarian catastrophe which itself was ignited by the United States, for effect. Our position is based on the notion that motives that drive foreign policy of states is mainly their national interest and not (as in this case) humanitarian deterministic as statesmen often would have us believe. Data for the study was generated mainly from secondary qualitative sources. It adopts historical and descriptive method of analysis anchoring on theory of propaganda as employed by Hans Morgenthau for understanding the relations of nation-states. The study's findings are compatible with George Kennan's postulate that moralism plays only an insignificant role in the conduct of foreign policy; and that statements of statesmen demand rigorous scholarly scrutiny to place them in their proper intent, content, and context.

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of *national interest* for purposes of understanding the motives undergirding the behavior of states within the international political arena is undeniable. This is so mainly because the role of morality for understanding the behavior of states has come under serious scrutiny as statesmen often go about moralizing their actions that go contrary to the legal principles and norms that guide relations of states in the contemporary times. It was in an attempt to question this notion of morality and foreign policy, that a leading scholar of international relations, George Kennan (1985), in looking at the motives for American foreign policy, observed: "Is it principle that determine our reactions? Or are there other motives?" Still in attempt to proffer answers to the questions, he went on: "Whereas measures taken by foreign governments affect American interest rather than America's moral sensibilities, protest and retaliations are obviously in order; but they should be carried forward for what they, in fact, are and not allowed to masquerade under the mantle of moralism (p. 206). Similarly, in his review article, Theodore Hasburg (1980, p. 30), noted that: "the security power dilemma preoccupies the foreign policy.

Some governments cover the nakedness of their fears and dreams of their expansionism by moral statements and ideological rationalizations. In such cases, hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue." It is therefore in the light of these views that the study of Russo-American dispositions to the Kosovo conflict is considered both significant and germane, and to that extent, auspicious for scholars of international relations. This is even more so, in this case, as all the justificatory pronouncements of Clinton administration leading to America's disposition and subsequent intervention in the Kosovo conflict bore moral colorations that leaves scholars in the field no choice but to "decode". In the light of this, actions of the United States in Kosovo were aimed at realizing its national interest objectives in Kosovo, but facilitated and given cover with the use of propaganda. Our attempt here is to show how this played out in Kosovo.

Problem Statement

The international system is characterized by crisis and conflicts of all sorts ranging from ethnic conflict to religious conflict to ideological, territorial, governmental/political and economical. According to *Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. History: War* (2008), it has been calculated that only 270 years of the over 3,500 years known to history have been free of wars. Recently,

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according to Thomson Reuters Foundation News (2014), the style of war has changed where most of the conflicts now take place within national borders (where the civilians are now the targets) rather than between nations outside national boundaries. This was the case in Kosovo where “civil war” erupted (regardless of who induced it) between Serbs and Kosovar following the declaration of independence of Kosovo from Albania. Also, international law does not have permanent solution to disputes because the ‘sovereign’ countries involved in the conflict may or may not comply with the directives of the international law. The conflict in Kosovo which pitted the Serbs against the Kosovar is instructive not only for understanding international politics but to appreciate the role of propaganda in the pursuit of *national interest*. The United Nations, it should be recalled was created in 1946 not only as a reaction to the failure of the League of Nations to prevent wars between nation states as well as intra-national wars, but was created in consideration that consequences of wars could violate the legal principles represented by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the Humanitarian international Law. It should equally be noted that for the founding fathers of the United Nations, consequences of war could be dire to the survival of humanity. The fear was created by the U.S. foreign policy decision makers over the Kosovo crisis.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult for the UN to enforce this responsibility of maintaining world peace. This, on the one hand, is based on the general negative attitude of sovereign states/nationalities to adhere to the dictates of international law, and on the other hand, due to a weak international mechanism of the UN as a body to enforce its own laws. As a result, the responsibility for maintenance of international law and by extension, global peace at war periods has often fallen on the laps of powerful states who now take advantage of the weakness of the international legal enforcement system to police the world, or so it seems. And in doing so, these powerful nations have often seized the opportunity to further their own individual or group’s national interests. This scenario found expression in the Kosovo following its unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia in October of 2008, a situation which pitted the United States/NATO against Russia and tended to rehash the ideological dichotomy that characterized the cold war era. It should be noted that “Kosovo historically has been a part of Serbia; indeed, Serbs consider it the cradle of their country’ (Friedman, 2008: Kosovar Independence and Russian Reaction). The war in Kosovo suffered its major casualty because of the reluctance or perhaps, the inability of the United Nations to sanction the war in Kosovo. This can also be explained by the veto politics of the United Nations Security Council. In any event and according to Friedman in *Geopolitical Weekly* (Feb. 20, 2008): *Russian opposition in the United Nations Security Council prevented any UN diplomatic cover for the Western military action. Following the war – in a similar process to what happened with regard to Iraq – the Security Council authorized the administration of Kosovo by the occupying powers, but it never clearly authorized independence for Kosovo. The powers administering Kosovo included the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and other European states organized as the Kosovo Force, KFOR. But unfortunately, because of the seeming hangover of the Cold War era characterized by the need to create or maintain sphere*

of influence, the war in Kosovo rekindled the old sentiments that characterized the pre-1989 East-West relations championed by both the Russia (in the East) and the United States and its allies (in the West). Specifically, while the United States intervened as it supported the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo, claiming the need to forestall “ethnic cleansing” of the Albanians, the Russians took the opposing disposition to the declaration, supposedly also in an attempt to forestall western expanding influence in an area it had considered its historical sphere of influence, albeit at a time it had lost quite a few of its republics to NATO membership following the Gorbachev-induced *Perestroika*. Hence the war in Kosovo inadvertently rekindled contentious dispositions between the United States, nay NATO and Russia, and by extension implicating politics of national interest at the international political environment. But to achieve its national interest vis a vis Russian’s in the area, the United States not only employed strategic use of propaganda to ignite the ethnic war, but used same to curry sympathy for the legitimization of independence declaration by Kosovo as the U.S. won military support of its NATO allies to achieve its national interest objective in Kosovo.

Objective of Study

The major objective of this study is to analyze as well as expose the significant role of propaganda as a strategic tool by nation-state in the pursuit of their national interests. Our special focus is the case of the United States and its allies during the Kosovo conflict of the late 1990s, leading to its declaration of independence in 2008.

Theoretical and Conceptual Clarifications

In consideration of the the trajectory of this study, few concepts are in order for clarification, namely: national interest, propaganda, and foreign policy.

National Interest

The concept of national interest is a controversial term amongst scholars of international relations. This has been so simply because of the use for which national interest has been employed by foreign policy decision makers. That notwithstanding, the concept occupies a central role in the study of foreign policy especially in understanding the objectives which nation-states pursue at the international arena. Be that as it may, Paul Seabury (cited in Holsti, 1977, p. 139) has observed that:

The idea of national interest may refer to some ideal set of purposes which a nation... should seek to realize in the conduct of its foreign relations. Wanting a better word, we might call this a normative, civic concept of national interest... A second meaning of equal importance might be called descriptive. In this sense the national interest may be regarded as those purposes, which the nation through its leadership, appear to pursue persistently through time... It might similarly be said that national interest is what foreign policy makers say it is... The American national interest (for example), has often been an arena of conflict among individuals and groups whose conception of it...has differed widely. Disagreement about policy and action may arise even among men who are

essentially in agreement about the general aim of their country in the world. But policy disagreements we are usually due to differences among policy-makers about conceptions of both what the United States is and what its role in the world politics, even its mission should be.

On the other hand, no one would argue that national interest ultimately aim at preservation or the survival of the national entity which international relations scholars, of course, characterize as *core interest*.

Propaganda

For students of international politics, propaganda generally refers to the use of false information to curry favor or sympathy in the support of goals or causes considered very important to states which use them. In his *Anatomy of Propaganda Within Religious Terrorism*, Roderick Hindery (2003) observed that:

Propaganda seeks to change the way people understand issue or situation for purpose of changing their actions and expectations in ways that are desirable to the interest group. It serves as a corollary to censorship in which the same purpose is achieved, not by filling people's minds with approved information, but by preventing people from being confronted with opposing points of view... What sets propaganda apart from other forms of advocacy is the willingness of the propagandist to change people's understanding through deception and confusion than persuasion and understanding.

For Holsti (p. 220), propaganda is the

... deliberate attempt by some individual or group to form, control, or alter the attitude of other groups by the use of the instruments of communication, with the intention that in any given situation the reaction of those so influenced will be that desired by the propagandist ... in the phrase "the deliberate attempt" lies the key to the idea of propaganda.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is an aggregate of actions, position, decisions, or postures of a state in relations to others or group of states within the international arena but geared towards the realization of its national interest objectives within that global arena (Ekemam, 2015)

Theory of propaganda

Theory of propaganda in foreign policy as espoused by Morgenthay (1965) is very relevant for this study if we must come to terms with its impact or role in the realization of the U.S. national interest in the Kosovo conflict. Accordingly, Morgenthau holds that:

Psychological warfare or propaganda joins diplomacy and military force as the third instrument by which foreign policy tries to advance its aims. Regardless of the instrument employed, the ultimate aim of foreign policy is always the same: to promote one's interest by changing the minds of opponents (or others) (pp. 324-325).

He went further to observe that: "Propaganda is the use and creation of intellectual convictions, moral valuations, and emotional preferences in support of one's own interest. All foreign policy then, is, a struggle for the minds of men, but propaganda is so in the specific sense that it endeavors to mold the minds of men ..." (p. 325). This perspective is compatible with our suggestion in the study when one considers that the U.S. propaganda characterized the Kosovo crisis as that in which human rights abuses were committed against ethnic Albanian majority population in Kosovo and of which intervention beckoned the conscience of the "civilized world". This is so because for the United States, Kosovo was sold to be viewed as a recast of Bosnia where it was morally right to save a victimized community of "people facing ethnic cleansing" and "genocide", claims which have been strongly faulted in the case of Kosovo. Thus, in Kosovo, Albanian refugees were to be viewed as the Jewish refugees running away from the Nazi holocaust and here Milosovic was a reincarnated Adolf Hitler who must be stopped before he unleashed further damages to humanity. The "created" Kosovo scenario having served the same purpose for which Jewish people were seen as victims throughout the world war years and after, the mindset of the American foreign policy decision makers was to appropriate the same psychoanalytical justifications to realize its interest of denying Russia yet another ally as was done to destroy Yugoslavia thereby giving Croatia and Bosnia their respective independence and subsequently opening a speedway to their NATO membership.

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, and according to (Friedman, 2008), 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. 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.

The Kosovo Conflict: A Brief Western Mainstream Media Account

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. Milošević 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. Milošević, 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 counteroffensive 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).

US Real Interest and Pretext for Intervention in Kosovo Conflict

To understand the power of US propaganda leading to its intervention in the Kosovo conflict, Stones (2005), has observed that:

Western historians, academics and media sources overwhelmingly paint the Serbs, led by ...Milosevic, as the architect of suffering, committing atrocities in Kosovo that necessitated NATO intervention. Serbs are portrayed as xenophobic fascists who caused a "humanitarian crisis" while the role of West, in intentionally severing Kosovo from Yugoslavia and Serbia is rarely mentioned ... Serbs legitimately feared Serbian expulsion from Kosovo, as well as separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, FRY. Serbian nationalism was not the cause of the 1999 Kosovo Crisis. Rather, the KLA, an Albanian paramilitary

organization supported by, was used to exacerbate ethnic tensions in Kosovo in order to legitimize NATO intervention.

Similarly, it is important to recall the role of the United States in the friction that severed Croatia and Bosnia from Yugoslavia and led to their respective independence. As equally observed Stone (an American):

Specifically, the United States demonstrated a willingness to intervene heavily to significantly influence the outcome of Yugoslavia's disintegration. Former U.S. ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith claims that US supported Croatia's war of secession against Yugoslavia and allowed large-scale military operations such as Operation Storm to be carried out. Even before Operation Storm ... the United States pursued a strategy that helped create the "opportunities we exploited". In my policy message back to Washington, I urged that we reward Croatia's cooperation by ... looking the other way in the face of Croatian (and Bosnian) violations of the arms embargo ... and supporting Croatia's desire for closer relations with the west.

It has equally been documented that NATO came to the negotiating table with three basic economic objectives in Kosovo and Yugoslavia in 1999: (1) to dismantle Yugoslavia's competing socialist economic system, (2) to gain control of valuable mineral resources, and (3) to command the site of future energy distribution network. Let us first observe that when Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia on Sunday February 17, 2008, the United States did not kill time to recognize it over Russia's blunt opposition to such declaration. Under the whole circumstance, the question begging for answer is what could have warranted the US and Russia's intervention in the Kosovo crisis? First, in April 1, 1999, President Clinton justified the US and NATO intervention in Kosovo as a "moral imperative" to end the killing of ethnic-Albanian civilians. Members of the State Department in Clinton's administration continued to make this humanitarian argument for the US involvement in the Kosovo crisis, an argument of which has been disputed by its opponents in Washington like Doug Bandow. For example, speaking to the International Relations Committee of the United States House of Representatives in March 10, 1999, Bandow had this to say in provocative and unequivocal terms: *Despite the administrations best intention, its proposal to bomb Serbia and initiate a long-term ground occupation of Kosovo is misguided in the extreme, the administration would attempt to impose an artificial settlement with little chance of acceptance by both sides to the conflict.*

It would try to micromanage a guerrilla conflict, likely spreading nationalistic flames throughout the region. It would involve America in an undeclared war against a nation which has not threatened the US or any US ally. It would encourage permanent European dependence on America to defend European interest with little relevance to America. It would turn humanitarianism on its head, basing intervention on the ethnicity of the victims, allied status of the belligerents, relative strength of the contending political interests, and expansiveness of the media coverage. Most importantly, it would put US troops at risk without any serious, let alone, vital American interest at stake.

He went further in faulting the involvement of the United States in Kosovo as hypocritical by putting his reasons in contrasting perspective. Hence Bandow noted that the world is generally a dangerous place with wars almost at all corners of the globe where humanity have continued to suffer from man's inhumanity requiring intervention, yet the United States continue to ignore them. Specifically, he observed that:

There has been mass murder in Burundi, Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Uganda; brutal insurgency in Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka; bloody wars between Armenia, and Azerbaijan, Ethiopia and Somalia, India and Pakistan; endless civil war in Afghanistan; violent separatist campaigns in Iraq (Kurds), Mexico (Chiapans), Northern Ireland (Irish Catholics), Russia (Chechens), Spain (Basques), and Turkey (Kurds); and varying strife in Burma, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Tajikstan, and elsewhere. Then there is Kosovo (The U.S. Role in Kosovo)

Understanding Russian Dissent on Kosovo

To fully capture the essence of American interest in Kosovo for which propaganda was a useful tool to achieving, Russia's dissention to the American-led NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia is worthy of appreciation. First, there is no doubt that with the fall of the Soviet Union in its discord with the west following a bitter and protracted Cold War, Russia was disposed to maintaining what Stepanova (1999) referred to as a "residual imperialism" in the east even if that served only a face-saving value aimed at minimization of its maximum loss of prestige in the East-West struggle. From the moralistic point of view, the foregoing is easily understood when one considers the historical friendship that has existed between Russia and Serbia running over a century. Indeed, there is no doubt that Russia could have thought of its moral obligation to saving a long term friend and to that extent keeping alive what has been referred to as the "mystic Pan-Slavism". Thus it would be naive not to expect Russia to be disposed to a united Serbia irrespective of how irrational some mainstream western media observers and scholars might have viewed it. Hence for Russia, the maintenance of the status quo of a viable competitor or 'center of power' on a world stage – in a seemingly multi-polar world outside the balance of power regime - was still a worthwhile goal to pursue.

In addition, it is important to note that Russia's disposition opposing the US-led NATO air strikes against Kosovo is marginally related to the conflict in Kosovo but nevertheless worth a reflection. As was once again observed by Stepanova:

Russia's policy in the post-Cold War European conflicts can be understood only through the prism of Moscow's complicated relations with the North Atlantic alliance and bitter opposition to the process of NATO expansion. Although the first phase of this process is over, the main source of Russian concerns remains: Moscow views NATO as a weapon aimed primarily at Russia, and NATO expansion as a hedge against any "future revival" of Russian power. The fact that formal accession of the three new members into NATO was almost immediately followed by the alliance's attack on a sovereign European non-NATO state elevates this potential threat. Ironically, the combination of NATO's eastward expansion with the

Alliance's internal transformation (the latter long viewed by Russia as "positive" alternative to Alliance's external adaptation) has become a matter of growing concern for Moscow.

Within this context, it did not come as a shock that US/NATO activities in the crisis in Kosovo had as its target, the whittling away of Russia's power in the region. On its part, Russia equally viewed the United States and NATO as gaming to become the only power and security organization in Europe and moving more and more closer to states in close proximity with her and with its associated security implications for Russia. So, in light of the foregoing, Russia's opposing disposition towards the U.S.-led NATO "meddling" in what may have been considered a civil crisis can be understood, if only such was done to stop further "bleeding" in its prior area of geopolitical advantage.

Understanding The US/NATO Disposition in the Kosovo Conflict

The real motivation for US/NATO involvement in the Kosovo conflict should be seen within the background of Russia's opposition to Kosovo independence from Serbia. One of the major reasons behind Russia's opposition to the independence of Kosovo has a coloration of geopolitical significance. First, allowing Kosovar independence would constitute a redrawing of the map and/ or borders of Europe and hence gives the United States and NATO a foothold through friendship with Kosovo in an area which Russia considers its sphere of influence. It raises for Russia a balance of power dilemma if not disadvantage.

According to George Friedman (2008):

It would put the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany in the position of challenging what Russia has defined as a fundamental national interest – and this at a time Russians have been seeking to assert their power and authority in the area (Kosovar Independence and Russian Reaction).

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

This paper has attempted to demonstrate how propaganda could be a useful tool or strategy employed by states in the pursuit of their national interests within the global arena focusing in this case mainly on the United States policy towards Kosovo and greater former Yugoslavia. The paper has equally demonstrated that this policy is defined by the Cold War disposition of the United States towards relationship between the United States and Russia. We have been able to demonstrate that behind pronouncements of statesmen are usually some other hidden agenda of national interest which are clouded under moral languages or appeal for sympathy, or in the alternative, couching such statements in such a way to betray legalistic interpretations that serve ulterior motives. Hence, based on Russo-American contending dispositions in the Kosovo conflict, this paper's conclusion is compatible with George Kennan's position that morality plays an insignificant role in the foreign policy of nation states. Scholars can come away from the study conscious of the fact that propaganda will continue to play a vital strategic role in the exercise of foreign policy especially amongst the powerful hegemonic states. To

this extent, scholars should endeavor to decipher facts and realities from the intrigues that characterize the statements of statesmen projected into the international political environment.

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