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## **WHAT DROVE THE AMERICAN DECISION TO THE NATO BOMBING OF YUGOSLAVIA IN 1999?**

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses relations between American branches of power and the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. Primarily, the focus is on U.S. President Bill Clinton's official statements, administration staff, and members of U.S. Congress. The aim is to analyze dominant arguments, political discourse, and narratives about the military operation against Yugoslavia. The work addresses a central analytical question: What drove the American decision to the NATO military action against Yugoslavia in 1999? In other words, the research intends to dig into who was involved in the military campaign from the part of American branches of power and who was against it. The work consists of three parts; the first provides a short contextual framework with the conceptual and theoretical background; the paper then looks at President Clinton's central arguments for initiating the war. In the last part, the article presents specific reflections regarding the justification of bombing and opinions against it in the U.S. Congress. As a methodology tool, the work utilizes content analysis. The sources are based on the BBC, CNN, Washington Post, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Guardian, and Los Angeles Times texts, on NATO and Clinton Foundation

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**Keywords:** NATO bombing, Yugoslavia, American foreign policy, U.S. Congress, Bill Clinton

## CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The USA called the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and the military attacks a “humanitarian intervention” – “Operation Allied Force”. The bombings started on March 24 and stopped in June when an agreement was reached in Kumanovo (North Macedonia) to withdraw Yugoslav armed forces from Kosovo and Metohija. After that, a U.N. peacekeeping mission was established (NATO 2022). Lastly, the U.N. Resolution 1244 adopted in June granted “the people of Kosovo can enjoy substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” (UNSC, S/RES/1244). Furthermore, it could be argued that the NATO campaign presented an illegal war of aggression against a sovereign state, U.N. and OSCE member, violating international law without the U.N. Security Council’s authorization.

Namely the NATO bombing was the second military intervention in its history after the 1994 and 1995 clashes with Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina in military operations “Deadeye” and “Deliberate Force” (NATO 2023). Likewise, it was the first time that NATO used military force without the approval of the U.N. Security Council. After Serbian police action against Kosovo Albanians in the village of Račak in January 1999, NATO opted to act, this time on Serbia’s territory. William Walker, an American diplomat and head of the Kosovo OSCE Verification Mission, accused Serbian forces of the intervention in Račak (OSCE 2003, 11).

Subsequently, the Rambouillet (Paris) Accords failed on March 23 when Yugoslavia refused the NATO presence on its territory and military and police forces withdrew from Kosovo and Metohija. Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special envoy, left Belgrade and returned to Brussels, announcing that Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević rejected the presence on the ground of NATO peacekeeping forces. Holbrooke communicated to NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana that diplomacy could not solve the crisis and that Yugoslavia was a NATO issue (BBC 1999). It would

have given NATO the right to free movement across Serbia. Hereafter, NATO decided to act by force (NATO 1999a). Solana authorized the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, American General Wesley Clark, to commence with military attacks on Yugoslavia (NATO 1999b). Ten years later, the former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger underlined, “the Rambouillet text, which called on Serbia to admit NATO troops throughout Yugoslavia, was a provocation, an excuse to start bombing” (Bancroft 2009).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

NATO wanted to obtain authorization from the U.N. Security Council for military action but was opposed by Russia and China. These countries indicated they would veto such a proposal. Additionally, on March 26, 1999, China and Russia demanded “the immediate cessation of the use of force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the urgent resumption of negotiations”, but the Security Council failed to adopt it. However, NATO continues its campaign without the U.N. support, stressing a “humanitarian intervention”. Amid the debate, American ambassador to the U.N. Peter Burleigh stated “Belgrade had chosen the path of war. It had continued to attack innocent Kosovars. Disturbing reports had been received that Serb forces were using human shields, that non-combatants were being rounded up in large groups, and that some were being summarily executed” (UNSC, Press Release SC/6659). A great number of scholars in literature and media have discussed the American role.

In the midst of the war, Huntington and Chomsky discussed the American foreign policy. During the bombing of Yugoslavia, Samuel Huntington published an article arguing that the U.S. is the only superpower in global politics. According to Huntington, the United States has the capability to promote its interests worldwide since it is the sole country with military, economic, ideological, diplomatic, cultural, and technological power. Nevertheless, he underlines that at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, international relations are changing amid the struggle for more power in a hybrid, uni?multipolar system with one superpower and several major powers? German-French alliance in the EU, Russia, China, Japan, India, Iran, South Africa and Brazil (Huntington 1999, 35–36). Furthermore, in May 1999, Noam Chomsky described NATO as the master of the world. On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of the foundation, its members “ratified the New Strategic Concept proposed by the United States, which permits to go beyond its defensive role and intervene militarily, without a mandate from the United Nations, against a sovereign state”. Chomsky sees the bombing of Yugoslavia as “a turning point in the global order” because the U.N. as a source of international legality was ignored since the military operation started in the name of “humanitarian intervention” but without the authorization of the Security Council. Thus, the NATO bombing further undermined the fragile structure of international law and escalated the conflict between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians (Chomsky 1999).

Three days after the bombing commenced, the question of legality and legitimization was addressed in the New York Times. For instance, Allan Gerson, a former counsel to the United States mission to the United Nations, stressed that the NATO bombing “flouts the traditional interpretation of the (U.N.) charter, but it is compatible, with the emerging international humanitarian law that recognizes the rights of individuals to be protected from genocidal practices, torture and other gross human rights abuses”. Contrary, Jack Goldsmith, a professor of international law at the University of Chicago Law School, underlined “that critics of the NATO bombing have a pretty good legal argument (...) if you just read the letter of international law, it does not expressly provide an exception for a humanitarian intervention”. Finally, Ted Galen Carpenter, a foreign policy specialist at the Cato Institute in Washington, criticized American leaders: “It has been a longstanding standard of international law, that internal disputes in a country, however disagreeable, do not justify external military intervention (...) Anything can be an emergency if the intervening country declares it so” (Glaberson 1999).

Likewise, many years after the NATO military action, the topic was part of the debate in academia. In conclusion, in the text from 2004, Joseph Nye, a political scientist and professor at Harvard University, underscored “the role of the American soft power” in the legitimization of NATO’s use of military force against Serbia in 1999, regardless of the absence of a formal U.N. Security Council resolution. According to Nye, military intervention was legitimate because the United States had the soft power to attract allies and influence public opinion, stressing that the U.N. was not the only source of legitimacy. The American professor rationalized the military campaign by the words that “many people concluded that the Kosovo campaign was legitimate (although not formally legal) because it had the *de facto* support of a large majority

of Security Council members” (Nye 2004, 269). Due to the imprecise, Nye’s explanation remains vague – Why is the U.N. not the only source of legitimacy? What are the other sources of legitimacy? Who are “many people”? Is it, at times, the U.N. an unwieldy institution just because of the veto power mechanism, which does not serve America’s hard, soft, or smart power interests?<sup>1</sup> It is indicative that Nye was part of the Jimmy Carter Administration; later in the Bill Clinton era, he was a National Intelligence Council member from 1993 to 1994. In 1994/1995, Nye worked as an Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; in 2014, during the Obama Administration, he was appointed to the Foreign Affairs Policy Board (Harvard Kennedy School 2023). Hence, it may be argued that Nye acts as a politician and member of the U.S. administration, unlike an independent intellectual.

A different opinion comes from Christopher Layne’s neorealist perspective. A professor at Texas University argues that U.S. – NATO military operations in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999 were unilateral American decisions (Layne 2010, 61). Equally, James Peterson, a professor of Political Science at Valdosta State University, writes about President Clinton and his “unilateral peacemaking policy with NATO forces”, where Clinton is not eager to involve the U.N. in the peace project (Chittick 2006, 157–158, according to Peterson 2014, 111). Therefore, Layne challenges American foreign policy from a neorealist theoretical standpoint; he criticizes the absence of multilateralism in American politics, by-passing international institutions, international law, and norms, ignoring public and Congressional opinion, and not respecting different views of other countries (Layne 2010, 51). Namely, Layne discusses neorealist positions, American foreign policy, and hegemony in the book “The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present” (Layne 2007).

Besides, professor John Mearsheimer, delineating the *offensive realism theory*, stresses that superpowers aim to increase power; they create world order by acting unilaterally, thinking on self-state interests, demonstrating power, and not working together for secure international order; for instance, that occurred when Russia has opposed U.S. foreign policy and NATO 1999 war against Yugoslavia (Mearsheimer 2001, 27). In addition, Huntington points out two crucial tools of coercion that the U.S. “utilized a decade after the end of the Cold War to impose its will

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<sup>1</sup> NATO could be seen as a political actor in the global arena in service of American foreign policy.

on other countries”: military intervention and economic sanctions. The consequence is a growing reputation as a “hollow hegemon” and the “rogue superpower”. Likewise, American leaders wrongly interpret the world as unipolar, claiming to act and “speak on behalf of the international community – but they are only one part of it” (Huntington 1999, 39–40).

Furthermore, Robert Keohane, a professor of Political Science at Princeton University, and Ruth Grant, from Duke University, analyze the legitimacy and legality of NATO bombing. They note that “legitimacy derives from conformity to human rights norms widely shared by the elites and publics of the most powerful states in the global political system and maintained by public discourse”. For instance, the Independent International Commission on Kosovo classifies the NATO war against Yugoslavia as legitimate since it aims “to protect an innocent population”, but it is “illegal according to the United Nations”. On one side, it was the “responsibility to protect” innocent populations; on the other, it was the norm of state sovereignty (Grant and Keohane 2005, 35). Thus, the Independent Commission of Inquiry on bombing and South African jurist, Justice Goldstone described the NATO intervention as “illegal but legitimate”. Moreover, Noam Chomsky, an American linguist, historian, philosopher, and Professor Emeritus at MIT, argues that “illegal” makes it a war crime. However, the American leaders pointed out legitimacy since “it was necessary to stop genocide”. Here, Chomsky underscores “the inversion of history” (Chomsky 2006).

Finally, further thinking is based on a neorealist theory of professor of Political Science Kenneth Waltz, who describes NATO as a non-independent international institution subordinated to American national interests (Waltz 2000, 18). Therefore, the Clinton Administration considers NATO the instrument for maintaining American power and domination of European states’ foreign and military policies. Besides, the Balkans are the region where the USA wants to test and show its power and dominance after the Cold War (21–23).

On the other hand, Serbian professors Proroković and Krga, analyzing the NATO aggression on its 20th anniversary, stress several reasons for the military campaign: to enhance NATO credibility before its 50th anniversary, to overthrow Milošević and put Yugoslavia under NATO control, to neutralize Russian influence in the region, to minimize the role of the UN, and to demonstrate the US dominant power (Proroković and Krga 2019, 144). Also, Slobodan Janković, a senior research fellow at the Institute of International Politics and Economics, sees the NATO

bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 as part of the “fragmentation” of the former federal country. As Janković notes, this process started with “larger political and ideological reformulation of the world after the end of the Cold War”. It culminated with the NATO occupation of the Serbian southern province (Janković 2019, 169). Moreover, French professor Alexis Troude, emphasizes the geopolitical aspects of the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia, such as, geoeconomic (mining wealth of Kosovo and Metohija) and “military- strategic interests of the United States and its allies” (Troude 2019, 123).

## **CLINTON’S ADMINISTRATION AND ARGUMENTS FOR NATO MILITARY OPERATION**

This section examines discourse and official communications in Clinton’s Administration: the views of President Clinton, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Vice President Al Gore, and State Secretary Madeleine Albright. The work will use the content analysis of speeches, interviews, statements on the topic in media, and Clinton Digital Library transcripts of Clinton’s conversations with other leaders. The article utilizes the qualitative method since it is appropriate for this research question. Before the NATO campaign, Clinton, on February 11, when the Rambouillet meetings were in progress, discussed with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder possible intervention and was preoccupied with the UN authorization: “We are having the NATO Summit in the spring, a time when we should celebrate our new members and keep the doors open to others. We have difficulties with Chirac on UN authority, out of area mission without prior explicit UN authorization. We cannot allow our hands to be tied, in case something happens that we have to respond to” (Clinton Digital Library 1999a). One week later, at the meeting with French President Jacques Chirac at the White House, Clinton announced: “There will be a very brief period between the collapse of talks and the start of airstrikes” (Clinton Digital Library 1999c).

Moreover, on March 5, Clinton met Italian Prime Minister Massimo D’Alema at the White House, and he expressed the opinion that Milošević could accept the Rambouillet agreement under threat: “Now, the big question before us is what if the Kosovars say yes but Milosevic says no? Under the existing policy of NATO, we must be prepared to take air action to reduce his capacity to hurt the Kosovar-Albanians. In the end,



I think that Milosevic will agree but only if he believes we are prepared to follow through with our threats” (Clinton Digital Library 1999d).

Here are certain statements of attitudes concerning the campaign, whether favoring it or expressing criticism. On March 24, 1999, in a speech on the Yugoslav strike addressed to the American nation, President Clinton said: “ (...) today our armed forces joined our NATO allies in airstrikes against Serbian forces responsible for the brutality in Kosovo (...) We act to prevent a wider war, to defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe...Kosovar men were dragged from their families, fathers, and sons together, lined up, and shot in cold blood (...) It is an attack by tanks and artillery on a largely defenseless people (...) Ending this tragedy is a moral imperative. It is also important to America’s national interests (...) a dictator in Serbia who has done nothing since the Cold War ended, but started new wars (...)” (CNN 1999). Thus, the bombing presents an American national interest and moral imperative to fight against the Serbian “dictator” and “brutality on defenseless people shot in cold blood”; Clinton does not mention NATO support to the Kosovo Liberation Army.

In a telephone call with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on April 19, Clinton discussed the role of NATO, control over the KLA, and possible solutions to end the war: “If there is no military element, the Kosovars will never return. The Serbs forces have burned all their villages, burned them alive, raped children, and there is no way they will come back without military protection. Here is the dilemma about a military force. I don’t care what it is called, but if there is no NATO involvement, we won’t be able to get the Albanians to disarm. We can get the KLA to disarm” (Clinton Digital Library 1999e).

Subsequently, on April 22, the White House organized the NATO meeting, which Javier Solana defined as “one of the most important meetings in NATO history”. The question was what to do with Serbian radio and television transmissions. President Clinton stressed: “No one thought we could stop Milosevic in Kosovo with an air action of a few weeks. We have to broaden the targets, make the Serbs uncomfortable while minimizing civilian casualties, and stepping up economic pressures” (Clinton Digital Library 1999f).

A few days later, Clinton defended the NATO bombing of a Serbian national television station, legitimizing the action, the TV. station as a target, and the killing of Serbian civilians in Belgrade: “Serb television is an essential instrument of Mr. Milosevic’s command and control...He



uses it to spew hatred and to basically spread disinformation. He does not use it to show all the Kosovar villages he's burned, to show the mass graves, to show the children that have been raped by the soldiers that he sent there" (Harris 1999). In an attack at a T.V. station, sixteen people die, all of whom are security workers, makeup artists, and technicians. Amnesty International report states that in the case of the NATO bombing of the Radio Television of Serbia, NATO forces deliberately targeted a civilian object, which is why this was a war crime. Additionally, Amnesty International points out that by attacking Yugoslavia, NATO violated international law because they were sure civilians would be killed by hitting a civilian object (Erlanger 2000).

Turning back to President Clinton's speech to the Veterans Organization on Kosovo in May 1999, he claims that "at least 100.000 Kosovar Albanians missing" and exposes the argumentation for American intervention: "(...) Unfortunately, for more than ten years now, President Milosevic has pursued a different course for Serbia, and for much of the rest of the former Yugoslavia. Since the late 1980, he has acquired, retained, and sought to expand his power, by inciting religious and ethnic hatred in the cause of greater Serbia (...) by demonizing and dehumanizing people, especially the Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims, whose history, culture, and very presence in the former republic of Yugoslavia impede that vision of a greater Serbia. He unleashed wars in Bosnia and Croatia, creating two million refugees and leaving a quarter of a million people dead. Though his ethnic cleansing is not the same as the ethnic extermination of the Holocaust, the two are related – both vicious, premeditated, systematic oppression fueled by religious and ethnic hatred. There must also be an international security force with NATO at its core. Without that force, after all they've been through, the Kosovars simply won't go home (...) But you do not have systematic slaughter and an effort to eradicate the religion, the culture, the heritage... Mr. Milosevic and his allies have dragged their people down a path of racial and religious hatred (...)" (Clinton Foundation 1999). Kosovar Muslims' status is presented in jeopardy, but it is fundamental to know that Kosovar Albanians are also orthodox and catholic.

Military action against Serbian "ethnic cleansing" served well to restore credibility to NATO (Jentleson 2007, 428 according to Peterson 2014, 111). In this speech, a simplified explanation of the civil wars in Yugoslavia can be noticed, blaming one side for the conflict or, more precisely, one political actor. Utilizing numbers has the purpose of

empowering statements. Also, mentioning the concept of Greater Serbia in the wrong context and not talking about Greater Albania proves poor knowledge of Balkan history. Fierce words include ethnic cleansing, ethnic extermination, systematic slaughter, and comparison with the Holocaust.

The same year, in June, at a press conference in the White House, President Clinton again accused Serbia – “tens of thousands of people were killed (...) all those little girls were raped, and all those little boys were murdered”; he said: “NATO stopped deliberate, systematic efforts at ethnic cleansing and genocide” (The White House 1999). Comparing Kosovo to the Holocaust starts in March, before the bombing: “What if someone had listened to Winston Churchill and stood up to Adolph Hitler earlier? How many people’s lives might have been saved? And how many American lives might have been saved?” It is essential that in the same interview, Clinton underscores America’s economic interest in protecting Kosovo: “If our country is going to be prosperous and secure, we need a Europe that is safe, secure, free, united, a good partner for trading, wealthy enough to buy our product” (Blitzer 1999). Chomsky argues that “the term genocide as applied to Kosovo is an insult to the victims of Hitler. In fact, it is revisionist to an extreme”. He highlights that until January 1999, most killings came from the Kosovo Liberation Army guerillas supported by the CIA. Chomsky continues: “If that is genocide, then the whole world is covered with genocide. In fact, the 50th Anniversary of NATO occurred right in the middle of all of this. The way it is presented is: the atrocities took place and, then we had to bomb to prevent genocide, just inverted” (Chomsky 2006).

Similarly, the media group Accuracy in Media accuses the American foreign policy of not telling the truth regarding the events in Kosovo, increasing the number of civilian deaths to justify military intervention. The group claimed that the USA “was determined to go to war; the Rambouillet talks as a ‘peace deal’ between the Serbs and the Kosovo Albanians were designed to fail”. Namely, NATO Commander American General Wesley Clark was blamed for pushing the war (Irvine and Kincaid 1999). Moreover, in March 2022 in Rome, I interviewed Sergio Vento, the Italian ambassador in Paris in 1999 and a member of Lamberto Dini’s (Italian Foreign Affairs Minister) delegation in Rambouillet. According to Vento, dossier Račak was a typical example of a media campaign, and then during the talks in France, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright supported the Albanians, particularly the military current led by Thaci and Haradinaj. Ambassador Vento further concludes: “To the

surprise of Italy, France, and Germany, the American proposal to Serbia was a classic dictate according to which Serbia should become a NATO protectorate with the permission of the forces of this alliance to enter the country. For that dictate, the USA prepared all the documents and even what the new Constitutions of Serbia and Kosovo should be. Practically, it was not a negotiation, but an ultimatum from the USA, and normally Serbia could not accept it” (Barović 2022).

It can be argued that the story regarding human rights and “protecting innocent people” serves to camouflage American economic and geopolitical interests. Likewise, after the bombing ended, prestigious journals like *The Wall Street Journal* and *New Statesman* criticized the Clinton administration for the false and exaggerated statements about genocide (Pearl 1999; Pilger 2000). Even a NATO spokesman and former BBC correspondent Mark Laity states: “We would rather be criticized for overestimating the numbers who died than for failing to pre-empt.” Thus, *The Guardian* claimed that “100 000 ethnic Albanians massacred in Kosovo revised to under 3000 as exhumations near the end”. Therefore, the question is whether the military action was humanitarian or had it as a goal to maintain NATO credibility in a post-Cold War world (Steele 2000). Furthermore, Chomsky focuses on Western media as responsible actors for glorifying the Clinton administration. *New York Times*, French and British press writes about a “normative revolution”, the USA as “the leader of the free world”, “acting from pure altruism”, and “Clinton’s policy as a noble phase with a saintly glow” (Chomsky 2006).

Additionally, James K. Oliver, a professor of American foreign policy and international relations at the University of Delaware, highlights that during Clinton’s eight years in office, “the most dangerous engagement of U.S. military forces occurred in the Balkans”. The significant detail is that Clinton never asked for Congressional authorization. Indeed, Clinton reported the actions to Congress and tried to get support but never explicitly requested authorization. Like in 1994 in Bosnia against Serbian forces, five years later, in 1999, Clinton acted unilaterally with an attack on a sovereign state without congressional authorization: “Yesterday I decided that the United States would vote to give NATO the authority to carry out military strikes against Serbia if President Milosevic continues to defy the international community”. The procedure is that Congress should give the President authority, and then the latter can authorize NATO (Oliver 2010, 279–280). Arguably, after the civil war in Croatia and Bosnia, American foreign policy toward Serbia (Kosovo and Metohija) was a continuity of unilateralism.

Therefore, these were President Clinton's arguments. Besides, the Secretary of Defense and Vice President of the USA have the same views as the President. Namely, William Cohen, Secretary of Defense, in April 1999, at a press conference at NATO Headquarters, said: "The appalling accounts of mass killing in Kosovo and the pictures of refugees fleeing Serb oppression for their lives make it clear that this is a fight for justice over genocide" (U.S. Department of Defense 1999). Moreover, in May, he speaks about Kosovar Albanians: "We've now seen about 100,000 military-aged men missing (...) they may have been murdered". Cohen also stresses the positive actions of the Kosovo Liberation Army: "KLA effort will prove to be Milosevic's quagmire, his Vietnam" (Doggett 1999). As can be seen, the argumentation for the bombing repeatedly is based on the narrative of "justice, genocide, mass killing, and 100.000 victims".

For instance, in March, before the military operation, another vital actor, American Vice President Al Gore, declared: "If Milosevic does not call off his attack and stop the slaughter of innocent men, women and children, we are determined to act to diminish the military power that he has turned ruthlessly toward the Kosovo people and help the Kosovar Albanians win the safety, security and self-government they deserve" (Blitzer 1999). Hence, an accent is at stopping "the slaughter of innocent men, women and children".

Another figure significantly involved in the war was State Secretary Madeleine Albright. Walter Isaacson, an American historian, journalist, Professor of History at Tulane University, former chairman and CEO of CNN, and Managing Editor of Time, defines the Kosovo war as "Madeleine's war". He underlines that Albright was pushing the U.S. into war. As reported by Isaacson, Albright was struggling decidedly for the moralistic and assertive new world role for America. Further, at a London conference on a meeting with foreign ministers, Albright announces: "History is watching us" (Isaacson 1999). Other sources provide possible explanations of how Albright got the war the U.S. wanted: "We deliberately set the bar higher than the Serbs could accept it (...) because they needed a little bombing". Reportedly, she had a meeting with a Kosovo delegation member, Hashim Thaci<sup>2</sup>, before Rambouillet talks where she said: "If you say yes and the Serbs say no, NATO will strike and go on striking until the Serb forces are out and NATO can go in. You will have security. And you will be able to govern yourselves" (Elich 2019). According to Huntington, the issue with American foreign

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<sup>2</sup> He is accused of war crimes and imprisoned in the Hague tribunal.

policy is when American officials tend to act as if the world were unipolar, boasting American power and defining the U.S. as a benevolent hegemon in tackling global problems. For instance, in 1998, Albright called the United States “the indispensable nation” and stressed that “we stand tall and hence see further than other nations” (Huntington 1999, 37).

Similarly, the opinions confessed after the NATO bombing provide interesting observations. For example, Chomsky emphasizes that the best explanation for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia comes from Strobe Talbott, a person from the highest level of the Clinton administration. Namely, Talbott was President Clinton’s Deputy Secretary of State and the leading U.S. negotiator during the war. He was director of the Pentagon/State Department Intelligence Joint Committee on Diplomacy during the NATO intervention; consequently, Chomsky thinks he was one of the *top* of the Clinton administration. So, Talbott in 2005 writes: “It was Yugoslavia’s resistance to the broader trends of political and economic reform ? not the plight of Kosovar Albanians ? that best explains NATO’s war”. Fundamentally, the argument is that Serbia was the last country in Europe that did not want to make the required social and economic reforms and then be subordinated to the U.S. neoliberal programs. Consequently, the American administration decided to destroy Serbia. According to Talbott, the war’s “real purpose had nothing to do with concern for Kosovar Albanians and human rights” (Chomsky 2006).

## THE U.S. CONGRESS AND NATO BOMBING

The opinions of the members of the U.S. Congress appear equally crucial for the dossier. Amid the NATO intervention, the U.S. Congress deliberated a few resolutions. First, the United States House of Representatives supported a non-binding resolution on March 11, by a vote of 219–191 conditionally (only if a peace agreement was reached) approving President Clinton’s plan to send 4.000 troops to the NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo (Clerk U.S. House of Representatives 1999). Namely, 174 Democrats and 44 Republicans support the President, claiming that “the United States has a moral obligation to stop a genocidal war”. Simultaneously, 173 Republicans and 18 Democrats opposed the Resolution (Mitchell 1999). Accordingly, numerous Republicans were against the President’s plan for Kosovo.

In a telephone call with Tony Blair yet on February 4, President Clinton was concerned about Congress’s opinion even for eventually

sending ground peacekeeping troops in Kosovo and Metohija: “I gather there is a general feeling that a lot of European countries are willing to make troop contributions. That will help me to get Congress to support participation. I just gave a speech today. I basically said we were considering our participation and talking to Congress about it. I will make the strongest case I can, but our system is that they have to come up with money for it. The more European countries that are willing to participate and the greater extent, the better luck I will have with the Republican Congress” (Clinton Digital Library 1999b).

In the first voting in March, the Senate supported U.S. participation in NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. It was 58 in favor and 41 against; 16 Republicans and 42 Democrats authorized bombing. Conversely, the contrary had 38 Republicans and 3 Democrats. Hence, various Republicans vehemently opposed the Clintons’ foreign policy, considering the military operation very risky; they prepared the resolution against NATO intervention, but it was not debated before March 24. Notably, most Democrats insist that airstrikes are necessary and inevitable (Kempster 1999; U.S. Senate 1999). However, even Republican Senator from Arizona, John McCain, who backs the resolution, is not entirely sure if it would be the right decision: “Congress and the American people have good reason to fear that we are heading toward another permanent garrison of Americans in a Balkan country where our mission is confused and our exit strategy a complete mystery”. Additionally, a Republican Senator from New Hampshire, Robert Smith, defines Kosovo’s circumstances as a civil war. At the same time, he worries for the American citizens and American soldiers: “American lives are being put in jeopardy because of a civil war in Kosovo” (Schmitt 1999). One week later, Senator McCain changed his stance: “We must now do whatever it takes to win, we cannot allow this Balkan thug to prevail. We must do whatever is necessary, including perhaps sending in ground troops” (Connolly 1999).

In April, the House Appropriations Committee accepted \$13 billion in emergency spending for the cost of air military action. On the other hand, a second non-binding resolution for approving the mission fails in the House of Representatives. At the end of voting, it was 213–213 (Pine 1999). Summing up, the House of Representatives and the Senate have different opinions; President Clinton obtained more extensive support for Kosovo politics in the U.S. Senate. Also, most U.S. House Republicans voted against two resolutions, contrary to approval for the US participation in the NATO intervention.



At the end of April, the debate regarding sending ground troops to Yugoslavia finished with rejection from the Republicans (U.S. Congress House of Representatives 1999). In the House, by a vote of 249 to 180, decision-makers approved a Republican-proposed bill that did not allow Clinton to use funds to transfer U.S. ground troops to Serbia without authorization from Congress. For instance, Dennis Hastert, a Republican from Illinois and House Speaker comments that Clinton “should better explain the goals, the costs, and the long-term strategy of why the USA is in Yugoslavia” (Pine 1999). Moreover, Tom Campbell, a Republican from San Jose, proposes to Congress “to formally declare war on Yugoslavia or order the withdrawal of all U.S. troops and equipment within thirty days”. However, the withdrawal bill failed in the House of Representatives by 290 to 139. Likewise, the declaration of war was firmly rejected by 427 to 2. In other words, nobody wants to declare war on Yugoslavia, but at the same time, the House members do not have the majority of votes for the withdrawing option; the status quo results from the voting. Consequently, Republican Tony P. Hall from Ohio criticizes Congress because of the contradictory resolutions related to the war. Ultimately, his Republican colleague, Charlie Norwood, a Vietnam War veteran, highlights that giving support to Clinton would “allow our nation to plunge into a quagmire from which there will be no exit”. Also, the House Speaker’s proposal’s primary goal is to emphasize Congress’s constitutional duty to decide about sending U.S. troops into war. Nevertheless, Clinton acts like he does not require categorical authorization from Congress for military operations abroad. Finally, the members of the House of Representatives are highly divided. Regarding supporting the air attacks, 181 Democrats and 31 Republicans voted *yes*; 26 Democrats and 187 Republicans opted for *no* (Pine 1999).

It is essential to remember that Article II, section 2 of the U.S. Constitution says that “the President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy”, but Article I, section 8 underlines that only “Congress has the power to declare war”; the President signs the Declaration (Constitution of the United States). In the book *Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Constitution*, Louis Henkin, a professor Emeritus at Columbia University, deals with constitutional confusion between the President’s power on foreign affairs, more precisely, of the use of military force and the constitutional power of the Congress. Henkin repeats that Congress has the exclusive constitutional power to declare war. This exclusive power represents the limits of the powers of the Commander in Chief (Henkin 1997).



Going back to the Senator's opinions, one of the first Senators stressed that the U.S. must win the war against Yugoslavia at all costs and even send in Serbia ground troops was a Republican John McCain, later a candidate for the 2000 presidential nomination. Therefore, military action against Belgrade seems part of the U.S. presidential election campaign. On the other side, Tim Hutchinson, a Republican Senator from Arkansas, states: "It has yet to be adequately demonstrated to Congress or the American people that it is our vital national interests that have drawn us into this conflict. In fact, I would say, we have stumbled into this conflict, we have slipped into this war". The same opinion comes from Democratic Senator from Minnesota Paul Wellstone, supporting: "cessation from what seems to be a slide toward the bombing of a broader array of non-military targets, a potential oil embargo directed at other countries – toward deeper involvement in a wider war—that I believe we will come to regret." In addition, a Republican Senator from Ohio, the only Senator of Serbian origin, Voinovich George, addresses critiques of the NATO military action: "The time has come, Mr. President, where NATO needs to get off its high horse, restrain its ego and instead of trying to save face over a major foreign policy blunder, start thinking about saving lives." It is interesting that he is against bombing but supports the idea of removal of Serbian troops from Kosovo: "It is time to stop the bombing and put everyone's effort into finding a diplomatic solution that will quickly result in removal of Serbian troops in Kosovo" (Crowley 1999). Analyzing American foreign policy (as well towards Yugoslavia), Huntington describes "the U.S. as the lonely sheriff and the world policeman" that the most of the planet does not accept; unilateral sanctions and interventions lead to "foreign policy disasters". Huntington argues that American decision-makers should leave the benign-hegemon illusion that their values and interests are the same as those of the rest of the world (Huntington 1999, 47–48).

## CONCLUSIONS

Twenty-five years after the NATO bombing, the work grappled with American foreign policy in Yugoslavia. As discussed above, the Clinton administration utilized harsh accusations as a dominant argument against Serbia in political discourses. NATO military action is justified as a humanitarian intervention, a "moral imperative" to stop or prevent "genocide, ethnic cleansing, and extermination, systematic slaughtering,

brutality, mass killing, powder keg, cold blood, dictatorship, and massacre". One of the arguments was a comparison between the Holocaust and Kosovo and Hitler with Milošević. Several times in American political underpinnings, a technique was used to overestimate the number of casualties in a war conflict. On the other side, Congress was not united in supporting President Clinton's decision to bomb Yugoslavia. The House of Representatives and Senate were exceedingly divided; numerous Republicans opposed the war. The real reason for such a decision remained unclear; were they against military action, or perhaps they opposed American foreign policy just because Bill Clinton came from the Democratic Party?

However, the Republicans argued that the military mission is a mystery and that American lives should not be risked because of the civil war in Kosovo and Metohija; the Senators were preoccupied that the military action could be a quagmire for the USA; they criticized the targeting of civilian objects; the main message would be that the war was not of vital American interest and that the solution should be found in diplomatic acting. Finally, the U.S. Congress did not declare war against Yugoslavia. Instead, President Clinton decided to act unilaterally as a Commander in Chief.

The NATO bombing of Serbia was the topic of many international academic authors, and it is not new. However, this spring marks the 25th anniversary of the bombing and the aggression, and the topic has more relevance as a reminder of the implications in international relations. Namely, the bombing of Serbia and the Kosovo war was detrimental to further steps in American foreign policy as an introduction and a general probe for military actions in Iraq. Likewise, later in the multipolar world, other significant international actors, such as Russia and China, utilized this example to highlight the unilateral American decision in 1999 that violated international law and order, bypassing the UN role. The latest example is the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Serbia and jointly mark the anniversary of the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in 1999. Also, amid the war in Ukraine, it is indicative the statement of Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov at November OSCE meeting in Skopje, stressing the destroyed military-political dimension of OSCE by NATO and EU in 1999 "brutal bombing" of Yugoslavia and later in 2008, taking Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia, violating 1244 UN Security Council Resolution and the principle of the inviolability of borders in Helsinki Final Act (OSCE 2023).

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## ШТА ЈЕ ПОДСТАКЛО АМЕРИЧКУ ОДЛУКУ НА НАТО БОМБАРДОВАЊЕ ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ 1999. ГОДИНЕ?

### Резиме

Овај рад анализира односе између америчких грана власти и НАТО бомбардовања Југославије 1999. године. Пре свега, фокус је на званичним изјавама председника САД Била Клинтона (*Bill Clinton*), члановима администрације и америчког Конгреса. Циљ је анализирати доминантне аргументе, политички дискурс и наративе о војној операцији против Југославије. Текст се бави централним аналитичким питањем: Шта је подстакло америчку одлуку на војну акцију НАТО против Југославије 1999. године? Другим речима, истраживање намерава да установи ко је био укључен у војну кампању од стране америчких грана власти, а ко је био против. Рад се састоји из три дела; први пружа кратак контекстуални оквир са концептуалном и теоријском позадином; након тога, рад се осврће на главне аргументе председника Клинтона за покретање рата. У последњем делу, чланак износи одређена размишљања о правдању бомбардовања и ставовима против истог у америчком Конгресу. Као методолошки алат, рад користи анализу садржаја. Извори су засновани на Би-Би-Си (*BBC*), Си-Ен-Ен (*CNN*), Вашингтон Пост (*Washington Post*), Њујорк Тајмс (*New York Times*), Вол Стрит Џурнал (*Wall Street Journal*), Гардијан (*Guardian*), и Лос Анђелес Тајмс (*Los Angeles Times*) текстовима, као и на интернет подацима НАТО, Клинтонове фондације, Архива Клинтонове

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Дигиталне Библиотеке и стенографским записима америчког Конгреса (Представнички дом и Сенат).

**Кључне речи:** НАТО бомбардовање, Југославија, америчка спољна политика, Конгрес САД, Бил Клинтон

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