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Albanian-American relations: The past and the future

Vladimir Cicani

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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ALBANIAN – AMERICAN RELATIONS
THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

by

Vladimir Cicani

Bachelor of Arts, English Language
University of Tirana, Albania
1970

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
Department of Political Science
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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The Thesis prepared by

VLADIMIR CICANI

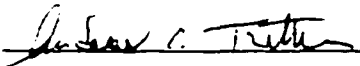
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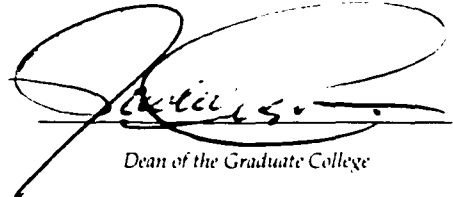
THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE



Examination Committee Chair



Dean of the Graduate College



Examination Committee Member



Examination Committee Member



Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

Albanian – American Relations The Past and The Future

by

Vladimir Cicani

Dr. A. C. Tuttle, Examination Committee Chair
Emeritus Professor of Political Science
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This thesis presents a political and historical analysis of the evolution of American – Albanian relations since their initiation up to the present.

The study focuses on the highlights of these relations such as the role of the United States (U.S.) in the preservation of Albania's territorial sovereignty right after the First World War, the decisive support of the United States for the democratization processes in Albania, as well as the dynamics of American-Albanian relations during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in Kosova (Serbian language, Kosovo). This study will analyze the importance and the role of Albania in the present strategy of the United States in the Balkans, as well as the main factors that will determine the future course of the relations between the two countries.

This research constitutes the first concise study dedicated exclusively to Albanian-American relations, especially for the period after the fall of communism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

American-Albanian relations have rarely made headlines. Albania, a tiny isolated country in the far-away Balkans, has not occupied a significant position in the U.S. foreign policy agenda. This is understandable if we take into account a number of factors.

First, there exists a huge difference in the territory, population and the economic and military potential of the United States and Albania that has determined their respective positions in the international hierarchy. The United States enjoys the status of a superpower, whereas Albania has hardly ever been regarded as a regional power in the Balkans.

Second, due to the late formation of the Albanian state, a long established tradition of bilateral relations does not exist. Albania was the last European nation to win independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. By comparison, Greece won it back in 1821. It also took several more years for Albania to achieve nationhood and international recognition.

Third, Albania, unlike other communist countries, was ruled until the fall of communism, by a Stalinist dictatorship, which virtually isolated the country from the outside world, including the United States. In fact, Albania was the only communist country in Eastern Europe that did not have diplomatic relations with the United States during the entire period of communist rule.

These three factors have greatly influenced what appear to be a low profile of American-Albanian relations and the seeming lack of U.S. interest in Albania. However, it should be stressed that, despite a long gap and ups and downs in the bilateral relations, American diplomacy, on more than one occasion, has been preoccupied with Albania and the Albanian question. In fact, there are a number of cases when Albania has been high on the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The first occasion was during the Versailles Conference in Paris in 1919 where the borders of a new Europe were decided after World War I. President Wilson and the American delegation in this conference were seriously involved in the Albanian question and the future of the Albanian state. They strongly defended the existence of an independent Albanian state, thus preventing the division of Albania among neighboring countries that had expansionist ambitions toward Albania.

The second major engagement of American diplomacy with Albania was in the late 1940s after the establishment of the communist regime and the failure of attempts to resume diplomatic relations. With the beginning of the Cold War, the United States, together with Britain, chose Albania, which was considered the weakest spot in the communist chain, as an experiment to test the possibilities of destabilizing new communist regimes in Eastern Europe by organizing internal uprisings. In the case of Albania this experiment failed, leading to a radical change of U.S. strategy towards Communist countries.

The third important moment in Albanian-American relations was during the recent Kosova conflict in 1999 when Albania played a major role in the U.S.-led NATO

involvement in this conflict. This resulted in the strengthening of overall bilateral relations.

This thesis will focus on the dynamics of the relations between the United States and Albania, especially since the fall of communism in that country in 1991. This study will analyze the main historic moments and directions of U.S. policy towards Albania as well as U.S. aims and interests in Albania.

The main research questions are: what is the role and place of Albania in U.S. foreign policy in the Balkans? How strong are the bilateral relations? What is the attitude of the Albanian political establishment and the Albanian people toward the United States? What can be the future developments of bilateral relations?

My hypothesis is that Albania, for a variety of reasons, represents both an asset and a problem for American policy and interests in the Balkans, and that, given the present trends and instabilities in the region, as well as the unpredictable future of Kosova, Albania and the Albanian question will preoccupy American diplomacy for a long period of time, thereby keeping the United States actively engaged in Balkan affairs. This may result in the further strengthening of U.S.-Albanian bilateral relations and the increase of the role and importance of Albania in U.S. Balkan strategy.

In presenting my findings, I have tried to combine historical facts and developments with an analysis of present-day events and phenomena.

My theoretical approach is based on the realist theory of international relations, which views states as the main actors and self-interest as the main motive of state actions and behavior. According to Hans Morgenthau, one of the main proponents of realism, national self-interest and the survival of the regimes and states is the basic tenet of realist

theory. Hence, military and security matters top the list of nation's priorities and dominate the agenda of international relations. It is for this reason that realist theory, with its emphasis on national interest and state survival, is the best guide in helping to explain the actions of the United States and Albania in their bilateral relations and their interactions with other actors.

For this thesis, I have made use of such U.S. archives as the Foreign Policy Volumes, Press Statements and Country Reports of the State Department, the Presidential Weekly Reports, and the documents of the Library of the Congress. I have also used various press reports and official documents and statements of the Albanian government and political parties, as well as numerous publications and interviews by experts and politicians who have been responsible for the region.

This thesis constitutes the first concise study dedicated exclusively to Albanian-American relations, covering their evolution from the beginning to the present. Much of the material, taken from the U.S. archives, is published for the first time in a scholarly publication.

CHAPTER 2

THE PAST

1. The Early Connections – An American Mandate over Albania?

The earliest American-Albanian contacts can be traced to the arrival of the first wave of immigrants to the United States during the last half of the 19th century. These immigrants settled mainly along the east coast, and formed a number of cultural and social organizations, which issued various publications. Although small in number, compared with other nationalities, the Albanian immigrants and their organizations played an important role in informing the American public on the dire situation in Albania, thus increasing the sympathy of the American people and that of official circles on the plight of the Albanian people. At the same time, through their contacts with the homeland, these immigrants made known to the Albanian public the American reality as well as American politics and ideals. With the passing of time, the Albanian people began to nourish strong feelings of attachment and friendship for the American people and their government. The Albanians in general, and the Albanian community in the United States in particular, placed high hopes in the support and protection of the United States for their small and newly independent country, which was constantly confronted with various threats by its bigger neighbors. Traditionally, in times of crisis and need, the Albanians

would look upon the United States for assistance and protection. This was best reflected in a popular song of the time which says: "Mother, don't be afraid because your sons are in the United States."

These sentiments were strongly manifested especially after the proclamation of Albania's independence in 1912. This was not well received by neighboring states, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece, which all had annexationist ambitions toward Albania. At that time, Europe was dominated by six Great powers: Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France and Russia, which considered small nations as bargaining objects in their rivalry for spheres of influence. These powers did not recognize the independence of Albania in 1912, which, for them, had to function as a small "autonomous principality" under the rule of a foreign prince and an International Control Commission. The result of this policy was that more than half of the Albanian nation and territory was detached from the homeland, including the province of Kosova, which was rich in mineral resources.

The position of Albania as an independent state was further complicated after the outbreak of the First World War when neighboring countries invaded Albanian territory. Under these conditions, the Albanians, living inside and outside the country, were very much worried about the survival of Albania as an independent state. They feared that in the political settlements after the end of the war, Albania might cease to be a sovereign country. In fact, these fears were not baseless. Immediately after the outbreak of World War I, on 20 April 1915, Britain, France, Italy, and Russia signed a secret agreement, known as the Treaty of London, which amounted to the virtual partition of Albania among Italy, Greece, and Serbia. Although this treaty was kept secret until its publication

in 1917 by a Soviet newspaper, news of a possible partition circulated among Albanian immigrants in the United States and other countries. It was precisely at these difficult moments that Albanians began to look increasingly upon the United States as their savior and protector, because they considered the United States as the only major power with no selfish ambitions toward Albania. Fan Noli, Bishop of the Albanian Orthodox church in the United States, in a letter sent to the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, appealed to President Wilson on behalf of all Americans in the United States "to use his moral influence to prevent partition of Albania."¹

It was at this time that the idea of an American mandate over Albania began to take root among Albanians. A statement issued on 15 March 1918 by "Vatra," the largest Albanian-American organization, noted that it is "the unanimous wish of all Albanians that when their independence is restored, there shall be assigned to them the assistance and cooperation of some great nation with no ambition to subserve and no desire for territorial conquest," and that "the United States seems to be the one nation to which the Albanians can look with perfect confidence."² This idea took an official tone with the opening of the Paris Peace Conference where the Albanian delegation presented, on 7 March 1919, an official request that the Conference assign to the United States a mandate over Albania.³

It must be stressed that the idea of a U.S. mandate over Albania was not solely a desire or project that originated from the Albanian side. A number of high-ranking officials at the State Department were also seriously contemplating this idea. Thus in a confidential document that circulated within the U.S. Department of State in November 1918 under the title "Brief Recommendations Regarding Albania," it was suggested that

the U.S. government might support “the assignment of this territory to a mandatory which must be a great power which should be disinterested.”⁴ The document acknowledged that the United States appeared to be the only power satisfying the above requirement and for this, it might accept the mandate. At that time, the State Department sent a number of emissaries to Albania in order to see to what extent this idea was practical and what support it had among the people. Joseph Have, the American Consul in Turin, after a special tour of Albania, stressed in his report that “the first choice and the universal demand throughout all Albania, without exception, is for American administrative control.”⁵ Another American emissary, Robert Hammond, U.S. Vice-Consul in Rome, visited Albania one year later and reached the same conclusion. “The Albanians as a whole,” he wrote, “worship and love the United States and American ideals to a fanatical degree,” adding that, “they want an American mandate over them.”⁶ It must be stressed that some members of the American delegation at the Paris Peace Conference supported the idea that the United States should accept a form of mandate over Albania. In a Memo written by a member of the delegation, dated 23 March 1919, it is argued that “America has no political ambitions on this part of the world,” and that, “a status and the presence of America in Albania would have positive repercussions throughout the Balkans.”⁷

Although the idea of a U.S. mandate over Albania found supporters in American diplomatic circles, and, for a time, was seriously discussed, it never materialized as an official U.S. policy. Two factors might have played a role in the outcome. First, at this time the United States, which was not yet a European power, was concerned that the big European powers would not allow Washington to establish a sphere of influence in

Europe's backyard, the Balkans. This is one reason why Wilson shifted toward favoring an Italian mandate over Albania. Second, as the First World War came to an end, a strong tendency toward isolationism reemerged in Washington and quickly became official U.S. policy with the refusal of the Senate to join the League of Nations.

It must be stressed that the very discussion of the idea of a U.S. mandate over Albania, despite not materializing, played an important role in bilateral relations, and future U.S. policies toward Albania. First, it demonstrated the strong pro-American feelings and sentiments of the Albanian population, a tradition that has lasted up to the present. Second, this discussion greatly influenced the stand of President Wilson and the American delegation toward the Albanian question when it was discussed at the Paris Conference, which was called to settle the post-War boundaries.

2. President Wilson and Albania's Sovereignty

The entrance of the United States in the First World War in March 1917, and the proclamation by President Wilson of the Fourteen Points Program as the basis for the future world order, aroused great hopes among the small nations of Europe, which counted on American help for a just solution of their problems and the achievement of nationhood. In particular, Albania, which was the smallest and weakest nation in Europe, had pinned great hopes on the support of America when the problem of Albania's independence was discussed at the Paris Peace Conference. The Albanian newspaper, "The Adriatic Review," wrote at that time "in the list of Albania's friends are included two of the illuminated people of America and the world, President Wilson and former

President Roosevelt.”⁸ The reference to Roosevelt was because the former President had publicly expressed his opposition to an Italian protectorate over Albania.

At the close of the First World War, Albania found itself in a very precarious situation. The neighboring countries of Serbia, Greece, Italy, and Montenegro, whose armies had occupied Albania during the war, had come to the Paris Peace Conference with the aim of securing the greatest part of the Albanian territory. Sensing the complexity of the Albanian question, with the initiative of the American delegation, the representatives of the United States, France and Great Britain signed, on 9 December 1919, a memorandum, which expressed the desire of the signatory states to recognize the territorial unity of Albania. However, they considered that the new independent Albanian state would require the administrative advice and assistance of one of the great powers, and thus entrusted Italy with a mandate over Albania. Although this decision did not fully satisfy the aspirations of the Albanian people for a fully independent state, it avoided the greatest danger for a possible partition of the country among its neighboring countries.

It is for this reason that these countries expressed dissatisfaction with the above decision and began to put pressure on the big powers for adding amendments that would grant them certain rights over Albanian territories. As a result, on 14 January 1920, the Prime Ministers of France and Britain, Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George, in the absence of the American representative, issued an amended declaration, agreeing that northern Albania, including the city of Shkodra, should be ceded to neighboring Yugoslavia while the Korca district in the south should go to Greece. This decision amounted to a near total partition of Albania among Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia, leaving only a dysfunctional small territory that represented some 30 percent of the

original territory. Upon hearing about this decision, on 9 February 1920, President Wilson sent a strongly worded note to London and Paris, complaining that the January Memorandum had been “negotiated without the knowledge or approval of the American government” and that it “partitions the Albanian people, against their vehement protests, among three different alien powers.”⁹ In another telegram sent, on 24 February 1920, to the American ambassador in Paris, Wilson stressed that the U.S. government was “vigorously opposed to injuring the Albanian people for the benefit of Yugoslavia.”¹⁰ In a third telegram sent to the American ambassador in Paris, on 4 March 1920, Wilson insisted that “the Albanian questions should not be included in the proposed joint discussion of Italy and Yugoslavia” and that he “cannot approve any plan which assigns to Yugoslavia in the northern districts of Albania territorial compensation for what she is deprived of elsewhere.”¹¹ According to a State Department official, “nothing else irritated Wilson more than the unjust attempt to annex Albanian territories.”¹²

Due to American insistence, France and Britain withdrew their agreement of 14 January, and the solution of the Albanian question was postponed and referred to the Conference of Ambassadors, which, in 1921 reaffirmed the 1913 boundaries, thus averting any further partition. This decision was of historic importance for the future existence of the Albanian state. As the British analyst Miranda Vickers points out, having in mind the weak position of Albania, the unfriendly stand of the major European powers, and the ambitions of the more powerful neighboring states, “the fact that Albania emerged at all as an independent state in 1920 was indeed remarkable.”¹³

There were a number of reasons for President Wilson’s stand in favor of Albania’s independence. First, there was the moral imperative of self-determination for small

nations that formed the backbone of Wilson's 14-point declaration. Second, American diplomacy at that time was against the domination of any big or regional power in the Balkans. Third, Washington considered the existence of an independent Albanian state as a positive factor of stability in the Balkans. President Wilson and his staff were convinced that any partition of Albania would lead to instability and problems in the region that already had been the origin of the First World War. Thus, Colonel Sherman Miles, an American emissary in Albania, wrote in a May 1919 letter sent to the International Commission on the Balkans that "the drawing of a just national boundary between Montenegro and Albania as well as between Albania and the other states, bordering on it, is a prime necessity for the future peace of the Balkans."¹⁴

It may be said that the Paris Peace Conference marked the first serious involvement of American diplomacy with the Albanian question that it would confront again at various stages in the future. In fact, the preservation of an independent Albanian state and its territorial integrity, as manifested at the Paris Conference, would be a permanent feature of official American policy in the Balkans, a stand that at crucial moments of history has been decisive for the future of Albania.

3. The Rule of King Zog I and American

Interests in Albania (1925-1939)

The United States officially recognized the new Albanian state on 28 July 1922, and in September of that year, the first U.S. Minister, Ulysses Grant Smith, arrived in Tirana to open the new legation. At that time Albania was going through a period of internal instability that was marked by frequent changes of governments and political quarrels.

The American recognition was of great importance for the international status of Albania and the future of bilateral relations.

This act demonstrated that, despite the departure of Wilson, strong feelings of sympathy and admiration for the Albanian nation still existed in the official circles of Washington. On the other hand, the presence of an increasing number of Albanian immigrants in the United States was becoming an important factor in influencing the American policy towards Albania. In fact, by this time U.S. diplomacy was trying to play a more active role in Balkan affairs, where Albania offered new challenges. Although small in population and territory, the country was rich in strategic minerals, representing some attractive opportunities for foreign companies. Thus, in March 1922, Charles Erickson, an American missionary who had been in Albania for many years and who at that time was acting as the representative of the Standard Oil Company, informed the State Department that "American capital could be very profitably and safely invested in Albania, but for this it must have the good will of the government, something that can only be established by diplomatic recognition."¹⁵ Following various recommendations, on 22 June 1922, one month before the official recognition, an official U.S. Commissioner, Maxwell Blake, was sent to Albania where he got assurances that American interests would receive most favored treatment in return for diplomatic recognition.

The establishment of diplomatic relations in July 1922 opened the way for a number of economic and political agreements between the two countries. The 1920s were characterized by a period of intense rivalry between the big European powers for political influence and economic concessions from the Albanian governments. Under these circumstances, the United States demonstrated in various diplomatic moves its

preoccupation and interest in preserving the independence of Albania. At that time, Washington rejected the establishment of any foreign monopoly over Albania's politics and economy, something that the United States continued to consider very dangerous for the future of Albania's independence. It is for this reason that Washington did not recognize the new government of Fan Noli, which came to power in June 1924 as a result of an uprising against the existing government of Ahmet Zogu. Along with the United States' suspicion of the tendency of the Noli government to establish close links with the Soviet Union, Washington also feared its favorable stand towards a Balkan federation, which at that time was considered detrimental to U.S. interests in the Balkans. Proceeding from this stand, the United States welcomed the return to power of Ahmet Zogu in December 1924, extending immediate recognition to the new government. Although Washington considered Zogu an authoritarian figure, the United States thought that his regime would better serve the stability of Albania and American interests in the region. During this period a number of important agreements in trade and education were reached between the two countries. American institutions and scholars contributed to the drafting of the new Constitution and the setting up of a modern Albanian state, based on law and order. At the beginning of 1926, the United States granted the accreditation of the first Albanian ambassador in Washington, Faik Konica, who would remain in this post until Albania was occupied by Italy in 1939.

In September 1928, President Ahmet Zogu, through an act of parliament, changed the form of regime, proclaiming Albania a monarchy and himself Zog I, King of Albanians. It is interesting to note that the United States, which traditionally favors parliamentary regimes, was among the first Great Powers,

after Italy, to recognize the change of regime and Zog as King of Albania.

President Calvin Coolidge sent a personal telegram of congratulations to Zog on his accession to the throne, expressing his desire for the further strengthening of the bilateral relations.¹⁶

There were a number of reasons for this swift recognition on the part of the United States. First, with this act, Washington wanted to confirm its preference and support for continuity in Albania, trying to prevent any possible turbulence in the country that might follow the change in the form of regime. At that time, American diplomacy had come to the conclusion that monarchy was an element of stability for Albania and that a stable Albania would better serve American interests in the region. Seen in a broader context, this diplomatic move expressed a new interest on the part of Washington in an area traditionally considered a European sphere of influence.

American recognition was a great boost for the new Albanian monarchy and its position in the international arena. The first years of the monarchy witnessed a new impetus in the bilateral relations. During this period, the two countries signed a number of treaties and conventions, while American companies won a number of concessions in the oil industry. The Albanian exports to the United States increased from 4.5% of the total in 1927 to 17.1% in 1930, while the import of U.S. goods in Albania increased from 1.6% in 1923 to 7.2% in 1930.¹⁷

However, with the passing of time it became clear that the new Albanian monarchy was coming more and more under the domination of Italy, which traditionally had regarded Albania as its legitimate sphere of influence. Although King Zog took some measures to diversify foreign relations, he was unable to escape the Italian yoke, and at

times of difficulties, tended to give economic and political concessions to Italy. With the increasing Italian domination of Albania during the last years of the Zog regime, American influence in the country began to dwindle. The failure to rely on American support to confront Italian domination might be considered as one of the major diplomatic mistakes of King Zog. Although on several occasions the United States had voiced its dissatisfaction with King Zog's concessions to Italy, Washington was not inclined to openly confront Italy over Albania.

It must be noted that the United States was the only big power to publicly protest against the Italian invasion of Albania on 7 April 1939. A day later, Secretary of State Cordell Hull issued a statement where he strongly condemned the act as "a forcible and violent invasion, which constitutes unquestionably an additional threat to the peace of the world."¹⁸ President Roosevelt himself made a personal appeal to Italy denouncing the Albanian occupation. The United States never recognized the annexation of Albania by Italy because this act violated international law as well as the main objective of American policy toward Albania, that is, the preservation of the independence of the country. At the beginning of June 1939, when the annexation was formalized with the Treaty of Union and the abolition of Albania's Foreign Ministry, the U.S. representative in Albania, Hugh Grant, was immediately instructed by the State Department to close the U.S. Mission in Tirana and return with his staff. This American stand was in contrast to that of Great Britain, which kept a representative in Albania until June 1941 when Italy declared war on Britain.

The withdrawal of the American mission from Albania in June 1939 was the start of a long gap in the formal diplomatic relations. This gap would close 52 years later with the

reestablishment of diplomatic relations in 1991, following the fall of the communist regime.

4. The Diplomatic Recognition that Never Materialized

During the Second World War, Albania was first occupied by Italy in 1939 and then by Germany in 1943 after the capitulation of Rome. A number of groups formed in the country with the aim of organizing armed resistance against foreign occupiers. The largest and better-organized formation was the National Liberation Front, which was led by the communists. Albania was the only country in Europe, which was liberated without the presence of allied troops in its territory.

During the war years, the United States was not actively involved in the various resistance groups that operated in Albania. This was in accordance with U.S. policy at that time, which considered the Balkans as a British sphere of activity. However, it should be noted that among the Allies, the United States was the first country to recognize the resistance movement of the Albanian people. On 10 December 1942, Secretary of State Cordell Hull issued a statement stressing that the government of the United States "is not unmindful of the continued resistance of the Albanian people to the Italian forces of occupation. The effort of the various guerilla bands operating against the common enemy in Albania is admired and appreciated. The Government and people of the United States, the statement went on, look forward to the day when effective military assistance can be given to these brave men to drive the invader from their homes."¹⁹ This statement reaffirmed the main objective of U.S. policy towards Albania, that is, support for the restoration of a free and independent Albania.

This American stand, while boosting the resistance movement in Albania, drew protests from Athens. In fact, Athens had asked the American government to make some confidential communications to the Greek government on the question of Northern Epirus, the Greek name for the Southern part of Albania, which was claimed by Athens as Greek territory. The United States, despite the strong influence of the Greek lobby, categorically refused to commit itself to such an idea. In December 1942, during a meeting with the Greek Ambassador in Washington, U.S. Under Secretary of State, Welles, made it clear that the U.S. government “would not be willing to make any secret commitments with regard to territorial changes to any another country.”²⁰

It must be stressed that even before the end of the war, the U.S. began to think seriously about the Albanian question and the future role of the Albanian state within the Balkan context. The old idea of a possible American mandate over Albania began to circulate again among U.S. diplomatic circles in Washington. Thus, in a State Department Memorandum dated October 1943 and entitled “The Albanian Problem,” Washington expressed its concern about the future stability of Albania and suggested the necessity for foreign control and authority. While affirming “only the United States would be wholly satisfactory to the Albanians,” the memorandum recommended as the best solution the establishment of “an international control in which the United States would play a prominent or a leading role.”²¹ By this time, it seems that the U.S. was concerned that the Albanian state that would emerge from the war would be too fragile to stand on its own feet and that the country might be dependent or controlled by another bigger power, namely Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union. This concern emerges from another document of the State Department of April 1944 entitled “The Economic Basis of

Albania's Independence." According to this document, Albania appeared to be so small and weak economically that "it is difficult to see how in the future it could escape economic vassalage to another power unless it joined in a partnership with its stronger neighbors."²² This recommendation was in line with the U.S. policy at that time, which favored the creation of a Balkan Union, as opposed to Soviet influence in the region.

The liberation of Albania in November 1944 and the subsequent coming to power of the communists was no great surprise to the United States, which together with Britain, had tended to render more help to the communist-led resistance group in comparison with the other nationalist formations, which were not so active in the anti-fascist movement. It seems that at that time, the United States was not fully convinced of the communist credentials of the new Albanian leaders, whom it considered patriotic and nationalist rather than communist. Moreover, as in the case of the other East European countries, Washington tried to use the Crimea Declaration on Liberated Europe and the extension of diplomatic recognition for the new regime in Albania as a pressure to foster a more independent and democratic course. Thus, when the new Albanian government asked Washington for official diplomatic recognition, the U.S. government replied that "it needed more time to be fully informed regarding the conditions and developments in Albania," asking, at the same time, for permission to send a small informal mission to supply the information which it needed.²³ This request was granted and the American mission arrived in Albania on 8 May 1945. At first, the U.S. mission had a favorable evaluation of the developments in Albania and the ability of the new government to control the situation. In particular, the members of the mission were impressed with the pro-Western orientation of the majority of the population and reached the conclusion that

American influence was strong in Albania. In a telegram that the Head of the U.S. mission, Joseph Jacobs, sent to the Secretary of State on 1 July 1945, it was noted "about 25% of the Albanian population have either been in the United States or have friends and relatives who have been there." It also noted that several thousand Albanians had been educated in American schools in Albania and that "cultural and sentimental ties with the United States are strong."²⁴ After only five months of observation, the U.S. mission sent a final report to the State Department where in principle it recommended the simultaneous recognition of the new regime by the three big allies, the United States, Britain and Russia, at the earliest possible date.

However, the United States added two conditions to this recognition: a pledge from the Albanian authorities to hold free elections for a Constituent Assembly which would decide upon the future form of government and the confirmation by Tirana of the validity of the bilateral treaties concluded during the reign of King Zog. It is interesting to note that at that time, the United States still believed that Albania could follow an independent course, since the Soviet Army had not entered the country during the war. In fact, U.S. officials had hoped that "if there is any occupied country where, in accordance with the Crimea Declaration, the three great powers might collaborate on equal footing, that country is Albania."²⁵

The stand of American diplomacy towards Albania at that time seems to be contradictory. By insisting on free election and the validity of the former treaties with King Zog, the United States hoped to strengthen its presence and influence in Albania as a counterweight to the Soviet penetration. On the other hand, the delay in granting diplomatic recognition had the effect of further driving Albania in the Soviet-Yugoslav

direction. While the United States expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the general elections in December 1945, the question of pre-war treaties was never resolved, becoming an insurmountable obstacle for the resumption of diplomatic relations.

By the beginning of 1946 the United States was convinced that a communist regime was established in Albania, which was slipping under the patronage of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. A telegram that the Head of the American mission in Albania, Jacobs, sent on 5 February 1946 to the Secretary of State stressed that "Soviet influence here has been increased by leaps and bounds" and that "everything the Albanian government is doing is directed by a Communist pro-Soviet group with, at least, the knowledge and consent of Soviet authorities and possibly under their direction."²⁶ Confronted with the increasing hostility of the Albanian government, which had put a number of restrictions on the movements of the American mission, as well as the continuous refusal of the Albanian authorities to recognize the validity of the pre-war bilateral treaties, the United States finally decided, at the beginning of November 1946, to withdraw its informal mission from Albania. In a telegram that the Acting Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, sent, on 2 November 1946, to the U.S. Acting Representative in Albania, Henderson, it is stated that there was not "any further reason for the mission to remain in Albania" and that "the mission has been unable to achieve the purposes for which it was originally sent to Albania," that is, the establishment of diplomatic relations.²⁷

Seen in retrospect, it is hard to reach a conclusion as to whether the withdrawal of the American mission from Albania was the right or the wrong decision at the time. The fact is that the absence of diplomatic relations as well as the lack of an American representation in Albania greatly weakened the capacity of American diplomacy to

influence the future direction of the internal and external developments of Albania. It had also deprived the United States of a foothold in a strategic position in the Balkans. A key question can be asked in reference to this problem: Having in mind the strong pro-American feelings of the Albanian population, would an American presence have influenced the future course of the country, especially after the break with the Soviet Union in 1961?

On several later occasions, Washington offered to establish diplomatic relations with Albania, but to no avail. By the end of the 1940s Albania would fall under the total influence of Soviet Union, and later in the 1960s, China.

However, the American withdrawal from Albania did not mean the end of American concern with the Albanian question. Very soon Albania was to become the first test of the new American strategy in the early Cold War era.

5. Albania and U.S. Strategy of Rolling Back Communism

The Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948 set the stage for the beginning of the Cold War in Europe. At that time, all the Eastern European countries (with the exception of Yugoslavia) were communist dictatorships under the firm grip of the Soviet Union. By then, Washington had already abandoned any hopes of accommodation with the Soviet Union and the establishment of free and democratic regimes in Eastern Europe, in accordance with the Crimea Declaration. Instead, the containment of communism, proclaimed by George Kennan, would become the new official doctrine of U.S. foreign policy. Very soon, a Balkan crisis would constitute the first test of this doctrine. In March

1947 the United States proclaimed the Truman doctrine, which aimed at saving Greece and Turkey from the threat of a communist takeover. The American intervention in the Balkan crisis marked the first major engagement of the United States in an area traditionally under British and European influence. At the same time the Balkan operation affirmed the new status of the United States as a superpower, with wider interests in Europe and beyond.

It must be stressed that despite the success in the Balkans, conservative circles in Washington were not pleased with the containment policy, which they considered inadequate to save the people of Eastern Europe from the communist yoke. Instead, they wanted a firmer and a more aggressive policy towards communism. At the beginning of the 1950s, there was a great deal of talk in Washington about liberation and the rolling back of communism. Liberation became the leitmotiv of the election agenda of the Republican Party in the presidential campaign of 1952. In fact, during the first term of the Eisenhower administration, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles openly urged a policy calling for the liberation of the peoples of Eastern Europe.

It was at this time that the United States, in collaboration with Britain, chose Albania as the first test of the new policy of rolling back communism. There were several reasons for this choice. First, American diplomacy considered Albania the weakest link in the communist chain. Geographically, after the defection of Yugoslavia, Albania was separated from the rest of the communist world, something that made its position more vulnerable. Economically, Albania was the poorest country in Europe and the new communist regime had done little to alleviate the sufferings of the population. According to U.S. intelligence sources, this situation had led to a growing dissatisfaction with and

opposition to the regime, stronger than in other communist countries. A CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) document stated that, "the present isolation and weakness of the pro-Soviet Albanian regime are important factors, contributing to its basic instability."²⁸

Second, with the onset of the Cold War, the strategic position of Albania at the entrance of the Adriatic was considered to be important for the West. A State Department document of the time stated "the United States has a strategic interest in Albania, whose significance derives from its strategic situation and from its part in the complex of Balkan and Adriatic relations."²⁹ The U.S. was seriously worried about the dangers of a possible installation of a Russian naval base in the port city of Vlora, in Southern Albania, which had a dominant position at the entrance of the Mediterranean.

The third reason was the lack of an American embassy in Albania, something that would have no consequences for eventual reprisals of the communist authorities against American subjects and institutions.

Under these circumstances, the State Department compiled a number of short and long-term objectives towards Albania. The main short-term objective, as expressed in a top-secret State Department document, dated 21 September 1949, was "the weakening and the eventual elimination of the Soviet-dominated Hoxha regime."³⁰ Another short-term objective was to deny Russia military rights and bases in Albania in time of peace. The main long-range objective was "the establishment of an Albania, which is free of foreign domination and whose government is responsive and responsible to the will of the Albanian people."³¹

The Albanian question was widely discussed in a meeting of the Policy Planning Staff in Washington on 1 April 1949, which analyzed the U.S. policy towards the Soviet

satellites in Eastern Europe. The meeting, presided over by Staff Director George Kennan, reached the conclusion that “something very definitely might be accomplished now in the way of assisting in the overthrow of the present pro-Kremlin regime (in Albania) or in the setting up of a new regime which would be anti-Communist and therefore pro-Western.”³²

In order to realize these objectives the United States relied on the anti-communist organizations and groups of refugees that had fled Albania immediately after the establishment of the communist regime. In the autumn of 1949 the United States gave the official go-ahead for preparations for an intervention in Albania. The base for the training of the commandos was established on the island of Malta, in the Mediterranean, while the American and British intelligence services set up a joint command to direct the operation. From 1951 to 1954, various groups of commandos, comprised of Albanian émigrés in the West, were sent into Albania by air, sea or land with the aim of inciting and organizing an anti-communist revolt, which was supposed to lead to the overthrow of the regime.

However, the operation did not proceed according to the plans of the organizers and, in the end, it resulted in a complete failure. The commandos were unable to incite any real opposition to the regime and most of them were captured or eliminated by the Albanian military forces. The reasons for this failure are manifold. For the West, the main culprit is considered to be British Intelligence officer, Kim Philby, who was joint commander of the operation and who was revealed to be a Soviet spy. However other factors came to play. First, the United States and Britain overestimated the extent of the weakness of the communist regime in Albania as well as the strength of the opposition to it. In the absence of diplomatic representation in the country, most of the information on

Albania came from Yugoslav sources, which, because of the recent split and bitter relations between the two countries, tried to present an unrealistic picture of Albania. Second, by placing too much hope on the traditionally pro-American sentiments of the Albanian people, Washington had also underestimated the effect of the indoctrination of the population by the communists' propaganda. Third, most of the émigrés that were sent as commandos were discredited figures because of their former collaboration during the war with the Italian and German forces, and they did not enjoy great prestige among the native population.

The attempts to organize an anti-communist uprising and overthrow the communist regime marked the highest stage of American engagement in the Albanian question. This act further consolidated the anti-American orientation of the communist regime in Albania, dashing any hope for a possible reestablishment of diplomatic relations.

The failure of the Albanian operation would serve as an important lesson for future American policy towards the communist countries in Eastern Europe. The Albanian example helped to convince Washington of the impossibility of the strategy of rolling back communism in Eastern Europe and its replacement with pro-Western regimes. The containment policy once again became the official doctrine of Washington. It was at this time, after the death of Stalin and the coming to power of Khrushchev, a more pragmatic leader, that the United States came to accept the realities of the Cold War and began to observe the division of spheres of influence in Europe. This was best illustrated in the case of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, when the United States, while playing a major role in its incitement, did nothing to help the insurgents in the face of brutal Soviet intervention.

In accordance with new historic developments, by the late 1950s, the United States began to adopt a new policy towards the communist countries of Eastern Europe, that of differentiation, which consisted of encouraging, wherever possible, an independent course, away from Soviet domination, without provoking a Russian military intervention. This was the case with Yugoslavia and later with Romania. Albania, to a lesser degree, was to become part of this new policy.

6. The Long Freeze

After failing at their attempt to overthrow the communist regime in Albania from within, the American government began to adopt a new course of rapprochement and friendly gestures toward Albania. In 1955, the United States withdrew its objection to Albania joining the United Nations. The same year, president Eisenhower announced that Washington, for the first time, would send a quantity of food aid to Albania, since its food supplies were dwindling seriously. Although this offer was rejected by the communist regime in Tirana, it signaled a significant shift in U.S. policy towards Albania. In fact, it was precisely at this time that the State Department had reached the conclusion that the lack of an American diplomatic mission in Albania constituted a disadvantage for the achievement of American objectives in this country and that it was time to explore the possibilities for the establishment of diplomatic relations. A National Security Council study, dated 20 November 1957, noted that “there has been no significant progress in the achievement of U.S. national objectives with respect to Bulgaria and Albania,” (relations with Bulgaria were frozen until 1960), and that it was desirable “to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the resumption of diplomatic

relations with Bulgaria, and possibly also with Albania.”³³ Another National Security Council Report, dated 24 May 1958, noted that, “Albania presents special problems to U.S. policy because it has traditionally been subject to rival claims and ambitions by Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia.”³⁴ In particular, Washington considered the military penetration and presence of Russia in Albania as very dangerous for American security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Under these circumstances and in the absence of direct diplomatic relations, the United States tried to encourage the other Western countries to establish diplomatic relations and increase their contacts with Albania in order to strengthen Western influence there and to counter, to some extent, Soviet dominance. Washington welcomed Albania’s break with the Soviet Union in 1961, considering this development as the best chance to resume its offer for the establishment of diplomatic relations. However, any hope in this direction was quickly dashed with the rapid shift of Albania toward close ties with China, a move that was motivated by ideological and economic reasons. In spite of this new turn in Albania’s politics, Washington continued to stick to its strategy of courting the Albanian leaders, trying to open other possible channels of communication with that country. In 1966, for the first time, the U.S. Department of Commerce allowed the export of some non-strategic goods to Albania while the State Department removed the restrictions on travel of U.S. citizens to Albania.

It is interesting to note that by that time, the United States had dropped its previous insistence on the validity of the pre-war bilateral treaties as a precondition for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Albania. Thus, in a conversation in Washington with the Italian Counselor, Piero Ferraboschi, in March 1972, the Director of

the Albanian, Bulgarian, and Yugoslav affairs at the State Department, Richard Johnson, pointed out that “the United States Government would welcome the normalization of relations with Albania” and that “the obligations contained in the pre-war U.S.-Albanian bilateral agreements would appear no longer to possess substantial intrinsic importance.”³⁵ This new American approach toward Albania was reaffirmed by the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Kenneth Rush, who, in a major speech on U.S. policy towards Eastern Europe at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, on 4 April 1973, stressed that if Albania wished to resume relations with the United States, “it will find us prepared to respond.”³⁶

However, all these offers were rejected by the Hoxha regime in Tirana, which continued to consider the United States, along with the Soviet Union, the greatest enemies of peace and freedom of the peoples of the world. Hoxha reiterated that Albania will never maintain relations with the two superpowers.³⁷

The United States welcomed Albania’s break with China in the late 1970s, concluding that after this, “Albania was now following a course independent of any major power.”³⁸ Washington had hoped that after losing the services of another big power, Albania, because of her precarious economic and security position, would turn for help to the West, including the United States. It is for this reason that Washington once again resumed its offer for the establishment of diplomatic relations. During a hearing before a Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, on 10 June 1981, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Laurence Eagleburger, stressed that “should Albania display an interest in resuming relations with us, we would be prepared to respond.”³⁹

Tirana again rejected this new offer. In fact, the new course of independence from the major powers, as described by Washington, led to the further isolation of Albania from the international arena. At that time, Albania was the only country in Europe that refused to participate at the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as the only communist country in Eastern Europe not to have diplomatic relations with the major western powers such as the United States, Great Britain, and West Germany.

The death, on 11 April 1985, of Enver Hoxha, the communist dictator who had ruled Albania with an iron fist for nearly four decades, renewed hopes in the West for a major reorientation of Albania's course in the international arena. It is interesting to note that the United States reacted swiftly to Hoxha's death, trying to seize this opportunity by extending a new offer for the establishment of diplomatic relations. Thus, on the day of Hoxha's death, the State Department spokesman, Edward Djerejian, when asked to comment on this development, reiterated once more that, "should Albania indicate an interest in resuming relations with the United States, we would be prepared to respond."⁴⁰

Once again the response from Tirana was negative. Although Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia, began to adopt a more pragmatic approach towards the West, as was demonstrated with the establishment of diplomatic relations with West Germany, Canada, and other Western powers, he continued to abide to the old Hoxha policy in opposing any relations with the United States or the Soviet Union, still considering them "dangerous and aggressive superpowers."⁴¹

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe forced the communist leadership in Albania to outline, at the beginning of the 1990s, a new course for its domestic and foreign policy, publicly expressing, for the first time its

readiness to establish diplomatic relations with the United States. Finally, a long freeze was coming to an end, while a new page would open in the history of bilateral American – Albanian relations.

Endnotes

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²³ Ibid., 70.

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²⁹ Ibid., 265

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³² Ibid., 12-13.

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³⁵ William Bland and Ian Price, A Tangled Web, 296.

³⁶ Department of State Bulletin, v. 68, no. 1766, April 30, 1973 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973), 536.

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³⁸ American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1983), 542.

³⁹ American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1981 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1984), 587.

⁴⁰ Quoted in American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1985 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1986), 413..

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CHAPTER 3

THE PRESENT

1. Albania's Transition to Democracy and the Role of the United States

The end of the 1980s brought about dramatic changes in the political map of Europe. As a result of wide-spread popular pressures from inside and the prolonged economic crisis, as well as the withdrawal of Soviet support, the communist regimes in Eastern Europe fell one after another, paving the way for the establishment of pluralism and a market economy. This was a strategic victory for the West, especially for the United States, which had waged a long battle for the defeat of communism.

After the revolutions of the 1980s, the United States, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, remained the sole superpower and actively engaged in assisting the East European countries in the difficult transition from communism to democracy. This role was most evident in the case of Albania, which, more than any other East European country, owes its transition to democracy to the United States. Given the rigidity of Tirana's brand of communism and the long isolation of the country, Washington was conscious that Albania's transition to democracy would be more difficult and prolonged compared to other East European countries. Ignoring the events in the rest of Eastern Europe, the Albanian communist leadership, in spite of some limited reforms, continued to refuse any

change in the political system, insisting on the validity of communism. Under these circumstances, Washington tried to combine political and economic pressures with diplomatic approaches in order to force the Tirana regime into accepting political pluralism.

In the spring of 1990, feeling more and more isolated from the general trends in Europe, the Albanian leadership expressed, for the first time, the desire to reestablish diplomatic relations with the United States. The response from Washington was that, before this, Tirana had to undertake significant steps towards the establishment of political pluralism and democracy. In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, James Baker, then Secretary of State, stressed that the United States would link the restoration of diplomatic relations with Albania to Tirana's acceptance of political pluralism and a movement towards a market economy.¹ The same message was communicated directly to Albanian President Ramiz Alia from Congressman Tom Lantos, who in May 1990 became the first U.S. official to visit Albania in more than four decades.

As a result of concerted American and Western pressures, as well as growing internal unrest, in December 1990 the Albanian leadership finally accepted political pluralism, becoming the last communist country in Eastern Europe to take such a step. New general elections were set for the spring of 1991.

These developments created the possibility for the resumption of Albanian -American relations. On 15 March 1991, after some months of negotiations, the United States and Albania signed an agreement in Washington for the formal establishment of diplomatic relations, ending a gap of more than half a century. This was an historic development in

the bilateral relations of the two countries. For many Albanians, who had great hopes in the United States, this was a welcome development.

At this stage, the United States considered that a diplomatic presence in Tirana would better serve American interests in facilitating a smooth transition from communism to democracy in Albania and ensuring a kind of internal stability at a time when new threats of war were hanging over the Balkans. At the same time, Washington concluded that only the victory of the opposition forces in the coming spring election would bring stability to Albania. Thus the American envoys in Albania openly supported the electoral campaign of the opposition forces. However, despite these efforts, keeping in mind the shortness of time and a lack in organization of the still young opposition forces, the March 1991 elections resulted in the victory of the former communist forces. This result had direct influence on American-Albanian relations. The United States, contrary to the stand of some Western European countries, such as Italy, was quick to react, considering the elections unfair and not free, and demanding their repetition.² Washington made it clear that any economic aid or political support to Albania would be linked to what it called real progress to democracy.

The continued pressures from the United States and from some other Western countries, as well as the deterioration of the internal economic and political situation in Albania finally led to the collapse of the communist government and the formation, in June 1991, of a coalition government with the participation, for the first time, of the opposition forces. New general elections were set for the beginning of the coming year. This development, which was welcomed by Washington, created new possibilities for the advancement of bilateral relations between the two countries. Shortly after this, with the

recommendation and support of the United States. Albania was admitted as a full member of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (now Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe-OSCE). Albania had been the only country in Europe not to participate in this organization since its inauguration in 1975. Some days later, on 22 June 1991, Secretary of State James Baker visited Tirana, the first U.S. high-ranking official to visit this country for more than half a century.

Baker's visit had three significant aims. First, it demonstrated the normalization of the bilateral relations and the increasing interest of U.S. diplomacy towards Albania at a time when Washington was foreseeing new turbulence in the Balkans as a result of the imminent disintegration of Yugoslavia. This message was made clear by Baker when he told thousands of Albanians, gathered at the main square in Tirana, that after half a century of no contacts, "America was returning to you."³ Second, this visit aimed at pressuring the present leaders of Albania to continue with political and economic reforms, while trying to boost the chances of the anti-communist opposition forces to win the coming election. Towards this end, during his speech at the Albanian parliament, Baker stated that he was visiting the country after a personal invitation from the opposition leader, Sali Berisha, a declaration that caused concern and surprised the high-ranking ex-communist officials present at the ceremony.⁴ Meanwhile, in a separate meeting with Berisha and other representatives of the opposition forces, Baker urged them to unite and work together so that they could win the next parliamentary election.

But, more than anything else, Baker's visit to Tirana allowed the Albanian people to demonstrate their strong support for America, and the high hopes, though somewhat naïve, they had placed on U.S. aid and assistance. This was shown by the multitude of

people gathered at the main square of Tirana (200,000 people out of the 500,000 inhabitants of Tirana at that time). Later, in his memoir, Baker would admit that during his fifteen years in public life, he had never seen a reception such as that in Albania. "The outpouring of genuine affection and support," Baker would write, "was because of the symbol of hope that America represents to people like this, who had had nothing to hope for so very long."⁵

Following Baker's visit, Washington increased its economic support and cooperation with Albania, abolishing a number of restrictions in the field of trade and immigration that existed since the communist period. Meanwhile, U.S. representatives in Tirana and American institutions, such as the Republican and Democratic National Institutes, were actively involved in the support and organization of the election campaign of the Democratic Party, the main opposition party. In particular, the U.S. ambassador to Tirana, William Ryerson, in an unusual move, greatly surpassed his diplomatic role, constantly appearing together with the opposition leader, Sali Berisha, at the rallies of the Democratic Party, and calling on the people to vote for Berisha and his party. In no other former communist country in Eastern Europe was a U.S. ambassador seen playing such a role during an election campaign.

American support was crucial for the landslide victory of the opposition Democratic Party in the March 1992 election. By this time the Albanian electorate had become very sensitive to the position of the United States, whose support they relied upon for the security of the country and its future integration into the Euro-Atlantic community.

Washington was quick to consider the new election as free and fair and pledged to establish close links with the new government and support Albania on the road to reforms

and democracy. For his part, Berisha, who was elected the new president of the country, wasted no time in expressing his pro-American position, considering the relations with the United States as the first priority of the new government. These declarations caused some concern in Western Europe, especially in Italy, which at that time was the main financial contributor to Albania and considered itself the natural ally and protector of the country.

2. The Berisha Government and the Golden Years of U.S. – Albanian Relations

Following the victory of the Democratic Party in March 1992, and the election of Berisha as President, the relations between Albania and the United States greatly improved. In fact, the years 1992-1995, which coincided with the rule of the Democratic Party, can be described as the golden years in American-Albanian relations, when Washington took a special interest in Albania. There are a number of reasons for this development.

First, with the spread of the war in the former Yugoslavia and a possible flare up of the conflict in Kosova, the Berisha government considered the American support the main guarantee for the security and independence of his country. Berisha did not put much trust in Italy and the other West European powers, which, he thought, historically had sided with the Serbs and the Greeks at the expense of Albania's territorial integrity. Second, there were internal political considerations. Berisha counted on American support as a counterweight to the open support of the Italian socialist government of Bettino Craxi for the Socialist party of Albania (former communists), headed by the

former Prime Minister, Fatos Nano. Third, on a personal note, Berisha wanted to use his strong pro-American rhetoric and orientation as a shield against all those on the left and the far right, who considered him an offspring of the former communist regime because of his past membership in the Communist party.

As for the United States, Washington had a strategic interest in its strong support for, and close relations with, the Berisha government. The years 1992-1995 coincided with the bloody conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia as well as with a growing involvement of the United States in the Yugoslav conflict. Under these conditions, Washington considered Albania as a valuable partner in its efforts to contain the Yugoslav conflict and ensure stability in the region. First, the U.S. counted on its ties with Albania to use its territory for conducting military and reconnaissance missions in the war zone. This was of strategic importance at a time when other countries in the region, such as Macedonia and Greece, had refused to give such permission. Second, Washington aimed to use the influence of the Berisha government in order to moderate any nationalist manifestations on the part of the Albanian leaders in Kosova and urged them to negotiate with Milosevic in order to prevent another war zone in Kosova. At a time when the United States was engaged in resolving the conflicts in Bosnia and Croatia, Berisha provided a great service to American interests in the region. Washington was conscious that Albania could not fulfill these missions without internal stability and economic development. It is for these reasons that during this period the American government invested heavily (militarily, politically and economically) in its support for Albania's Democratic government and specifically for Berisha who was considered the only person that could stop the country's slide back into chaos.⁶

a. The Military Connections

It is no surprise that the U.S.-Albanian ties were most evident in the military field. Since the beginning of the Berisha government, we witness a constant increase in the presence of U.S. military missions and personnel in Albania. In 1992, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding which tied the Albanian Defense Ministry with the U.S. command Headquarters in Europe.⁷ Following this agreement, a number of American military advisors were appointed to the Albanian Defense Ministry and a U.S. liaison office was opened in this ministry. In 1994, a second military agreement was signed, which included, for the first time, the provision of certain equipment for the Albanian army. With the intensification of the conflict in Bosnia, the U.S. military began to conduct a number of joint military exercises with the Albanian army, in preparation for the use of Albanian territory for a possible combat or peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. A number of joint land and naval exercises were held during 1995 alone, including an engineering exercise, the first of its kind in Eastern Europe.⁸ The Albanian minister of Defense, Safet Zhulali, was at that time a frequent visitor to the Pentagon, while many U.S. high-ranking military officials, including Defense Secretary William Perry, visited Albania. In one of these visits, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense, Joseph Nye, stressed that, "Washington believed Albania to be a pillar of stability in the Balkans."⁹

Meanwhile, strong cooperation was established between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Albanian Intelligence Agency. In the spring of 1993, the CIA took over a military airfield in the northern part of the country, near the border with Montenegro, in order to prepare it as a base for unmanned observation flights over Bosnia. In July 1995, the United States deployed two Predator spy planes in this airfield

to conduct reconnaissance missions over Bosnia in order to gather intelligence on the location of troops and weapons. About 100 American military and civilian personnel were stationed at the base, the most significant U.S. military deployment ever in Albania.¹⁰

It was by this time that the U.S. showed an open interest for the island of Sazani, a strategic location at the entrance of the Mediterranean and a former Soviet naval base. A number of U.S. military experts visited the island and work began for the modernization of military facilities.

For his part, Berisha stated on more than one occasion that the Albanian government was ready to place its airports, seaports, and other facilities at the disposal of the United States and NATO for any possible use in the region.¹¹

b. The NATO Dimension

Since the beginning, the Berisha government considered closer ties and entrance into the Atlantic Alliance as a matter of strategic interest for the country. In fact, Albania was the first country in Eastern Europe to file in 1992 a formal application for membership to NATO, an application that was politely turned down. The former Secretary General of NATO, the late Manfred Wörner, was a frequent visitor to Tirana and cultivated strong personal ties with Berisha. Although the United States had never expressed any open approval for Albania's membership in NATO, the impression among analysts at that time was that Washington was pushing in that direction. In 1994 Albania was among the first countries to join NATO's Partnership for Peace program, which was launched by the Clinton administration, as a first step before gaining full membership. With the end of the Yugoslav conflict and the internal instability caused by the fall of the pyramid schemes in

1997, the chances of Albania joining NATO diminished. However, Albania is still among the nine candidates that are under discussion for admittance to the alliance in a second round of enlargement.

c. Political Ties

Another example of the strong bilateral ties that existed during that period between the two countries was the intensity of diplomatic contacts at the highest levels. In June 1992, less than three months after his election as President, Berisha visited the United States and met with President Bush at the White House. This was the first such summit in the history of the two countries. In 1993 the Albanian Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi met with President Clinton at the White House, while in 1995 President Berisha conducted his second official visit to Washington where he discussed regional issues and bilateral military and economic cooperation with President Clinton. During these discussions, Clinton valued Albania's important and responsible role in regional affairs, while both sides expressed their commitment to further strengthen bilateral ties.¹² The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, and other high-ranking U.S. officials visited Albania during the 1994-1996 period.

d. Economic Connections

Along with improvements in military and political ties with the Berisha government, there was also an increase in American economic assistance for Albania. In a boost for the Berisha government, in 1992 Washington granted Albania most favored nation status in trade and abolished a number of restrictions for Albanian products and U.S. companies operating in Albania. In 1995 the two countries concluded a treaty for the encouragement and reciprocal protection of investments. That same year Washington established a \$30

million Albanian-American Enterprise Fund to encourage private American companies to invest in Albania. A number of American companies secured government contracts in Albania, especially in the fields of oil, telecommunications and mining. It is estimated that during the period from 1991 to 1995, Washington granted Albania more than \$250 million in technical and humanitarian assistance, which made the U.S. Albania's second highest contributor of foreign aid, after Italy.¹³ Compared with the small size of the Albanian population of 3.5 million inhabitants, this sum is the largest granted to any former communist country in the Balkans. U.S. support was crucial to Albania's entry during this period to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as well as to securing considerable loans and assistance from these powerful financial institutions, dominated by Washington.

For many observers, Berisha's strong pro-American policy and close ties with Washington was in keeping with Albania's traditional concern to seek refuge in the arms of a superpower in order to protect its sovereignty from the threats of its more powerful neighbors. In fact, for Albania, this was a new edition of its love affair with a superpower, after the bitter experiences with the Soviet Union and China. As for the United States, the establishment of close ties with Albania served American strategic aims in the Balkans, in preventing a further spillover of the conflict in the South.

However, as time would prove, by 1996, with the end of the Yugoslav conflict and the internal upheavals in Albanian politics, the U.S.-Albanian honeymoon would come to an end, testifying once more to the sudden turns of Albania's foreign policy.

3. The Fall of an Idol

The year 1996 was a bad one for U.S.-Albanian relations. In May 1996 new general elections were organized in Albania. The Democratic Party, which had ruled the country for four years, had hoped for another landslide victory. But the political situation in the country had changed. In spite of some economic and political gains, the population had begun to feel the effects of the market reforms, which initially led to rising unemployment and prices, while there was growing discontent with the widespread corruption of the officials. On the other hand, the former communist party, now turned socialist, had reformed itself along the lines of other socialist parties in Eastern Europe and seemed to be more acceptable to the electorate. Meanwhile, the U.S. ambassador William Ryerson, Berisha's main supporter, was no longer in Tirana. Keeping in mind the new political situation in Albania and past criticism for interfering in the internal affairs of the country, the United States tried to adopt a more neutral stand with the coming of the new elections.

In fact, the May 1996 elections turned out to cause a great amount of damage to the democratic processes in Albania. Arrogant in its aims to secure by all means another historic victory, the Democratic Party tried to manipulate the vote, resorting to many irregularities and open pressure against the opposition forces and its supporters. This created a bad image abroad for the democratic credentials of the Democratic Party. In fact, the international community criticized the election, which was won by Berisha's Party by a large margin, as unfair and far from democratic standards. To some surprise, the United States turned out to be the most critical foreign power of the May 1996 election. The State Department issued a statement saying it considered the elections "a

significant step backward from the previous parliamentary election in Albania in 1992,” while demanding a revote in a considerable number of districts.¹⁴ This was the first open schism between Washington and its closest ally in Albania, Berisha. Washington let it be known to Berisha that unless he undertook measures to amend the flawed May election, the United States would not support the government that would emerge from the new parliament. In fact, contrary to the stand of some other Western powers, American diplomats boycotted the inaugural session of the new parliament. This was another sign of the split between the Berisha government and the United States. Throughout the summer of 1996, Washington urged Berisha to review the voting process, even raising the stakes by demanding the organization of new elections. When in August 1996 Berisha refused to meet Clinton’s special envoy, Timothy Wirth, who was sent to Tirana to discuss the flawed electoral process and human rights concerns raised by the opposition, it was clear that the honeymoon between Berisha and Washington was finally over.

All these developments had a negative influence on the relations between the two countries, leading to a freeze in a number of joint projects and initiatives. In testimony before the House of Representative’s Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Operations, on 25 July 1996, Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Rudolph Perina announced that in view of Berisha’s refusal to comply with the U.S. and International community demands as related to the May 1996 election, the United States had initiated a thorough review of its relations with Albania, including assistance programs.¹⁵

For some political analysts the schism between Washington and Berisha, who at the beginning of the 1990s was considered the most pro-American leader in Eastern Europe,

was a bit of surprise. However, there existed a number of issues and reasons for the shift in that direction.

a. Human Rights Concerns

With the coming to power of the Clinton administration, Washington put more emphasis on the issue of human rights, considering it one of the main pillars of its relations with other countries, including the new democracies of Eastern Europe. As in the case of Lukashenko in Byelorussia or Meciar in Slovakia, Washington became preoccupied with some aspects of human rights abuses on the part of the Berisha government, especially towards the opposition. In the summer of 1993, Fatos Nano, the leader of the Socialist Party, the biggest opposition party, was jailed under charges of corruption. For many observers, that was a political act on the part of Berisha's government. Meanwhile, in the summer of 1994 the premises of the newspaper "Koha Jone," the biggest independent paper in the country, was burned by unknown persons, believed to be government secret agents. All these acts could not go unnoticed in Washington, where government officials also began to be preoccupied with the harsh stand of Berisha towards the small Greek minority in Albania. In late 1994 the Albanian authorities arrested and put in jail a number of leaders of the Greek minority organization, "Omonia," accusing them of espionage. This incident caused serious frictions in Albanian-Greek relations. Trying to avoid another crisis in the Balkans, Washington called on both parties for a dialogue and put pressure on Berisha to release the Omonian leaders. For a period Berisha defied these requests, causing further strains in the two country's relations. Thus, a planned visit of Berisha to the United States in 1995 was made conditional upon the release of the Omonian leaders. At the same time,

Washington put on hold plans for a \$30 million Albania-American Enterprise Fund.¹⁶ Although Berisha later bowed to American pressure and the Omonian leaders were released, this incident tarnished the human rights credentials of the Berisha government and was a warning for the American administration.

b. Nationalist Tendencies

As mentioned, from the beginning Berisha allied Albanian foreign policy with the needs of American strategy in the region and put the national territory at the disposal of the United States and NATO . At the same time, in accordance with Washington's requests, Berisha tried to play a moderate role in Albania's relations with neighboring countries and to quell any nationalist tendencies of Albanians living in those countries, especially in Kosova. But with the passing of time, this stand began to change, sometimes taking the form of nationalism. The first manifestation of this stand was as early as 1993 in Macedonia. During the autumn of that year, there was a power struggle within the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), the biggest party of Albanians in Macedonia, which, at that time, was part of the coalition government. A radical faction, led by Menduh Thaci and Arber Xhaferi, criticized the existing leadership of the party for compromising the rights of the Albanian community. Berisha allied himself with the radical group in their criticism against the leadership of the PDP, which at that time seemed closer to the opposition socialist party in Albania. This official stand of Tirana in support of the radical group, which advocated a confrontational stand toward the Macedonian government, caused some friction in Albania's relationship with Macedonia. The United States was concerned that this development could radicalize the demands of the Albanians in Macedonia, leading to a destabilization of the country. For this reason,

Washington exerted pressure on Berisha to moderate his support for the radicals and engage in a more constructive policy towards Macedonia, something that later resulted in a number of bilateral agreements between the two countries.

Berisha manifested this same unpredictable policy with raising nationalist tones towards Kosova, too, especially in periods of intense internal political conflicts in Albania. Thus in 1996, during the opposition demonstrations in Belgrade, Berisha called on Albanians in Kosova to organize street protests, coming out against the peaceful policy of Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova, a policy that, for pragmatic reasons, at that time enjoyed the support of the United States.

c. Authoritarian Tendencies

Like many other East European leaders of the time, such as Walesa in Poland, Iliescu in Romania and Meciar in Slovakia, Berisha proved to be a very authoritarian and controversial political personality. To some extent it was Washington that nourished these tendencies. At the initial stages of democracy in Albania, Washington needed a strong hand in the country in order to ensure a kind of stability in the chaotic Balkans. At that time the United States encouraged an American model of the presidency in Albania, believing that a strong president could stabilize the country and moderate its stand towards neighbors. This was evident in the draft Constitution of 1994, which was written with the aid of American experts. But this American model backfired in Albania and the draft Constitution, which envisaged sweeping powers for the President, was decisively rejected in a national referendum. The Albanian people, who had suffered for a long time under a dictatorship, had no desire for another dictator. Moreover, Albania lacked the

political culture of the United States, and Berisha himself was a product of the former communist regime.

Taking the American support for granted, Berisha continued to concentrate power in his hands, trying to dominate his own party and to put under government control every aspect of political life, including the judiciary system and mass media. This caused a large amount of friction even with his close allies. On several occasions, the U.S. had to intervene in the internal quarrels of the Democratic Party in order to avoid any possible political crises in the country. Thus, in 1995, Washington tried to solve a political confrontation that emerged at that time between Berisha and his closest ally, Eduard Selami (then Chairman of the party) as well as another dispute with the Head of Cassation, Zef Brozi, over the competencies of the judiciary branch of government. In both cases, in order to quell the internal political strife, Washington invited Selami and Brozi to the United States and granted them political asylum.

These developments increased the perception in Washington of Berisha as an authoritarian leader, and led to concerns over his unpredictable nature. The bitter polemic with Selami was especially harmful for Berisha because Selami was considered one of the most pro-American leaders in the Democratic Party.

d. The New Geo-Strategic Setting

One of the main explanations for the precipitated downfall of Berisha's credentials in his relations with his patron, the United States, was the change after 1995 of the geo-strategic situation in the Balkans. For much of the period from 1992-95 the United States ignored domestic and international criticism towards the increasing authoritarian style of government used by Berisha. Due to concerns about the unresolved conflicts in Bosnia

and Croatia and a possibility of a flare up in Kosova, Albania, during that period, gained strategic prominence in the eyes of the United States, which was more concerned with the stability of the country and its role in the U.S. strategy in the Balkans than with the authoritarian rule and human right abuses of Berisha. For Washington, Berisha was considered the only personality who could ensure stability in the country, allying Albania firmly to the United States. This stand was in accordance with the realist theory, when for its national self-interests the United States has come to the support of various dictatorial or undemocratic regimes. This has been the case with U.S. support for Pinochet in Chile, Saudi Arabia, and now with Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

However, after the signing of the Dayton Accords in December 1995 and with a relatively calm situation in Kosova, the strategic importance of Albania diminished somewhat in the eyes of the American administration.¹⁷ Washington's stand towards Berisha was greatly influenced by this new geo-strategic setting as well as an increased emphasis on human rights by the Clinton administration. The flawed 1996 election and Berisha's refusal to heed the criticism and recommendations of the United States and the international community sealed his divorce with his former protectors and supporters. After that, it was clear that Berisha lost once and for all favor with the United States, which began to consider him a dangerous and unpredictable element, unable to maintain the stability of the country and to respect the values of democracy.¹⁸

4. The Socialists – The New U.S. Allies in Albania

Following the May 1996 elections, Albania entered into a period of intense internal political squabbles and confrontations, which severely undermined the democratic

process and the image of the country as a stabilizing factor in the Balkans. This situation took a worse turn at the beginning of 1997 with the collapse of the pyramid schemes. During the period 1994-96 in Albania, a number of companies operated and began to collect the savings of the population by promising much higher interest rates than the banks. Some of these companies, in order to disguise their true nature, were involved in charitable activities. Thousands of Albanians, who were dependent on the get rich quick investments for their livelihood, lost their life savings. Up to that time, the government seemed to have tolerated the activity of these fraudulent schemes in an apparent attempt to lessen the burden of poverty and unemployment. So, it was not a surprise that, after the fall of the pyramid schemes, the frustration and anger of the population turned towards the government, blaming it for not taking the proper measures to prevent such a development. This led to widespread unrest and an armed revolt that undermined the government's authority over most part of the country.

Meanwhile, the socialists and other opposition forces tried to take advantage of this development, giving their full support to the mass protests and calling for earlier general elections. This further deepened the political crisis and divisions between the government and opposition, while the country slid into anarchy.

This situation alerted the international community, which greatly feared that the instability in Albania could spread to Kosova and other areas, endangering the fragile status quo that existed in the Balkans after the Dayton accords. The OSCE sent a special mission to Albania, headed by the former Austrian chancellor, Frantz Vranitzki, in order to find a solution to the internal political crisis. At the same time, a multinational

protection force headed by Italy was sent to Albania to secure the delivery of essential foods and guarantee the freedom of movement along the main communication routes.

From the beginning of this crisis, the United States gave its full backing to the international military and political missions in Albania, and an American envoy was appointed to the Vranitzki delegation. Washington threw its support to the demonstrators, which were organized by the socialist opposition, making it clear that they favored the resignation of president Berisha as a quick solution to the political crisis. In fact, the U.S. openly boycotted the parliamentary session, which was convened in the midst of the crisis, in March 1997, to reelect Berisha for another 5-year term, considering it as a provocative movement. The U.S. diplomats in Albania avoided any public meetings with Berisha, further isolating him politically.¹⁹ At the end, under continuous pressures from the U.S. and the international community and feeling the ever tightening grip of the popular uprising, Berisha was forced to accept, in March 1997, the formation of a broad coalition government, headed by a socialist, Bashkim Fino, as well as the organization of early general elections in the coming summer.

From the beginning, the United States strongly supported the coalition government and its new Prime Minister, considering him as their only interlocutor in Albania, shunning any contacts with Berisha. The U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in particular, took an active interest in the Albanian crisis. In May 1997 she invited Prime Minister Bashkim Fino for talks in Washington, considering the meeting a demonstration of "strong support for the forces of moderation and consensus in Albania."²⁰ The Albanian question took a prominent place in the talks that President Clinton held with

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi in Denver, on 20 June 1997, during which Clinton thanked Italy for the leadership role it took during the recent crisis in Albania.²¹

By this time, Washington was actively involved in helping with the organization of new election, which would take place in June 1997. A high-level delegation headed by the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, John Shattuck, was sent to Albania to offer help and to observe the electoral process. In a special announcement, the State Department considered the sending of this delegation as a sign of the U.S. government's commitment to the Albanian people, pointing out that 'the situation in Albania is one of critical importance for us as well as for our European partners.'²²

As expected, the June 1997 elections resulted in a landslide victory for the Socialist party and its allies and a defeat for President Berisha and his Democratic Party. In a sharp contrast with its stand on the May 1996 elections, Washington hailed the proceedings of the June 1997 elections, considering them a crucial step toward democracy and economic reform in Albania, while, at the same time, expressing its readiness to assist the new government with the difficult tasks of restoring public order and building a sound economy.²³ Following the formation of the new socialist government, the United States renewed a number of programs for Albania that had been suspended during the crisis of the spring of 1997, including cooperation in the military field. In October 1997, the CIA began dispatching personnel to Albania to train and reorganize the secret service, which was greatly damaged during the crisis.

The decisive influence and role of the United State in the internal political affairs of Albania was once again manifested during another serious crisis that the country

underwent in the autumn of 1998. On 12 September 1998, unknown gunmen shot and killed a prominent opposition leader, Azem Hajdari, who was a Member of Parliament and a close aide of the Democratic Party leader, Berisha. Enraged by this assassination, two days later, on 14 September 1998, during the funeral ceremony for Hajdari, thousands of Democratic Party supporters took to the streets of the capital, Tirana, and attacked government institutions. For a brief period, they managed to take control of the office of the Prime Minister and the State Radio-television station. A coup d'état was on the verge of taking place, with unpredictable consequences for the stability of the country and the region. The United States was very concerned with these developments and was quick to react in order to avoid further escalation of the situation. The same day the State Department issued a stern declaration, condemning in the strongest words the actions of the opposition supporters and warning Berisha bluntly that the U.S. "will not recognize or work with a government that comes to power through violent means."²⁴ Confronted with this condemnation, Berisha ordered his supporters to withdraw from the institutions they had previously occupied. The crisis was resolved with the resignation of Prime Minister Fatos Nano and his replacement with a young socialist politician, Pandeli Majko.

The choice of Pandeli Majko, a young politician with no connections to the former communist regime, was welcomed by the United States and greeted as "an important opportunity for tangible achievements on the serious political and economic problems facing Albania."²⁵ With the election of Majko as Prime Minister, the pro-American direction of Albania was further strengthened, while bilateral relations entered a new phase. In February 1999, Majko was invited to Washington where he held talks with Secretary of State Albright and other high-ranking officials. This meeting served to

reaffirm American determination to help Albania on the path to political stabilization and economic development. Washington gave Albania \$30 million annually in foreign aid to stabilize the state budget and encourage trade and private investments. At the same time, concerned for the stability of the country, Washington was constantly calling on the opposition Democratic Party and its leader Berisha to renounce any further acts of violence and destabilization and return to the parliament, which that party had boycotted. An important role in this direction was played by the special U.S. envoy for the Balkans, Frowick, who, after many attempts, finally brokered the entry of the Democratic Party in Parliament.

It must be emphasized that the U.S. support for the socialist government of Majko, (and later for his successor, Ilir Meta), marks a significant development in U.S. policy toward Albania. Contrary to the beginning of the democratic processes, when the U.S. openly distanced itself from the Albanian Socialists, American policy toward Albania had no more partisan bias and Washington accepted the former communists as part of the political landscape in Albania. This was in accordance with the general trend in other East European countries, where, by the mid 1990s, the former communist parties, turned socialist, were partners with Washington, strongly advocating entry to NATO and other Euro-Atlantic institutions. On the other hand, we witness a new orientation in the foreign policy of Albania's Socialist Party, which considered the United States the main strategic partner of the country, a shift from its past anti-American rhetoric and a pronounced orientation towards Western Europe.

However, it must be stressed that there is another strategic reason for the new love affair of the United States with the Albanian Socialists. By 1998 Washington became

preoccupied with the developments in Kosova, where there were growing signs of another bloody conflict in the former Yugoslavia. In view of a possible flare up in Kosova, Albania's stability and its role in the region once again gained prominence in American strategy in the Balkans, entering a new phase in Albanian-American relations.

5. U.S. Intervention in Kosova and the Albanian Connection

The Kosova conflict, more than any other event, dominated international politics during the first half of 1999. For nearly three months, the alliance undertook intensive air strikes against Serbian positions in Kosova and Serbia itself, until finally forcing Slobodan Milosevic to withdraw his forces from Kosova. Seen in retrospect, it is clear that NATO's intervention in Kosova was mainly an American foreign policy initiative. Washington was the driving force that rallied allies to undertake the air campaign against Serbia, while, at the same time, carrying the main military and financial burden of the operation. Many times during the prolonged air campaign, the Clinton administration brushed away any mention on the part of some allies to give up the air campaign, which they thought was ineffective in breaking Milosevic's grasp on Kosova.

It is a fact that during the initial stages of the Yugoslav conflict, Washington somewhat neglected the Kosova problem and the potential of a bloody conflict there, encouraging, instead, the passive resistance advocated by the Kosovar leader, Ibrahim Rugova. When the war broke out in Bosnia, the Bush administration delivered a warning to Milosevic at the end of 1992, (repeated one year later by the Clinton Administration) that he would face unilateral intervention if he cracked down on the ethnic Albanians in

Kosova.²⁶ But for Milosevic this threat sounded more like rhetoric than real intention. The Serbian leader, who knew that at that time Washington needed his collaboration to find a solution for the Bosnian conflict, did not heed these warnings and further intensified his campaign of terror against ethnic Albanians in Kosova. In fact, in order to win Milosevic's support for the signing of the Dayton accords, the U.S. excluded consideration of the Kosova problem from those negotiations.

After the signing of the Dayton accords, Washington began to show more interest in the developments in Kosova. The U.S. was the first Western country to open an information center in Pristina, the capital of Kosova, in order to follow closely the developments in the region. The situation changed dramatically in 1998 with the emergence of the Kosova Liberation Army and the growing desperation of the Albanian population in Kosova with the passive resistance of Rugova. After an initial rebuke of the armed movement, Washington shifted strategy and entered into intensive negotiations with the Kosova Liberation Army and the Serbian authorities, in order to avoid a flare up of the conflict. U.S. Secretary of State Albright and the experienced diplomat, Richard Holbrook, were personally involved in trying to broker an agreement between the two opposing sides by organizing a Peace Conference at Rambouillet, France, in the beginning of 1999. But when a negotiated settlement failed to materialize because of the intransigence of the Serbian delegation, the U.S. put the blame squarely on Milosevic and threatened a military campaign. This time the warning was real and in March 1999 Washington, together with its allies, undertook the air campaign, which lasted 78 days and finally forced the Serbian army out from Kosova. Within days, NATO sent around

50,000 troops to Kosova (including 20,000 Americans) to secure the province, while the United Nations took the civilian administration under control.

There has been a heated debate about U.S. intervention and engagement in Kosova. Leading American political analysts, such as Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft, argued that Kosova was not an American vital interest and that it was wrong to go there. On the other hand, many in the Clinton administration, especially in the State Department, insisted that U.S. intervention, apart from human rights concerns, would prevent a further destabilization in an area that was considered important to European security and U.S. interests.²⁷ Seen in retrospect, the defeat of Milosevic in Kosova is considered to be the first victory against international terrorism, giving a strong warning to other despots and rogue states. As Ian Cuthbertson predicted before the events of September 11, "the greatest apparent threat to American national security appears to lie with a rage of megalomaniac dictators, hunkered down in bunkers, whose locations range from somewhere in the Iraqi desert to the suburbs of Belgrade and the people's palaces of Pyongyang."²⁸ For many observers the defeat of Milosevic in Kosova was the main reason that eventually led to his fall from power in Serbia, fulfilling a strategic aim of U.S. policy in the Balkans.

It must be stressed that NATO intervention in Kosova led to further consolidation of pro-American feelings on the part of the Albanian population in Kosova and in Albania itself as well as of the pro-American foreign policy of Tirana. The United States was seen now not only as the protector of Albania but also as the main guarantor that could prevent a return of the Serbian army to Kosova. In fact, many in Kosova and Albania thought that only the United States could ensure the future independence of Kosova. This attitude was

best manifested in the enthusiastic welcome that the Albanian population in Kosova extended to the American soldiers and to President Clinton when he visited Kosova in the summer of 1999.

In general, the Kosova conflict increased the geopolitical importance of Albania and its role in the Balkans, leading to a further strengthening of Albanian-American relations.

a. The Increase in Military Ties

The conflict in Kosova led to a reconsideration of military collaboration between the United States and Albania and to an increase of U.S. military presence in the latter country. For the first time the U.S. stationed a contingent of troops in Albania, while the U.S. military was engaged in the construction of a number of strategic projects in Albania such as airfields, roads, and ports. During the entire duration of the air campaign, the Albanian government handed over control of its airspace, ports and military infrastructure to U.S. and NATO commanders.²⁹ Most planes, which were stationed in Italy, flew over Albanian territory for their bombing missions against Serbia. The U.S. and NATO did not have any problems with the use of Albanian communication facilities, as they did with countries such as Bulgaria, Greece and Macedonia. The United States sent a squadron of Apache helicopters to Albania, the first time that this advanced weapon was sent to the Balkan Peninsula. In spite of not being used in the war, the presence of this contingent on Albanian soil served as psychological pressure against the Serb army. NATO military commanders used Albanian territory to gather intelligence about Serbian troop movements inside Kosova. Moreover, Clinton's National Security Adviser, Samuel Berger, revealed after the end of the conflict that, in case of a failure of the air campaign, the United States was preparing a massive invasion of Kosova by ground troops, an

operation which would be based on the use of the Albanian territory as the main launching pad.³⁰ After two years of closure, the Pentagon reopened the liaison office attached to the Albanian ministry of defense while U.S. advisers were engaged in helping with the reorganization of the Albanian army.

b. The Intensification of the Political Ties

The conflict in Kosova led to an intensification of the political ties between Albania and the United States. During the days of the Kosova conflict, Tirana was turned into a center of international diplomacy, as many high-ranking U.S. and West-European officials visited Albania's capital in order to press for a solution to the crisis. In fact, the collaboration of the Albanian government was considered of paramount importance to the United States in reaching its objectives in Kosova. As the U.S. Ambassador in Tirana, Joseph Limprecht, pointed out in an interview with the Albanian press in October 1999, "the close ties that the Albanian government created with the United States during the crisis in Kosova constituted a strong support for the U.S. policy in the area."³¹

Thus, due to the concerted efforts of Secretary of State Albright and Albanian officials, the Kosovar delegation accepted the Rambouillet agreement. This was of great political importance because the refusal of this agreement by the Serb delegation opened the way for NATO air strikes. In the aftermath of the armed conflict, the Albanian government has played an important role in trying to quell the tensions within Kosova by appealing to the Kosovar political parties to unite and collaborate with the United Nations civil administration and NATO troops in running Kosova.³²

Because of the crucial role played by the United States during the crisis, all the Albanian political parties agreed in their assessment of the United States as the main

political and strategic ally of Albania. During a visit to the United States in 1999, the Albanian Prime Minister Pandeli Majko stressed that “the United States remains our main partner not only for the present but also for the vision of the future.”³³ The same stand was also affirmed by the main opposition Democratic Party and its leader Sali Berisha. During the proceedings of the National Council of this party in the summer of 1999, it was stated that “the relations with the United States constitute our first priority,” considering the presence of the U.S. military in Albania and Kosova “of the utmost importance.”³⁴

c. The Humanitarian Role

During the Kosova crisis, Albania bore the main burden of the Kosovar refugees, who were forced to leave their homes because of the Serb offensive. In fact, nearly 500,000 Kosovars, or 75% of all the refugees, found shelter in Albania. For comparison, fewer than 200,000 refugees went to Macedonia and 50,000 to Montenegro. The treatment of the refugees was much better in Albania than in the other neighboring countries, which tried first to prevent the exodus of the refugees there and then to expel them. To some extent, this was understandable, since all the refugees were of Albanian nationality.

It must be noted that the readiness of the Albanian government to receive and accommodate hundreds of thousands of refugees greatly helped the United States and NATO in performing their military mission in Kosova. President Clinton acknowledged this important role of Albania. In a message sent to the Albanian government and people after the successful conclusion of the operation in Kosova, Clinton pointed out “no country bore a greater burden than Albania, and no nation did more to help humanity prevail.”³⁵

In general, it can be said that the U.S. intervention in Kosova had a double impact on the future of Albanian-American relations. On the one hand it strengthened the pro-American orientation of Albania and its political establishment. On the other, this intervention confirmed a pro-Albanian shift in U.S. diplomacy in the Balkans, with the U.S. now considering Albania and Kosova as two important allies in this troubled region.

Endnotes

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² *Ibid.*, 100.

³ James A. Baker, III with Thomas M. DeFrank, The Politics of Diplomacy (New York: G. P. Putnam's Son, 1995), 352.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁶ Miranda Vickers and James Pettifer, Albania: From Anarchy to Balkan Identity, Rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 170.

⁷ Gus Xhudo, Diplomacy and Crisis Management in the Balkans (New York: St. Martin Press, 1996), 64.

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, Memorandum for Correspondents, no. 148-M, 27 June 1995.

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¹⁰ Miranda Vickers and James Pettifer, Albania: From Anarchy to Balkan Identity, 233.

¹¹ See John Pomfret and David B. Ottaway, "U.S., Albania Form 'the Weirdest Relationship,'" Washington Post, 20 November 1995, A1, A18.

¹² The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "President Clinton Meets with Albanian President Berisha," 12 September 1995.

¹³ U.S. Department of State, Background Notes: Albania, March 1999.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "Albanian Parliamentary Elections," 1 June 1996.

¹⁵ Elez Biberaj, Albania in Transition, 302

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

¹⁷ Miranda Vickers and James Pettifer, Albania: From Anarchy to Balkan Identity, 283.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, Daily Press Briefing, 15 March 1997.

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "Albania: Visit of Prime Minister Fino," 12 May 1997.

²¹ "Exchange with Reporters Prior to a Meeting with Prime Minister Romano Prodi of Italy in Denver, June 20, 1997," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 33:26 (30 June 1997), 919.

²² U.S. Department of State, Press Release, "Assistant Secretary Shattuck to Lead Official Delegation to Observe Albanian Parliamentary Elections," 29 June 1997.

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²⁴ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "United States Condemns Violence in Albania," 14 September 1998.

²⁵ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "United States Welcomes New Albanian Government," 9 October 1998.

²⁶ Richard Kaplan, "International Diplomacy and the Crisis in Kosova," International Affairs 74, no. 4 (1998): 752.

²⁷ See Strobe Talbott, "The Balkan Question and the European Answer," Address at the Aspen Institute, 24 August 1999.

²⁸ Ian Cuthbertson, "Chasing the Chimera," World Policy Journal 16, (summer 1999): 75.

²⁹ "Albania Hands Key Strategic Controls to NATO," Wall Street Journal, 28 March 1999, A17.

³⁰ Doyle McManus, "Clinton's Massive Ground Invasion That Almost Was," Los Angeles Times, 9 June 2000, 1.

³¹ Koha Jone, 29 October 1999, 1.

³² Pandeli Majko, "Speech at the Meeting in Prishtina," Zeri i Popullit, 15 August 1999, 2.

³³ "Albanian Prime Minister Visits the United States," Albanian Daily News, 5 February 1999.

³⁴ "Resolution of the National Council of the Democratic Party" Rilindja Demokratike, 29 June 1999, 2.

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CHAPTER 4

THE FUTURE

1. A New Role for the United States in the Balkans

With the break up of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed, the United States became strongly engaged, militarily, politically and diplomatically in the Balkans. For much of the Cold War, the Balkans was considered to be an area outside the U.S. strategic interests, simply a backyard of Europe. For many years, U.S. involvement in the Balkans was mainly confined to the efforts to find a solution for the Cyprus problem and the territorial disputes between Turkey and Greece, two U.S. allies. This situation changed dramatically during the last decade of the 20th century, which coincided with the end of the Cold War and the break up of Yugoslavia. At the beginning, when the wars broke out in Croatia and Bosnia, Washington adopted a passive attitude, considering the Yugoslav conflict as Europe's problem. But after three years of bloody wars and the loss of the lives of a quarter million people, the worst conflict in Europe since the Second World War, the United States took military and diplomatic initiatives, rallying NATO to act in Bosnia and imposing the Dayton accords, which ended the bloody conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. This led to a new U.S. military engagement in the Balkans, with Washington sending more than 8,000 troops to Bosnia, the bulk of the peacekeeping forces.

The second major involvement of the United States in the Balkans during the 1990s was some years later in Kosova. After months of hesitation and a failed attempt to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, Washington orchestrated another NATO air campaign against Serbia, which was more intensive and prolonged than during the Bosnian conflict. And again, thousands of U.S. soldiers were sent to guarantee the security and borders of another Balkan province, Kosova.

The third case of American involvement during the 1990s in a Balkan country was in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Fearing a spread of war in this republic, during the mid 1990s the U.S. sent a preventive force of 300 troops, within the framework of the United Nations Mission, but under the command of U.S. officers. When armed clashes between the Macedonian army and the Albanian minority broke out last year (2001), after some initial hesitation, the Bush administration was politically involved in the conflict, sending a high-ranking diplomat who played a major role in brokering an agreement that stopped the fighting.

All these developments marked a significant change in U.S. policy towards the Balkans, affirming a new status for the United States in the post-Cold War era.

First of all, U.S. intervention in the Balkans, particularly in Kosova, confirmed the indispensable role of the United States in world affairs, including the Balkans. For many analysts, the relatively successful resolution of the armed conflicts in Bosnia and Kosova would have been impossible without the engagement of the United States. "The Kosova crisis," writes Elisabeth Pond, "clarified the evolution that began the moment the Berlin Wall fell but was dimly perceived in the mid-1990s, the status of the United States as the sole remaining superpower."¹

Second, the Kosova conflict confirmed the fall of Russia from the status of superpower. Although it expressed a strong opposition to NATO's air strikes, Moscow was not in a position to pose any serious challenge to this campaign. As Zbigniew Brzezinski has put it, more than supporting the Serbs, Moscow's traditional allies in the Balkans, Russian opposition to the NATO air campaign in Kosova, "was driven by nostalgia for global power status and by resentment against America's special international standing."² In the final analysis Russia agreed to participate in peacekeeping, but her role by now was a secondary one. This was one example indicating the end of bipolarity.

Third, U.S. interventions in Bosnia and Kosova revealed the huge military gap between the United States and its European allies. Ever since the Clinton administration engaged the United States in the Dayton process, the Europeans have known that without the backing of the United States they would have been helpless in resolving a conflict in their backyard. This is why they contemplated no major move in the region without U.S. participation. As former U.S. ambassador to NATO Robert Hunt has put it, "Kosova and America's involvement in the Balkans tested the continuation of Europe's security on the United States. This heralds a long U.S. military presence in the Balkans."³

The recent events in the Balkans, while reaffirming the leadership role of Washington, heralded an increasing importance of the Balkans in the global strategy of the United States. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, there is the geo-political argument. Despite many changes in the international arena, geopolitics, as the realist theory of international relations acknowledges, still has a strong influence in guiding the foreign policy of nation states. Thus, after NATO's

intervention in Kosova, a number of analysts and human rights organizations criticized the Clinton administration for not acting in Rwanda, Sierra Leone or East Timor, where the victims of genocide and human rights abuses were much higher than in Kosova. The answer to this criticism is simple: geo-politics. Kosova was a crisis at the edge of Europe and Europe has a much higher priority for American interests than Africa or the Far East. Despite much talk of a Pacific shift, America's foreign policy remains Euro-centric. According to a survey by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Europe ranked ahead of Asia as an American foreign policy priority, 42% to 28% of those interviewed.⁴ The United States still devotes roughly half of its enormous military budget to the defense of Europe, while the bilateral trade is \$1.3 trillion annually. This is an important American investment in Europe that cannot be wasted away because of any regional conflict in the Balkans, which has the potential to spread throughout the continent.

Second, there is the historical argument. It was precisely in the Balkans that the First World War started with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the streets of Sarajevo. This is an important fact that cannot be neglected. And as the theory of international relations explains, experience has a strong influence in formulating policy. There is no doubt that the curse of the First World War has played a significant role in Washington's decisions to intervene in Bosnia and Kosova and prevent an escalation of the conflict.

Despite the silence of weapons in the Balkans and a certain progress in the political settlements of the conflicts, the situation in the region is far from stable and the old inter-ethnic and inter-state quarrels are far from being resolved. As many observers agree, achieving the goals of peace and stability in the Balkans, especially in the long run, is

likely to prove more elusive and complex than stopping the fighting. Here once more, U.S. presence and U.S. leadership will be crucial for the future.

At present, U.S. diplomacy and the international community are presented with a number of crucial challenges in the Balkans

a. The Future of Bosnia as a Single Entity

There is growing concern in Washington and international circles that the future of Bosnia as a single multiethnic state is in doubt. While the election of the reformist president, Stipe Mesic in Croatia (who succeeded the nationalist Franjo Tudjman) was good news for Washington, the results of the local elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which showed considerable gains for the nationalist parties, was surely bad news for the United States and the West as well as an obstacle for the consolidation of the multiethnic bases of a single state. There are still thousands of NATO peacekeepers in Bosnia, including Americans, and there isn't yet a set date for their withdrawal. Meanwhile, nearly seven years after the end of the war and the signing of the Dayton Accords, Bosnia is still administered by an international representative, who makes the key decisions for the country.

b. The Future of Kosova

There is no doubt that the future status of Kosova presents one of the most intriguing problems that will confront U.S. diplomacy and the international community in the Balkans for a long time. Officially, Washington continues to support the United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution for the settlement of the conflict, which considers Kosova as part of Serbia. However, the United States has made it clear that there will be no return to the former status of Kosova. Washington's unofficial stand has wavered from

independence to a sort of loose confederation with Serbia and Montenegro. For the moment, Kosova continues to be a sort of UN protectorate, with NATO ensuring its security, without a clear vision of its future political status. The United States still maintains 5,000 troops in Kosova, more than any of the 38 other countries participating in the NATO operation. Here, as in the case of Bosnia, despite some planned reductions, there is no indication of an early U.S. military withdrawal.

c. The Future of Montenegro and Its Links with Serbia

This is another big headache for the United States in the Balkans. As long as Milosevic was in power, the official policy in Washington was to isolate Serbia, back the opposition, and encourage Montenegro to take an independent path, while trying to force Milosevic out of power. The election of Kostunica as president and the exit of Milosevic from the political scene was an important victory for American diplomacy in the Balkans. At the same time, the United States was confronted with a new and more complicated situation concerning the future of the so-called Yugoslav federation and the links of Serbia with Montenegro. The fact is that Kostunica, although considered a democrat, is as nationalist as Milosevic. He strongly opposed NATO's bombardment in Kosova as well as U.S. involvement in the Balkans. The recent agreement to form a sort of loose Confederation between Serbia and Montenegro seems to be a hasty solution of the moment, reached under strong pressure from the International Community, mainly the European Union. Given the huge differences in territories and populations as well as the traditional nationalist tendencies and ambitions of the Serbs, it is impossible to envision that a new confederation could function on an equal footing. Under these conditions, the

possibility of Montenegro seeking independence would always be present, adding another hot spot in the Balkans.

All these questions, together with the still uncertain future of Macedonia and the never-ending problem of Cyprus and Greek-Turkish quarrels, pose serious problems for the future. At the beginning of the 21st century, most of the small Balkan countries seem to be in the process of nation building, while still nourishing territorial ambitions toward each other. This gives the Balkans the former geo-strategic importance and makes this region the most destabilized area in Europe, which directly affects U.S. interests on the old continent. All this will require an active military, diplomatic and economic engagement of the U.S. in the Balkans, confronting Washington with real challenges and responsibilities in the area. As former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it, "if the tower of democracy is really to rise above all of Southeast Europe, we must be prepared to devote substantial efforts and resources to the region over a substantial period of time."⁵

It is true that after the events of 11 September 2001, with the new focus on the war against international terrorism, the Balkans seems to have lost some of its importance in the global strategy of the United States. However, to ignore the dangers that might come from the Balkans, for the sake of another major objective, would be a grave mistake for any American administration. Moreover, the Balkans, with its chronic instabilities and interstate rivalries, represents a possible hot bed for the spread of terrorist activities. That is why stabilizing the Balkans is also part of the fight against global terrorism, which will confront the United States for a long time. The importance of the Balkans, which, in some ways, was underestimated at the beginning of the new Bush administration, seems

to have been underlined again in Washington. In an apparent retreat from the former positions when there was talk of an early withdrawal of American troops from the Balkans, the Bush administration has affirmed now that U.S. troops will remain in the Balkans for as long as needed, and that they will withdraw from the area at the same time as the other NATO forces. In the final analysis, as the tragic events of the 1990s proved, Europe, despite much talk of its ambitions to become a world power and to assume a greater role in the European security, is unable to resolve the Balkan conundrum. As a consequence, any retreat or disengagement of the United States from the area will prove to be fatal for the future. As David Fromin writes, only "the United States and NATO at the end of the 20th century can be the holder of the balance in the Balkans, as England was the Balancer in the 19th century."⁶

It must be stressed that this new role of the United States in the Balkans cannot be realized without the establishment of close ties and collaboration with the individual countries of the region. In this context, of special importance are the relations with Albania, which, as argued in this study, more than any other country in the region, is affected by the developments in the Balkans.

2. The Albanian National Question and the Implications for U.S. – Albanian Relations

Ever since Albania gained independence in 1912, the issue of Kosova and other predominantly Albanian-inhabited territories that were incorporated into former Yugoslavia has been a focus of contention in the Balkans that has drawn the attention and intervention of the international community. In no other country of Eastern Europe has a

national schism been so tragic as in the case of Albania. It is rare to find a country, like Albania, which has lost half of its territory and population as a result of treaties put together by the big powers, and where more indigenous people live outside than inside the mother country. For comparison, Hungary, which among the East European countries has the highest external minority, the figure is only 25 % of the population.⁷ Albania can be considered the only country in Europe that has not resolved its national problem. Although most Albanians were never content with the national separation, during the Cold War the communist regime in Albania, for various reasons, was forced to acquiesce to the status quo and never raised this question.

The end of the Cold War and the demise of communism, contrary to the hopes of many Albanians, were not followed by the resolution of the national problem. On the contrary, this problem became more complex in the wake of the collapse of the Yugoslav federation, when Albanians in Kosova were separated from their kin in Macedonia by a new international border. The Kosova crisis has raised, for the first time at the beginning of this century, the Albanian question, whose solution is considered to be crucial for the future stability of the Balkans. In fact many observers believe that the Kosova problem and the Albanian question in general could present a greater and longer-term threat to peace and stability in the Balkans than Bosnia.⁸ All the indications are that in the future the salience of the Albanian national question is likely to increase. There are a number of reasons for this.

a. The Kosova Conundrum

After the tragic events in Kosova, it is almost impossible to foresee a future Kosova under the governance of Serbia or in any sort of federation with it. Any talk of such a

move would certainly spark a new war in the province. In fact, all the Albanian political parties in Kosova have declared as their main political objective the independence of the province.⁹ This is unacceptable for the international community, which support the resolution of the United Nations that calls for an autonomous Kosova as part of Serbia. However, as Kosova continues to be administered by the United Nations, with NATO guaranteeing its security, this situation, in the long run, would be unacceptable for both the Albanians and the Serbs. And while a new reunion of Kosova with Serbia seems impossible in any circumstances, many analysts agree that an independent Kosova will be the prelude of a union with Albania, leading to a Greater Albania.

b. The Fragility of Macedonia

This constitutes another hotbed in the Balkans that is directly linked with the Albanian question. Although the danger of a large-scale conflict for the moment seems remote, the seeds of the inter-ethnic conflict are always present. In fact, the armed clashes that took place in 2001 have further shaken the already delicate co-existence between the Macedonians and the minority Albanians. While the Albanians have always resented the political and military monopoly of the Macedonians over the country, the latter fear that an extension of self-government rights to the predominantly Albanian populated areas, may further inflame the separatist tendencies.

c. The Increasing Albanian Element in Greece

This is a new development in the political landscape of the Balkans. After the fall of communism, between 400,000 and 500,000 Albanians have immigrated to Greece in search of a better life. This constitutes a considerable number of foreigners for Greece, a country of 10 million people, and the Albanians now comprise the largest group of

immigrants. Many of them have immigrated with their families, with a potential for staying permanently and further adding to the numbers. Along with the new immigrants, in some areas of Greece there exists an indigenous population of Albanians, called Arvanitas, who have kept their language. Meanwhile some nationalist circles in Albania consider vast areas in Northern Greece, formerly inhabited by Cami (an Albanian population that was deported from Greece early last century) as part of the old Great Albania. In fact, some nationalist circles in Greece have seen the ever-increasing presence of Albanians in Greece as a new threat for Hellenism, while giving rise to fears of a Greater Albania. At the same time, the presence of a Greek minority in Albania and the claims of some nationalist circles in Greece for the areas inhabited by this minority, which they still call Vorio Epirus, tend to make the national question in the Balkans more acute.

d. The Demographic Explosion

It is envisioned that, given the current demographic trends, in a not so distant future, the Albanians will become the third largest ethnicity in the Balkans.¹⁰ The Albanians constitute the youngest population in the Balkans and the birth rates of the Albanians, both in Albania and Kosova, are the highest in Europe. Many in Serbia fear that in an eventual incorporation of Kosova with Serbia, in a couple of decades, the Albanians might surpass the Serbs. The same can be said about Macedonia, where the Albanians, who now comprise 1/3 of the population of the country, may acquire the status of the majority, making the Macedonians a minority.

All these developments will make the Albanian national question more visible in the future, while putting further pressure on the international community to find a viable

solution to this problem. In this context, the United States policy in the Balkans and its relations with Albania would be crucial. At present the official American policy, like that of the other West European countries, is to repudiate any thought of a Greater Albania.¹¹ The U.S. fears that this tendency may encourage claims of other nations in the Balkans for a bigger Serbia or bigger Croatia. Nevertheless, there are some different nuances in the stand of the United States and its European partners when it comes to the problem of Kosova and the Albanian question in general. Washington, from time to time, has flirted with the idea of an independent Kosova, something that has caused concern among the European allies.¹² Although officially this idea is denied, it remains a potential alternative of the U.S. policy in the Balkans. The United States was the main force that drove the Serbs out of Kosova and it has been more consistent than the European allies in opposing any attempts of the Serbian administration to return in Kosova. All these facts are greatly resented in Belgrade, giving rise to strong anti-American feelings among the Serbian population. In fact, since the beginning of the Balkan crisis, some observers have noticed a tendency of Albanophilia and Serbophobia in the U.S. policy in the Balkans.¹³ Some analysts have gone even further in foreseeing a new realignment of forces in the Balkans, with the formation of an axis between the United States, Turkey and Albania to counter the other axis of Serbia, Greece and Macedonia that tends to be linked with Russia.

Whatever truth lies behind these scenarios, it is clear that the solution of the future status of Kosova will surely require the involvement of the American diplomacy. The European powers, as the recent events in Macedonia proved once more, are unable to solve this problem without American leadership. At the same time, any solution of this problem cannot be achieved without the participation of Albania, which is directly

affected by the course of events in Kosova and Macedonia. This is another important area of cooperation between the United States and Albania, whose services are indispensable for Washington. In the final analysis, both a stable Kosova and a stable Albania are vital for realizing the American strategic goal for a Southeast Europe that is democratic, prosperous and fully integrated into a unified and indivisible Europe.

3. The Stability Pact for the Balkans

And the Role of Albania

One of the major components of the U.S. policy in the Balkans is the so-called Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe. This Pact, which is mainly an American initiative, was officially launched at the Sarajevo Summit at the end of July 1999. Under the Pact, more than 40 countries and international organizations have formed a partnership to advance needed economic and political reforms in a region that is considered the least developed and stabilized in Europe. Unlike the Dayton Accords, which were confined to the former Yugoslavia alone, the Stability Pact includes all the Balkan countries, that is, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Montenegro and Serbia (after the fall of Milosevic). Many compare this initiative with the Marshall Plan that helped to rebuild Europe immediately after the end of the Second World War.

The Stability Pact, which is confined to a smaller geographic area, has the same objectives, that is, the economic and democratic rebuilding of the Balkan countries in order to prepare them for future integration within the Transatlantic and European institutions. This is in accordance with the U.S. foreign policy objective of creating a unified and stable Europe, an aim that was reaffirmed by president Clinton at the

Sarajevo Summit.¹⁴ Although the European Union will bear the main economic burden of the Pact, the United States will play a major role in its implementation, a task that is going to keep Washington actively engaged in Balkan affairs.

The Stability Pact has three main directions:

a. The Working Table on Democratization

and Human Rights

This will address the rights of national minorities, the problems of refugees and displaced persons, the strengthening of the civil society and democratic institutions, and the independence of the media. This is an important objective given the complexity of the problem of minorities in the Balkans and the deficiencies in the democratic processes.

The OSCE has been given a leading role in implementing these objectives.

b. The Working Table on Economic Reconstruction,

Development and Cooperation

This table will work to enhance economic cooperation among the countries of the region and with the European Union, promote free flow of goods and capital, improve regional infrastructure and support privatization and market-oriented reforms. An important objective in this field is the creation of a pan-Balkan customs union and an integrated network of transportation, in order to increase inter-regional trade and exchanges. At present, commercial relations among the Balkan states represent only 5% of their foreign trade. The European Union is supposed to play the leading role in this table.

c. The Working Table on Security and Defense

This table will work toward ending inter state tensions, creating good neighborly relations and a climate of security throughout the region. It will seek full implementation of existing arms control and confidence building measures, will fight terrorism and illegal trafficking, and strengthen civilian control of the armed forces. A main objective is the military reform and the preparation of these countries for their future integration into the Atlantic Alliance. It is understood that NATO and the U.S. will play an important role in this area.

The United States has taken several important steps to support the Stability Pact objectives for promoting democracy, regional stability and cooperation in the Balkans. Immediately after the launching of the Pact, in November 1999 the U.S. administration proposed the creation of the "Southeast Europe Trade Preference Act," which extends duty-free treatment for a number of products from the Balkan countries. At the same time, the Overseas Private Investment Cooperation (OPIC) is engaged in financing a number of projects in the region, while facilitating U.S. investments there. It has opened a \$200-million line of credit for U.S. investment in Southeast Europe. In July 2000, OPIC and the Soros Foundation launched the Southeast Europe Equity Fund, a \$150 million fund to provide new business development, expansion and privatization in the region.¹⁵ It is estimated that only for the year 2000, the amount of U.S. assistance to the region has been more than \$600 million.¹⁶

The United States is especially active in supporting the Stability Pact's objectives for promoting security and stability in the region. Washington is a main participant in the Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial process, which brings together four NATO

allies (the United States, Greece, Italy and Turkey) and five Balkan partners (Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia) to cooperate on a variety of security related issues in the region. In November 1999 the Balkan countries adopted a joint initiative proposed by the United States to secure and safely destroy illegal small arms and light weapons. A U.S.- Norway joint working group was established to develop an action plan and a schedule for the destruction of these weapons. At the same time the United States is engaged in a number of bilateral military agreements with the countries of the region in supporting their efforts to reform their defense establishments in a manner consistent with the Stability Pact objectives.

For its part, Albania has strongly supported the idea of the Stability Pact, declaring its willingness and commitment to contribute to its implementation. It has actively participated in regional meetings and projects in the framework of the Pact.¹⁷ At the same time, Tirana sees this Pact as an opportunity to further strengthen its ties with the United States. In fact, there are a number of projects that the United States has undertaken in Albania in the framework of the Stability Pact. For example, Washington is actively supporting and financing a UN project to gather and destroy hundreds of thousands of illegal weapons, which were looted by civilians from the army depots during the unrest of 1997. This is an acute problem and a source of instability in Albania. Meanwhile, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are also engaged in promoting U.S. investments in Albania, supporting the process of privatization and the expansion of small businesses. Washington's support was decisive in obtaining Albania's membership in the World Trade Organization last year. Albania, with its mineral riches such as oil, copper and

chromium (it ranked third in the world for the production of chromium during the communist period) offers some good opportunities for American companies.¹⁸ At the same time, the United States has taken a leading role, within the framework of the Stability Pact, in helping to reform the Albanian army and promote confidence building measures and good relations with its neighbors. In this framework, Washington has encouraged a number of trilateral ministerial meetings and agreements between Albania, Macedonia, and Greece for the easing of tensions and border cooperation.

An important project for Albania within the Stability Pact and one of the major investments of the United States in the region is the so-called Corridor 8, a trade route that will run through three countries, Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria. This route will connect the Albanian ports of Dures and Vlora on the Adriatic Sea with the Bulgarian ports of Varna and Burgas on the Black Sea. It is envisaged that this Corridor will be extended to Italy, linking the Albanian ports of Durres and Vlora with the Italian ports of Bari and Brindizi on the other side of the Adriatic. Corridor 8, which will include highways, railways, oil pipelines, and fiber-optic telecommunications, is considered to be one of the major trade routes in Southeastern Europe that will greatly increase regional integration and East-West trade.¹⁹ The American government has taken a particular interest in this project, which was personally launched by President Clinton in 1996 and was included in the Stability Pact since its beginning. The American Agency for Trade and Development (TDA) has given a grant of \$30 million to the participating countries for the initial stage of the project.²⁰ The choice of the ports of Durres and Vlora as the gateways to this Corridor, something that is supported by the American government, besides the economic benefits, will greatly enhance the geo-strategic position of Albania.

At the same time, the possibility of adding a new segment to this Corridor that will link Tirana with Pristina, the capital of Kosova, will help the efforts of the international community to rebuild the province.

A major component of Corridor 8 is a plan to build a trans-Balkan pipeline, which will pass from Burgas, Bulgaria, in the Black Sea to the port of Vlora, Albania, in the Adriatic Sea. This pipeline, which will cost \$1.3 billion, will ship crude oil from the rich areas of the Black and Caspian Seas to the markets of Western Europe and North America. It will bypass Turkey's heavily traveled Bosphorus Strait, making the transit journey to the United States more economical. An American Company, Balkan Ambo, has undertaken the construction of this pipeline, which is expected to be completed in 2005. According to Ted Ferguson, the president of this company, the underground pipeline is designed to carry 750,000 barrels a day, which will represent 40% of the crude oil from the newly developed oilfields that would enter the Black Sea in the next five years.²¹

It must be said that the Stability Pact in general and Corridor 8 in particular, will increase the geopolitical importance of Albania, creating at the same time new possibilities for the further strengthening of Albania's relations with the United States, a major supporter and contributor to the Stability Pact.

4. Albania – A U.S. Ally in the War against Terrorism

September 11, 2001, marks a landmark in the course of international relations. The tragic events of that day changed dramatically the configuration of American foreign policy, while the war against international terrorism has emerged as the number one

priority. In this framework, such areas as Asia and the Middle East have become the main focus of American foreign policy, while the attitude towards terrorism is considered a new yardstick for Washington to build new coalitions and judge its allies and enemies. “The axis of evil” has become the new leitmotif of American foreign policy as the “the empire of evil” used to be at the height of the Cold War.

It is true that, as argued above, the priority given to the fight against terrorism has somewhat overshadowed the concerns over the Balkans, which dominated American foreign policy during the 1990s. However, while engaging in this new endeavor, it would be a grave mistake for American strategists to underestimate the continuous dangers that could emerge from the Balkans, including that of terrorism. In fact, the Balkans has many elements that can make it a potential hot bed of terrorism.

First of all, the instability of the region, fueled by the old ethnic rivalries and the still uncertain futures for Kosova, Bosnia and Montenegro, as well as the deficiencies in the process of democratization, makes the Balkans a potential terrain for terrorist activities that can directly affect the U.S. presence and interests in the area. There have been various reports of terrorist plots to attack U.S. embassies and other installations in a number of countries in the region, such as Bosnia, Albania and Macedonia.

Second, the Balkans represents the only area in Europe where we find a Muslim population. Besides Turkey, Muslims make up the majority of the population in Albania and Kosova and also the largest community in Bosnia. Although the Muslim population in the Balkans is known for its religious tolerance and coexistence with other faiths, the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia had many elements of a religious conflict, while there have been many acts of sympathy and solidarity of extremist Islamic groups with

the cause of the Muslims in the Balkans. Thus, it is known that during the war in Bosnia, hundreds of Islamic volunteers, called Mujahedins, fought by the side of their religious brothers, the Bosnians. With the end of the war, some of these fighters were allowed by the Bosnian government to remain in the country, a move that after September 11 has rekindled the fears of potential terrorist activities in the area. In fact, a number of persons linked with Islamic militant groups were arrested in Bosnia in October 2001, including two foreigners.²²

Third, the strategic position of the Balkans as a link between Asia and Europe has turned this area into a transit route for various illegal activities that help international terrorism. It is known that many Islamic terrorists have used the Balkan countries as a gateway to the West, where they have organized various terrorist cells. At the same time, the Balkans has served as a main passage for the trafficking of drugs from Asia to the West, a main source for financing the activities of the terrorist groups. According to Ray Kendall, former General Secretary of Interpol, about 80% of the heroine (the main source of income for Taliban) that enters Western Europe passes through Turkey and the Balkans.²³

It is for all these reasons that the Balkans should represent a potential target for the U.S.-led coalition in its war against international terrorism. In this framework, of special importance are the relations of the United States with Albania, which, for various reasons, represents both a problem and an asset in U.S. efforts against terrorism.

The fact is that Albania, with its chronic instability, weak government authority, and widespread corruption as well as its favorable geographic position at the entrance of the Mediterranean, has been a favorable terrain for illegal and criminal activities. The

Albanian ports of Vlora and Durres in the Adriatic are considered to be a main transit route for the trafficking of people and drugs from Asia and Eastern Europe to the West. According to a seminar organized in Marseille, Albania is topping the list of the countries, along with Morocco, serving as a springboard for the drug trafficking network in Western countries.²⁴

This situation has been a lure for various terrorist groups, which have tried to create a foothold in Albania. Thus, after the fall of communism, at the beginning of the 1990s, under the mask of religious activities or aid programs, various Islamic elements from the Middle East began to set up cells in Albania. The increasing presence of these Islamic organizations in Albania began to draw the attention of the American government, which at that time was involved in the conflicts in the Balkans. By this time a close collaboration was established between the CIA and its counterpart in Albania, the National Intelligence Service. American agents were engaged in the training of the Albanian officers in the tracking and apprehending of potential foreign terrorists that might operate in Albania. In August 1998, this collaboration led to the uncovering and foiling of a plot by an Islamic group in Albania to attack the U.S. embassy in Tirana, similar to the attacks against U.S. missions in Kenya and Tanzania. This led to the temporary closure of the American embassy in Tirana, and a Marines unit was sent to provide security to the embassy compound.²⁵ Following this plot, a joint operation of CIA and Albania's Intelligence Service led to the arrest and the expulsion from Albania of a number of suspected Islamic terrorists, working in the country under various disguises.²⁶

The events of September 11 led to renewed efforts and collaboration between the American and Albanian authorities in order to thwart any possible terrorist attacks against American interests in Albania. Following the September 11 attacks, the Albanian parliament approved a special resolution expressing the full support of the country for the United States in its fight against terrorism. The document stated that Albania was ready to put its airfields and seaports at the disposal of the United States if needed, to fight terrorism.²⁷ The Albanian government fully supported the U.S. military operation in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Ilir Meta declared that Albania considered itself part of the U.S.-led world coalition against terrorism. Responding to the call of President Bush, the Albanian authorities took immediate measures to block a number of bank accounts in Tirana, which were thought to belong to Al-Qaida. With the help of the CIA, more than twenty Islamists, suspected as terrorists, were deported from Albania following September 11.²⁸

Meanwhile, the United States has identified two armed groups, the National Albanian Army (AKSH) and the so-called National Committee for the Liberation and Protection of the Albanian Lands (KKCMTSH), operating in Macedonia and Southern Serbia, as terrorist organizations and has moved to block their bank accounts and deny entrance to the United States to their members.²⁹

It is for all these reasons that Albania, with its pro-American policy, its geo-strategic position, and its links with Kosova and Macedonia could represent a close and reliable ally for the United States in its war against international terrorism, thus adding an important element for the future collaboration between the two countries.

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⁸ Thanos Veremis and Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, eds., Kosova and the Albanian Dimension in the Southeastern Europe (Athens: Eliamep, 1999), 120.

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¹¹ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "Madeleine K. Albright: Speech to the Albanian Parliament," 19 February 2000.

¹² Joseph Fitchett, "Clinton Tilt on Kosova Worries Europeans," International Herald Tribune, 1 October 1999, 7.

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¹⁷ Paskal Milo, "Kosova and Southeastern Europe After the Crisis," American Foreign Policy Interests 21, (October 1999): 18.

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¹⁹ "Corridor 8- A Vital Project for Balkan Cooperation," Koha Jone, 15 December 2000, 3.

²⁰ Ibid.

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²² Gabriel Partosh, "On the Presence of Islamic Militants in the Balkans," BBC, Albanian Service, 3 October 2001.

²³ See Albanian Daily News, 7 December 2000.

²⁴ "Albania-Safe Haven for Drug Traffic," Albanian Daily News, 4 May 2000.

²⁵ "Letter to Congressional Leaders on Deployment of Troops to Protect the U.S. Embassy in Albania, August 18, 1998," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 34:34 (24 August 1998), 1639.

²⁶ See Andrew Higgins and Christopher Cooper, "CIA: Berisha and Klosi Helped Us to Destroy the Al-Qaida Cell in Albania," Koha Jone, 30 November 2001.

²⁷ "Albania – Free Skies for the Americans," BBC, Albanian Service, 27 September 2001.

²⁸ "Albania Supports U.S. Attacks in Afghanistan," BBC, Albanian Service, 8 October 2001.

²⁹ See Koha Jone, 5 December 2001.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Albanian-American relations have rarely been a major topic in the history of international politics. This is understandable given the small territory and population of Albania, as well as the extreme isolation of the country during the 45 years of communist rule. However, despite this lack of publicity, Albanian-American relations tend to be more complex and intriguing than they appear on the surface, while at certain moments, they have assumed an important role for the interests of both parties and the development of international relations.

Historically, the United States is considered to be the main factor for the existence of an independent Albanian state. Wilson's insistence at the Paris Peace Conference for the preservation of the Albanian state was a major contribution that prevented the division of Albania's territory among the neighboring countries, which all nourished expansionist ambitions towards the country. This single historic fact would determine the strongly pro-American feelings and orientation of the Albanian population in the future. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the United States showed a particular interest in the fate of the tiny Albanian state, vying with the other neighboring countries, such as Italy and Yugoslavia, for influence in the country. It is believed that since that period, Washington considered the existence of a strong Albanian state in the Balkans as an ally and a counter-balancing factor in view of the historic and ever-increasing ties of Serbia with Russia. This U.S.

interest in Albania continued even after the establishment of the communist regime in Albania, when Washington, in collaboration with London, tried to organize an internal insurgency to topple the communists. The failure of this attempt led to a period of inactivity on the part of Washington with Albania. Albania's split with the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1960s was considered to be a strategic victory for the United States, because this prevented Moscow from an important foothold in the Mediterranean, from where it could directly threaten the U.S. 6th fleet. After some initial attempts at rapprochement that followed the Albanian-Soviet rupture, Washington abandoned any attempt to incorporate Albania in its new policy of détente with the communist block, something that, in retrospect, is considered to be a diplomatic mistake.

With the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the establishment of pluralism in Albania, Albanian-American relations took a new dimension. Since the beginning of the democratic processes in Albania in the early 1990s, one can distinguish a strong tilt in Albania's foreign policy toward the United States, which, on its part, began to show an increasing interest in Albania. Once considered the most anti-American country in Europe during the Hoxha regime, Albania became the most pro-American country on the old continent. In the early 1990s, as Albania's analyst Elez Biberaj puts it, "there was probably no country in Europe where there was as much good will toward the United States as in Albania."¹ This was best reflected during Secretary of State James Baker's visit to Albania in June 1991, when tens of thousands of Albanians turned out at Tirana's main square to give an unprecedented welcome to the American envoy.

It must be stressed that Albania's quest for close relations with the United States has a strategic character and is in keeping with the old tradition of the country, which has

constantly tried to find a big ally to serve as its protector from Great Powers' rivalries in the troubled region of the Balkans.² This has been the case with the Soviet Union, later with China and now with the United States. In fact, the military matters have been the most important aspects of the relations between the small Balkan country and the greatest power in the world. Considering an entrance to the European Union as a distant prospective, Albania counts on the support of the United States for a possible joining of NATO, an act that will greatly soothe its security concerns. On the other hand, Albania considers its close ties with Washington, as well as American engagement and leadership in the Balkans, as of paramount importance for a favorable solution to the Kosova problem.

For the United States, the close links with Albania tend to have a more conjectural and pragmatic nature. Thus, throughout the wars in Bosnia and Kosova, Albania played a key role in U.S. strategy toward the region, making its territory available as a support base for NATO military missions. Albania's collaboration will be essential for American diplomacy in finding a viable solution for Kosova and for maintaining stability in Macedonia. On the other hand, Albania offers some good investment opportunities for American companies particularly in the oil and tourism industry. The implementation of the Stability Pact and the role of the port of Durres as the gateway of Corridor 8, a major network of communication through the Balkans that would link Asia with Western Europe, would offer new chances for U.S. businesses in Albania.

1. Factors Favorable to Increased

Bilateral Relations

Keeping in mind the present situation in the Balkans and the new American engagement in the region, bilateral relations between Albania and the United States will continue to increase in the future. There are a number of factors that favor this trend:

a. The Kosova Problem and the Albanian Question

in General

The Kosova problem is going to occupy the international community, especially the United States, for a long time. We are just at the beginning of the solution of this problem, which poses many unanswered questions and risks for the future. As Amos Perlmutter, professor of political science at American University points out, "Kosova is the most intractable postwar conflict to date."³ On the other hand, the Kosova problem has raised for the first time at the beginning of this century the Albanian question in general, whose solution is considered to be crucial for the future stability of the Balkans. Many analysts predict that a possible future independent Kosova, which is the most likely solution, will, at some point during this century, be joined with Albania, making a reality the so-called "Greater Albania." Such a possible scenario would dramatically change the strategic balance in the Balkans, resulting in a new alignment of forces in the region. This would directly influence the interests of the big powers, including the United States and Russia.⁴ This is a major problem that is going to keep American diplomacy actively engaged in the Balkans in general and in Albanian politics in particular.

b. The Pro-American Orientation of the Albanian

Population and Politics

As opposed to other Balkan countries such as Serbia and Greece, where there exist strong anti-American feelings, in Albania, the overwhelming majority of the population and the political parties are strongly in support of closer political, military, and economic ties with the United States. All the main political parties consider relations with the United States of strategic importance for Albania. In every major development in U.S. foreign policy, as was the case with the events of September 11, Albanian political leaders and parties have stood strongly in support of U.S. actions. This is also manifested in the voting in the United Nations, where, in 1996 and 1997, for example, the Albanian delegation has cast, on average, the same vote as that of the American delegation more than 70 % of the time, one of the highest percentages among the East European member countries.⁵

c. The Geo-Strategic Importance of

Albania and American Interests

The Albanian sea-cost is of strategic importance for the domination of the Balkans and Mediterranean and the United States has already shown an interest in using military facilities in Albania. A possible American naval base on the strategic island of Sazan will greatly increase an American presence in Albania, while generating economic and political benefits for the country. This is a possible alternative for the Americans keeping in mind the new global fight against terrorism (which includes the Balkans) and the uncertain attitude of the Greek government toward an American presence there, as well as the political instability in Turkey. Despite its small size, as the Balkan analyst Miranda

Vickers points out, "Albania matters much more to the international community in the post communist era than it did previously."⁶

d. The Increasing Albanian Community
in the United States

This is another important factor that influences the efforts to forge closer ties between the two countries. The Albanian community in America, although still not so large in numbers, is becoming ever present and a major factor in influencing U.S. policy in the Balkans. This was evident during NATO's intervention in Kosova when there was a big show of support on the part of the Albanian community in the United States for this intervention, something that increased the sympathy of the American population for the Kosovar cause. The Albanian-American Civic League, founded in 1989, the main organization of Albanian immigrants in the United States, has been very influential with American politicians, and there is a caucus of Albanian friends in the American Congress, which has strongly lobbied for a number of initiatives toward Albania and Kosova. Albania has been given a larger quota of immigrants in the annual Diversity Visa Lottery in comparison with the other East-European countries.

e. The Dominance of the Dollar and of the
English Language in Albania

Unlike most of the East-European and Balkan countries where the German mark (now Euro) has been the main foreign currency and the German language is taking precedence, in Albania the dollar dominates the currency exchange market and English is the first foreign language taught at schools. At the same time, the majority of young

Albanians prefer to study and immigrate to the United States. Both these factors would have a positive influence for the strengthening of bilateral relations.

2. Factors Unfavorable to Increased Bilateral Relations

It must be stressed that parallel with the favorable factors mentioned above, there are a number of negative or unfavorable factors, which influence the future developments of the bilateral relations.

a. Lack of Law and Order and Political Instability in Albania

The confrontational spirit of Albanian politics, the fragility of the democratic institutions and the weakness of government authority tend to damage the foreign relations of Albania with other countries, including the United States. Although Washington has played a major role in reducing the internal political tensions in Albania, the United States has repeatedly warned the Albanian authorities of negative consequences in bilateral relations if the lack of law and order and the unabated political confrontations continue in the future.⁷ On the other hand, because of internal and external factors, Albania will continue to remain for some time on the list of countries posing a high risk for the foreign investors, including those from the United States.⁸

b. Sudden Shifts in Albanian Politics

Traditionally Albania has tried to maintain close relations with a big power. This was the case in Albania's close relations with the Soviet Union and later with China. At the height of these relations, these countries were considered protectors of Albania's

sovereignty. However, in both case we have witnessed a radical turn in Albanian politics when the closest friends have become the biggest enemies. A similar scenario can happen with the United States. A reminder of these turns in Albanian politics can be illustrated with the stand of the Democratic Party, one of the two major parties in Albania, and its leader Sali Berisha. This party was pro-American since its formation at the end of 1990 and enjoyed the strong support of Washington. Yet, later on, this party adopted a cool and even anti-American stand. This happened when Washington began to distance itself from the leader of the Democratic Party, Sali Berisha, criticizing him for authoritarian and antidemocratic practices. At present, this party again is adopting a pro-American stand. However, the presence of Berisha as the Chairman of the party is considered to be a handicap for Albanian-American relations.

c. The Contrasts in Political Priorities

There exists a disproportion in the priorities of the foreign policy objectives of the two countries. While the United States has a global policy and its relations with Albania are part of this policy, for Albania, relations with the United States is considered to be of strategic importance. Another disadvantage is that Albania, with its tiny population and territory, as well as its distance from the United States, represents a small and costly market for American companies and products.

However, despite these disadvantages, as mentioned above, there are a number of compelling factors that tend to give Albanian-American relations more importance than might seem to merit at first sight. As argued in this study, the future of Kosova, the emergence of the Albanian question in general, and a potential destabilization of Macedonia are all problems which could pose real dangers for the stability of the

Balkans. These situations will lead to a further intensification of American-Albanian relations, providing a new challenge for the future of the whole region.

In conclusion, it can be said that Albania, because of its strategic position and its connections and influence in Kosova and Macedonia, as well as its strong pro-American orientation, can represent a key player in Balkan politics and serve as a natural ally for the United States in supporting the American strategy and interests in the area.

Endnotes

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⁷ See Joseph Limprecht, Interview by Koha Jone, 5 March 2002.

⁸ *Ibid.*

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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Vladimir Cicani

Home Address:

1655 E. Sahara Ave. # 2074
Las Vegas, NV, 89104

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, English Language, 1970
University of Tirana, Albania.

Academic Memberships:

Albanian League of Journalists
Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society

Special Honors and Awards:

European Commission Scholarship, Oxford, 1993

Thesis Title: Albanian – American Relations: The Past and the Future

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. A. C. Tuttle, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Jerry L. Simich, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Anne Bennett, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Joseph A. Fry, Ph.D.