

**UNDERSTANDING U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD  
EMERGING SECESSIONIST STATES:  
A Close Look at the Balkan Regional Context\***

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**Note from the author:** This paper is part of a larger research project that attempts to explain the variation of the U.S. foreign policy toward secessionist states in the post-cold war era. It introduces the general puzzle of the research, formulates an argument based on stability considerations to explain the problem under investigation, and cast some serious doubts on the ability of the ethnic diaspora argument to explain the American policy towards secessionist conflicts abroad. More generally, this paper aims to contribute to the literature on the enduring struggle in American foreign policy between principles of international stability and secessionist self-determination.

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## Introduction

Empirical evidence indicates that the United States reacted in a contradictory manner toward the resurgence of secessionist aspirations in the post-Cold War era. On the one hand, the U.S. supported and recognized the independence of several secessionist states such as Croatia, Eritrea, and East Timor. On the other hand, it refused to offer the same kind of support to other secessionist movements like Kosovo, Somaliland or Transnistria. How can this inconsistency be explained? What accounts for the U.S. foreign policy variation toward secessionist states?

To address this problem, this paper focuses its attention on the United States' reaction to the independence of Croatia and Macedonia from Yugoslavia. These cases are among the most recent instances of secession to occur in Europe. These states are, in many respects, very similar given their close geographical proximity and that they both seceded from the Yugoslav federation in 1991. However, they experienced very different outcomes. Croatia was quickly recognized by the United States and by the greater international community in 1992, which makes it a successful case of post-cold war secession. Macedonia, however, had a more painful experience since the United States delayed its recognition for more than two years and waited until 1995 before sending an Ambassador to Skopje, the Macedonian capital. Why did Washington support and recognize Croatia but did not act with the same alacrity toward Macedonia? This raises an important theoretical puzzle in the field of U.S. foreign policy.

The resolution of this theoretical problem is pressing since separatist movements constitute, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an enduring challenge to the lone American superpower as well as to the international community.<sup>1</sup> At this moment, there are several secessionist movements that are seeking independence in the different regions of the world—Aceh, Chechnya, Dniester, Turkish Kurdistan—and recent studies have shown that secessionist

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<sup>1</sup> David Callahan, "The Enduring Challenge: Self Determination and Ethnic Conflict in the 21st Century", *Carnegie Challenge*, Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2002.

movements tend to proliferate.<sup>2</sup> As the most powerful state in the current international system, the U.S. must therefore consider secessionism as an important concern.<sup>3</sup> By understanding the circumstances under which the United States recognizes secessionist entities, we will be better equipped to explain its policy and to predict its response towards future secessionist attempts.

### **The Ethnic Politics Argument**

In recent years, several analysts have maintained that U.S. ethnic lobbies are now a major determinant in American foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Henry Nau, for instance, asserts that the U.S. is gradually “losing its ethnic core” from British origin, which result in the transformation of “its foreign policy into a patchwork of ethnic [...] particularisms”.<sup>5</sup> Some have even questioned whether the U.S. government still promote the national interest or if it has been undermined by diaspora’s interests. Although it could hardly be identified as a conventional wisdom, the ethnic politics argument is increasingly regarded as a core proposition to explain U.S. foreign policy.

Yossi Shain asserts, among other things, that some ethnic groups have been able to pressure U.S. leaders to adopt supportive policies towards national self-determination movements. He implies, for instance, that U.S. ethnic groups often influence which side the United States will support in a secessionist conflict abroad. According to him, the Croatian-American lobby had an impact on the U.S. decision to recognize the independence of Croatia in 1992.<sup>6</sup> John Shea makes a very similar argument when he asserts that a Greek-American lobby

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Barry, *Foreign Policy In Focus: Self-Determination*, Project Description, Carnegie Corporation of New York, <[http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/about\\_body.html](http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/about_body.html)>, 2003. (consulted in December 2004).

<sup>3</sup> David Callahan, *Unwinnable Wars: American Power and Ethnic Conflicts*, Hill and Wang Editions, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, “Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy”, in Thomas Ambrosio, (ed.), *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Westport (CT): Praeger, 2002, pp. 1-19. Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy*, Cornell University Press, 2002. Alexander Deconde, *Ethnicity, Race, and American foreign Policy: A History*, Northwestern University Press, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Henry R. Nau, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-84.

<sup>6</sup> Yossi Shain, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 66

succeeded in preventing the United States from extending full diplomatic relations to Macedonia in 1994 by convincing President Clinton to reverse his decision.<sup>7</sup>

The ethnic argument has been studied in several policy oriented works but has never been measured in a systematic manner. Analysts seem to often invoke the cases that support their ethnic argument but never perform scientific analyzes to test the validity and the consistency of this proposition. I am not arguing that ethnic lobbies do not matter in the U.S. foreign policy process. However, I call into question the reliability of this argument and I maintain that the issue of regional stability must be considered to better account for the U.S. response to secessionism.

### **The Stability Argument**

Here I develop an alternative argument to explain the U.S. foreign policy variation toward secessionist efforts in the post-cold war era. I assert that the maintenance—or restoration—of regional stability is the U.S.’s paramount interest when dealing with foreign secessionist quarrels, and that this instrumental motive accounts for the decision to support or not support secessionist aspirations.<sup>8</sup> To pursue stability, this model suggests that the United States will support a host state (e.g. a state embattled with a secessionist movement), as long as it offers the best option to restore order. In the case of Yugoslavia, I argue that if the Yugoslav state would have managed to remain united in the early 1990s, the U.S. would not have considered the possibility of recognizing the independence of Croatia and Macedonia.

In the instance where the host state becomes a disruptive agent and that it is unwilling or unable to reestablish regional stability, the argument predicts that the United States will contemplate the possibility of recognizing a secessionist state as a way to reinforce stability. However, and this is consistent with the first part of the argument, the model predicts that

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<sup>7</sup> John Shea, *Macedonia and Greece: The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation*, McFarland & Company, Inc. 1997. See also Hanna Rosin, “Why we flipped on Macedonia”, *The New Republic*, June 13, 1994, pp. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> By regional stability I mean: peace between sovereign states, maintenance and respect of international borders, nonintervention in states’ internal affairs, and respect of states’ internal borders.

secessionist leaders will have to demonstrate their ability to maintain external as well as internal stability before being recognized by the United States.<sup>9</sup> The ability of secessionist leaders to maintain stability will be decisive since the U.S. will not be interested in supporting a new state that is likely to reproduce the instability problem of the predecessor state.<sup>10</sup>

The main contribution of this model is that it explains how the United States reacts to secessionist aspirations on the basis of stability interests. Most of the time, the concept of stability is vaguely used in the literature on U.S. foreign policy and very little explanations are offered as to how this concept impacts the behavior of the United States. As for the concepts of national interest or globalization, the notion of stability often results from intuitive thinking rather than from sound theoretical justifications. Some people say: *The United States opposes secession because it is instable*. Fair enough. But then how do we explain that Washington did recognize secessionist states in the post-Cold War? How does stability or instability explain why the U.S. support secessionist movements? The stability model that is proposed here provides a theoretical path that establishes a clear connection between foreign policy and stability and generates theoretical mechanisms that explain, on the basis of the notion of stability, why the U.S. sometimes supports and sometimes opposes independentist movements.

#### *Secession and the U.S. Quest for Stability*

Why should the United States care more about stability than about other factors such as U.S. domestic politics when facing foreign secessionist conflicts? In the post-cold war era, secessionist movements have stood as one of the most disturbing causes of regional disorder. These movements are highly unstable, they can provoke civil war, and initiate state disintegration. Secessionist demands can also lead to conflict escalation by generating foreign

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<sup>9</sup> Internal stability refers to: a democratic process toward independence, the respect of internal borders, the respect of minorities and human rights, and achieving control of the territory. External stability refers to: the respect of international borders, and peace with neighboring states.

<sup>10</sup> I define 'instability' as resulting from the increasing disjunction between the way a given regional order was configured and the current state of affairs generated by a secessionist conflict in that region.

states' incentive to intervene in a secessionist conflict. In a word, quarrels resulting from secessionist self-determination can harm in many ways the functioning of the international political system by creating instability within and between states. For this reason, the U.S. superpower does not address secessionist issues from an objective and neutral point of view, but rather from a pessimistic perspective.<sup>11</sup> As former Secretary of State Warren Christopher once mentioned, the world is made of thousands of ethnic minorities and less than two hundred sovereign states. Allowing the right of external self-determination to ethnic minorities would lead to a "permanent turmoil" of the international system.<sup>12</sup> Joseph Nye, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration, makes a similar argument when he asserts that the political precedent that the U.S. "would create by endorsing a general right of self-determination could have disastrous consequences".<sup>13</sup>

But then, if the United States is a stability-seeking power that has an anti-secessionist bias, how can we explain that it did support and recognize some secessionist states like Croatia and eventually Macedonia in the post-Cold War era? What accounts for the U.S. departure from its a priori support for stable international borders? Before looking at the Croatian and Macedonian cases, I first make some comments on the research method employed.

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<sup>11</sup> Some also argue that the historical background of the United States reinforces the U.S. anti-secessionist bias and its concern for stability. The American Civil War (1861-65) was a painful experience to the United States and decision-makers do not remember it as being a glorious episode in American history. That can partly explain the U.S. negative appreciation of secession and its bias in favor of state indivisibility. The former U.S. ambassador to Canada, James Blanchard, mentions in his memoir: "the vast majority of Americans, inside and outside the government, have absolutely no sympathy or patience for the notion of secession. That's rooted, reasonably or not, in our own Civil War...". James Blanchard, *Behind the Embassy Door*, Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press, 1998, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in David Callahan, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Nye maintains that the United States should be extremely cautious about "demands for secession by groups in Indonesia, Central Asia, or in many African countries". He asserts that "In a world of nearly ten thousand ethnic and linguistic groups and only about two hundred states, the principle of self-determination presents the threat of enormous violence". Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 152.

## The Method

This research uses the “method of structured, focused comparison” developed by Alexander George and Richard Smoke.<sup>14</sup> It formulates a limited number of theoretical questions applied systematically to both cases to measure the veracity of the regional stability and of the ethnic politics arguments.<sup>15</sup> Croatia and Macedonia may prove to be tough cases for a stability argument since proponents of the ethnic politics argument have used these cases to validate their proposition. For each of the two cases, I first test my own stability model, and then see whether the ethnic argument does a better job at explaining the research puzzle. If the U.S.-based diasporas proposition is as good as some have claimed, it should provide a better explanation of the phenomenon under investigation than the stability argument.

## The U.S. Supports Yugoslavia

From the early days of the Yugoslav secessionist crisis to the formal disintegration of Yugoslavia, which happened a few months later, the United States supported the unity of Yugoslavia and categorically opposed the unilateral secession of its constituent republics. In late June 1991, a few days before Croatia declared its independence, the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, went to Yugoslavia to deliver a message of unity. His main objective was to convince secessionist states to remain part of Yugoslavia and to work on a new constitutional

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, Columbia University Press, 1974. See also Alexander L. George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison”, in Paul Lauren (ed.), *Diplomacy: New Approaches in Theory, History, and Policy*, New York: Free Press, 1979, pp. 43-68.

<sup>15</sup> The set of questions that are systematically asked are as follow. For the *stability argument*: Does the United States support the host state as long as it offers the best option to restore order? If yes, what happens when a host state fails to maintain stability and becomes a disrupting agent? Does the U.S. revise its policy and consider recognizing secession? If so, does the U.S. only grant diplomatic recognition to secessionist states that achieve internal and external stability? If ‘yes’ is the answer to the questions above, I will make the preliminary conclusion that the stability argument is internally valid and that it may be generalizable to other empirical cases. As for the *ethnic diasporas argument*: Are U.S. ethnic groups sharing ties with protagonists in the secessionist conflict abroad well organized at the national level? Do these ethnic groups exercise pressure on the U.S. government and more specifically on the executive branch? Is the foreign policy decision regarding the secessionist crisis in accordance with interests of the strongest ethnic group involved in the issue?

arrangement with the other republics. Baker's main worry was the likelihood of a war in the Balkans. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had warned the administration in late 1990 that Yugoslavia would probably disintegrate by 1991. The U.S. embassy in Belgrade had also reported to the State Department that a Yugoslav breakup could not happen peacefully.<sup>16</sup>

Having taken that into consideration, the United States was willing to support a variety of constitutional designs that would have peacefully settled the Yugoslav crisis. Baker also pointed out that the administration of President H.W. Bush would accept the dissolution of Yugoslavia, not through unilateral secessions, but in a negotiated and peaceful way between its constituent republics.<sup>17</sup>

The declaration of independence of Croatia, as well as the one issued by Slovenia, had a disastrous effect on the Yugoslav state. Despite several attempts from the European Community to settle the dispute between Yugoslav republics, Yugoslavia was moving toward disintegration as the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) intervened in Croatia to bring assistance to the Serbian minorities living in the Krajina and East Slavonia regions. This brutal aggression against Croatia was badly received in Washington. The Bush administration, as well as the European leaders, began to seriously question the legitimacy of the YPA, which was getting 'serbianized' as a result of Croatia's secession, and foreign observers began to refer to the Yugoslav army as the 'Serbian troops'.

At the first meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Yugoslavia in September, the United States adopted a more pro-active attitude toward the conflict. James Baker expressed his high concern about Yugoslavia's stability and declared that the Bush administration was

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<sup>16</sup> David Binder, "Yugoslavia Seen Breaking Up Soon", *New York Times*, November 28, 1990. See also Danielle Sremac, *War of Words: Washington Tackles the Yugoslav Conflict*, Praeger Editions, 1999, p. 58. Warren Zimmermann, "The Last ambassador: A memoir on the collapse of Yugoslavia", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 2, 1995, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Secretary of State, James Baker, writes in his memoir: "while we supported the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and existing republic borders and would not accept unilateral changes, the international community, of course, recognized that if the republics wanted to change borders by peaceful, consensual means, that was an altogether different matter". James A. Baker, III, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995, p. 480.



highly concerned about “the dangerous impact on Yugoslavia’s neighbors who face refugee flows, energy shortfalls, and the threat of a spillover in the fighting”. He also mentioned that Serbia and the YPA were bearing a special responsibility for the Yugoslav conflict. “The apparent objective of the Serbian leadership and the Yugoslav military working in tandem, Baker declared, is to create a ‘small Yugoslavia’ or ‘Greater Serbia’”.<sup>18</sup>

Baker’s speech at the Security Council marked a turning point in the evolution of the U.S. policy toward Yugoslavia. For the first time, Washington designated Serbia and the former YPA as the main aggressors in the conflict and as a threat to international peace and stability. In an attempt to establish a cease-fire in the Croatian republic, the U.S. voted in favor of U.N. resolution 713 establishing a “general and complete embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia”.<sup>19</sup> Following the adoption of the resolution, U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar named U.S. former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance as his personal envoy to Yugoslavia. Vance’s mission was twofold: to reach a cease-fire in Croatia and establish a U.N. peacekeeping operation in Yugoslavia.<sup>20</sup> As the former YPA’s aggressive behavior intensified in Croatia and hastened Yugoslavia’s collapse in the fall of 1991, the United States concluded that the Yugoslav federal entity was no longer able to manage the crisis and that Yugoslavia had in fact ceased to exist. It was then clear for the Bush administration that the secessionist republics would have to be recognized as sovereign states.

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<sup>18</sup> James A. Baker, III, “Violent Crisis in Yugoslavia”, *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, September 30, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> U.N. Security Council, *Resolution 713: Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, 3009<sup>th</sup> meeting, 25 September 1991. *Facts on File*, “EC Imposes Sanctions On Yugoslavia”, *World News Digest*, Vol. 51, No. 2660, November 14, 1991, p. 858-59. See also David Binder, “U.S. Suspends Trade Benefits To All 6 Yugoslav Republics”, *New York Times*, December 7, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the White House along with the G-7 powers called for the creation of a U.N. peacekeeping force in Yugoslavia, which led to the adoption of U.N. Security Council resolution 721. As stated in Resolution 721, the Security Council “Approves the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, and expresses the hope that they will pursue their contacts with the Yugoslav parties as rapidly as possible so that the Secretary-General can present early recommendations to the Security Council including for the possible establishment of a United Nations peace-keeping operation in Yugoslavia”. See U.N. Security Council, *Resolution 721: Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, 3018<sup>th</sup> meeting, 27 November 1991.

In the first phase of the Yugoslav crisis, the U.S. was first and foremost concerned with the stability of Yugoslavia and diplomatic efforts aimed to prevent a war in the Balkans. Throughout this period, the United States supported the Yugoslav host state, believing that a unified Yugoslavia offered the best chance for stability in the region. The question of whether or not the U.S. should recognize Croatia and Macedonia was not an issue. Moreover, there is no evidence that the Bush administration was influenced by ethnic diasporas during that time. In fact, the Croatian-Americans and the Greek-Americans, who started to campaign respectively in favor of the recognition of Croatia and against the one of Macedonia as soon as these two republics declared independence, were simply not heard by the Bush administration. According to Thomas Niles, who was Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs and later worked closely on the issue of Croatia and Macedonia's recognition, U.S. decision-makers ignored ethnic lobbies. When asked about the Bush administration's reaction to the demands formulated by these ethnic groups, he responded: "We paid no attention to them".<sup>21</sup>

### **Washington Compelled to Recognize Croatia**

As the Yugoslav crisis intensified, the State Department realized that the issue of diplomatic recognition of secessionist states could be used as a political tool to reinforce stability in what used to be Yugoslavia. As James Baker notes in his memoir: "each of the republics craved legitimacy in the West, and withholding recognition (or conferring it) was the most powerful diplomatic tool available. Earned recognition was one of our key points of leverage over the combatants".<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in a note sent to Baker, the director of the State Department's policy planning office, Dennis Ross also pointed out that "U.S. interests will not be served by

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Thomas M. T. Niles, Washington D.C., January 29, 2005. This view is shared by David Gompert who served on the National Security Council as special assistant to President Bush and as senior director for Europe and Eurasia. Interview with David C. Gompert, Washington D.C., January 25, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> James A. Baker, III, *op. cit.* p. 638.

uncoordinated, ad hoc declarations and recognitions—or rejections”.<sup>23</sup> The State Department believed that premature or uncoordinated recognition of secessionist republics would risk intensifying violence in the Balkans by irritating Serbia and the YPA. Baker therefore reported to President Bush that the U.S. should coordinate a non-recognition policy with the European Community to invalidate, or at least to reduce, the destabilizing effect of Croatia and Macedonia’s secession. In conjunction with the European Community, the United States therefore decided to withhold the recognition of the republics as long as the crisis could not be resolved peacefully.

On the basis of a policy recommendation issued by the State Department, which suggested that the U.S. should develop a “philosophical and practical framework” to evaluate the merits of the Yugoslav secessionist states,<sup>24</sup> the Bush administration also unveiled a list of principles that would guide its decision to grant or deny recognition. This guideline included the following criteria:

- 1) Determining the future of the country peacefully and democratically.
- 2) Respect for internal and external borders.
- 3) Support for democracy and the rule of law, by promoting the democratic process.
- 4) Safeguarding human rights, including equal treatment of minorities.
- 5) Respect for international law and obligations, especially the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris.<sup>25</sup>

This guideline reveals the importance that the Bush administration gave to the internal and external stability of the secessionist states. Although these criteria were not mutually exclusive, points 1, 3 and 4 refer to: the internal legitimacy, to the governing ability, and to the democratic stability of the secessionist states, while principles 2 and 5 contain both internal and external elements of stability. In point 2 it is implied, for instance, that a secessionist state that would pursue a policy of irredentism toward another state, or that would try to unilaterally redraw its

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Henkin, Richard Crawford Pugh, Oscar Schachter and Hans Smit, *International Law*, Third Edition, West Publishing Co., 1993, p. 250. The Charter of Paris was signed by CSCE members in 1990. The Charter had the objective to reinforce the protection of human rights, democracy, and rule of law in Europe included in the Helsinki Final Act. For more on the Charter of Paris, see Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Charter of Paris for a New Europe*, Paris, 1990.

internal territorial divisions would fail the test. Finally, point 5 requests that secessionist leaders obey to international norms of state conduct, such as respecting the territorial integrity of other states. These principles of state recognition marked an important step in the evolution of the U.S. policy toward secessionist movements. For the first time in its history, the United States had elaborated clear principles of state recognition.

However, the evolution of the Yugoslav conflict as well as the evolution of its international dimension, were not linear processes. In December 1991, Germany decided to unilaterally recognize the independence of Croatia and Slovenia despite objections widely expressed by the United States and the EC members. The German government managed to convince the other EC members, which were reluctant to grant recognition to the Yugoslav republics, to follow suit in January 1992.<sup>26</sup> This decision had several consequences: it ended the Western consensus on the non-recognition of the secessionist republics, it marginalized the U.S. policy on the issue, and it made the secession of Croatia and Slovenia a *fait accompli*. The reasons leading Germany to defect from the Western common position are numerous and this paper cannot do them justice.<sup>27</sup> It seems, however, that two main factors can explain this decision. First, the Germans thought that recognition would deter the Yugoslav People's Army from committing further aggressions in Croatia, and that such a recognition would bring international protection to Croats. Second, and more importantly, the government of Helmut Kohl came under intense domestic pressure to recognize Croatia and Slovenia. German public opinion, opposition parties, as well as Croatian foreign workers living in Germany (*gastarbeiter*) strongly favored recognition.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Brussels chose, however, to delay Macedonia's recognition because Greece was categorically opposed that the former-Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia uses the name 'Macedonia'. The next section will deal with this issue.

<sup>27</sup> For a good account of the reasons leading Germany to recognize the two Yugoslav republics, see Beverly Crawford, "Explaining Defection from International Cooperation: Germany's Unilateral Recognition of Croatia" *World Politics*, Vol. 48, July 1996, pp. 482-521.

<sup>28</sup> Following Croatia and Slovenia's independence, a pro-independentist lobby representing some 700,000 immigrant workers—among which 200,000 were voting citizens—and who came in majority from Croatia

The Bush administration remained steadfast on its decision to not recognize Croatia and the other republics and worried that this “premature” recognition would end the cease-fire between Serbia and Croatia, which had been reached by U.N. Special Envoy Cyrus Vance. At this stage, the strategy of the Bush administration was to focus on the cease-fire so that the United Nations could begin the deployment of a peacekeeping force in the region. These two elements were seen, in Washington, as the main conditions to restore stability in the Balkans.

In early 1992, however, the prospect of a war in the multiethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina had a major impact on the U.S. perception of the issue. Thomas Niles, wrote to James Baker that since it was almost certain that the Bosnian Muslims and Croats would vote for Bosnia’s independence, the United States should get ready to recognize this republic because it would be the only way to “reinforce stability” and to deter Serbia’s eventual attempt to annex Bosnia’s territory populated by Serbs.<sup>29</sup> This position was also supported by the U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmermann. Diplomatic recognition began to be seen as a strategy to contain further violence and to stabilize the Balkans. Since recognition was to transform Yugoslavia’s internal frontiers into international borders, Washington saw it as a ‘political dam’ against Serbian aggressions, and expected that this could slow down the diffusion of war. As Peter Galbraith, the first U.S. Ambassador to Croatia, indicates: “Internal borders you can change, but international borders basically nobody has successfully change them by force since 1945. [...]”

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and Slovenia became very active in pressing Helmut Kohl’s government to extend recognition to both republics. It is interesting to see that ethnic groups in Germany did make a difference in Helmut Kohl’s decision to recognize Croatia, while domestic pressure did not affect the U.S. policy on the issue. See Hans Stark, “Dissonances franco-allemande sur fond de guerre serbo-croate”, *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 1992, p. 340.

<sup>29</sup> James A. Baker, III, *op. cit.* Bosnia-Herzegovina withdrew from the collapsing Yugoslavia in March 1992. The result of the Bosnian referendum was unequivocal. 99 percent of the voters chose independence. However, only 63 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots since the Bosnian Serbs boycotted the referendum. Morton H. Halperin, David J. Scheffer and Patricia L. Small, *Self-Determination in the New World Order*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., 1992, p. 35.

Because of the difficulty or the near impossibility [to change international borders] it would be a deterrent for Serbia”.<sup>30</sup>

This stand was of course contradictory to the U.S. initial policy. In the early stage of the crisis, the United States argued the recognition of Croatia would intensify the war in the Balkans. However, when Bosnia declared its independence, the Yugoslav federation no longer existed and the deployment of 14,000 UN peacekeepers in the region was imminent. With a major contingent of U.N. troops in place (the second-largest force deployed in U.N. history) the U.S. believed that the recognition of the northern republics of Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia was a more realistic and efficient way to restore stability than waiting for a general agreement among republics, which became unlikely as time went on. In this context, the U.S. National Security Council and the State Department decided that these republics would be recognized following the deployment of the U.N. peacekeeping mission in the region. President Bush’s advisors judged that the U.N. peacekeeping operation in Croatia and the cease-fire that occurred between Serbs and Croats were sufficient conditions for Croatia to be recognized.<sup>31</sup> The first U.N. troops arrived in Croatia and Bosnia in early April 1992. The next day, the United States recognized the independence of the republics.

Croatia clearly failed to meet the U.S. requirements for recognition. Although the Croatian government had held a winning referendum on independence and that it consented to respect internal borders, Zagreb had no effective control of its territory—it had lost one-third of its territory to the former YPA—and failed to provide sufficient constitutional guarantees to its Serbian minority.<sup>32</sup> However, the intensification and the diffusion of ethnic violence in the former

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Peter W. Galbraith, Washington D.C., January 23, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> The cease-fire, however, did not last very long since a few months later the Croatian army fought to regain control over its Serbian-populated regions. Cease-fires reached in 1993 and 1994 between Serbs and Croats were also broken by Croatia, which led military offensives to get control of Krajina. Thus, the U.N. intervention in Croatia and the U.S. recognition of the republic did not solidify Croatia’s internal stability. See Department of State, “Background Note: Croatia”, *Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs*, October 2004. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3166.htm> (January 2005).

<sup>32</sup> The United States also recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina despite human rights violation.

Yugoslavia compelled the United States to bypass its principles of state recognition and to recognize the republics in an attempt to reinforce stability in the Balkans.

*Did the Croatian-American Lobby Matter?*

The Croatian diaspora in the United States, which gathers around 2.5 million people, is well organized and has been very active in promoting the cause of Croatia's self-determination and independence. According to Yossi Shain, "the numerous Croatian organizations launched lobbying campaigns in the White House and Congress [...] and used the American media to focus public attention on their peoples' suffering".<sup>33</sup> In the summer of 1991, more than 35,000 Croatian-Americans rallied in Washington urging the Bush administration to recognize Croatia.<sup>34</sup> Croatian-American associations also helped to organize U.S. Congressional hearings on the situation of Croatia during the Yugoslav war. According to Pero Novak, who lobbied the U.S. government in favor of Croatia's recognition, and who is now President of the Ohio Chapter of the Croatian-American Association (CAA), the American Croats clearly had an impact of the U.S. final decision to recognize Croatia.<sup>35</sup> On the website of the CAA it is even written that "being directly involved in the U.S. recognition of Croatia" is one of the main achievements that the organization accomplished in the last 15 years.<sup>36</sup>

However, American decision-makers who were involved in the issue of the recognition of the Yugoslav republics categorically dismiss the proposition that the Croatian-American lobby was an important factor in President Bush's decision to proceed with diplomatic recognition of Croatia. In a very interesting section of his memoir, James Baker explains that the U.S. government resisted pressure from the Croatian Americans to recognize Croatia because it

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<sup>33</sup> Yossi Shain, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>34</sup> Embassy of Croatia, *Croatian-Americans: The bridge between two homelands*, [http://www.croatiaemb.org/C\\_U\\_relations/Cro&USA/part10.htm](http://www.croatiaemb.org/C_U_relations/Cro&USA/part10.htm) (October 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Correspondence with Pero Novak, January 26, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Croatian American Association, "Croatian American Association Celebrates its 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary", <http://www.lijepanasadomovinahrvatska.com/folder/CAA-15thTH%20ANNIVERSARY.htm> (March 2005).

believed that such a premature recognition could compromise the United Nations' effort to achieve a cease-fire in the former Yugoslavia. "I told the President at lunch on January 24, [1992] '[...] We should do all we can to support Vance's efforts, because our best hope for resolving the crisis is maintenance of the cease-fire and introduction of U.N. peacekeepers.' The President agreed, and so we waited".<sup>37</sup>

David Gompert, who served on the National Security Council as special assistant to President Bush and as senior director for Europe and Eurasia, often met with Croat-American organizations. "I learned from them, did he remark, but at no point, as far as I know, did somebody in the White House make a calculation that if we recognize Croatia we will pick up some votes in Cleveland. It really wasn't the way that the White House functioned".<sup>38</sup> Robert Pearson, who was the Executive Secretary of the State Department, and Peter Galbraith share this view. The Croatian-American lobby was not an important factor in the U.S. decision to recognize Croatia.<sup>39</sup>

### **Macedonia Left in the Waiting Room**

In contrast to Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia managed to secede without violence. In early 1992, a European Arbitration Commission ruled that Macedonia met the European criteria for recognition.<sup>40</sup> Macedonia was also meeting the principles included in the U.S. guideline for

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<sup>37</sup> James Baker also points out: "After the EC decision, I had Larry Eagleburger talk to Cy Vance. He told us to wait at least two weeks, and preferably a month, before moving ahead with recognition. That would allow time to begin the deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping force. Vance felt that our decision to withhold recognition had had an important restraining effect on the Serbs and had discouraged Milosevic and Tudjman from carving up Bosnia". James A. Baker, III, *op. cit.*, p. 639.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with David C. Gompert, Washington D.C., January 25, 2005. Elsewhere Gompert argues: "George Bush declined to recognize Croatia despite intense pressure from the influential Croatian-American community, which as a result deserted him in the election of 1992". See David C. Gompert, "The United States and Yugoslavia's Wars", in Richard H. Ullman (ed.), *The World and Yugoslavia's Wars*, A Council on Foreign Relations Book, 1996, p. 129.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Robert Pearson, Washington D.C., February 14, 2005. Interview with Peter W. Galbraith, Washington D.C., January 23, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> The role of this commission, which was known as the Badinter Commission, was to establish a set of criteria for the international recognition of the Yugoslav Republics, and to evaluate the merits of the republics' secessionist claims along these criteria.



state recognition. In a note sent to the Secretary of State James Baker in early 1992, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger stated his appreciation of Macedonia's process toward independence and argued in favor of its recognition. He wrote:

[O]n the issue of principle, both Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina will have met every criterion regarding recognition. They have used a democratic process to establish the groundwork for their declaration of independence; they have both moved very reluctantly toward independence recognizing that the situation in Yugoslavia has left them with no alternative as a simple matter of self-preservation; their governments are, at least by standards of the region, representative and committed to the principles of democracy.

Eagleburger concluded his analysis by adding that the non-recognition of Macedonia "could create real instability, which less than mature players in Serbia and Greece might decide to exploit".<sup>41</sup> This note reveals the extent to which the internal and external dimension of the stability of secessionist states was a U.S. key concern. Without necessarily referring to stability in these terms, it is quite apparent that the State Department was thinking the issue along these lines. In terms of internal stability, 74 percent of the Macedonians who cast ballots had voted in favor of independence. Macedonia had a legitimate government, which had full control of the republic's territory, and was committed to liberal democracy. As for the external dimension of stability, the State Department predicted that the U.S. recognition would bring greater stability to Macedonia by transforming its republican frontiers into international borders. Macedonia's neighbors would have then to comply with international laws when dealing with the republic.

Greece, however, quickly cast a shadow on Skopje's hope to be recognized. Athens argued that Macedonia was the name of its northern province, famously known for being the native soil of Alexander the Great and Aristotle, and therefore that the former-Yugoslav republic of Macedonia had no right to refer to itself as being 'Macedonia'.<sup>42</sup> Greece requested that the government of Skopje remove the word Macedonia from its constitutional name if it wanted to be recognized. Greek officials also denounced article 49 of the Macedonian constitution, which

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<sup>41</sup> James A. Baker, III, *op. cit.*, p. 640.

<sup>42</sup> The Republic of Macedonia represents about one-third of geographic Macedonia. The other two-thirds are under Greece's sovereignty.

stated that “the Republic cares for the status and rights of those persons belonging to the Macedonian people in neighboring countries”.<sup>43</sup> The Greek government maintained that this constitutional statement implied that the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had territorial aspirations toward the Greek province of the same name.<sup>44</sup> As a member of the European Community, Greece conducted a vigorous campaign against the recognition of Macedonia and managed to veto the EC decision to recognize the republic.<sup>45</sup> Greece Prime Minister, Constantine Mitsotakis, had also asked President Bush to defer its recognition so that the Greek nationalist opposition could calm down.<sup>46</sup> In reaction to Athens’s opposition, the Macedonian government adopted constitutional amendments to reduce Greece’s suspicions,<sup>47</sup> and declared that it had no territorial aspirations over the Greek province of Macedonia. However, this did not change Greece’s stand on the issue.

Although the State Department initially believed that recognition would greatly reinforce the stability of the republic, the Greek opposition toward Macedonia had a major impact on the U.S. policy. Not so much because the Bush administration was supportive or empathetic to Athens’s position, but because the political dispute between Greece and Macedonia was a great source of instability and raised the prospect of a war in the Southern Balkans.<sup>48</sup> In this context,

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<sup>43</sup> Duncan M. Perry, “Macedonia: A Balkan Problem and a European Dilemma”, *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 25, June 19, 1992, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> Duncan Perry, “Destiny on Hold: Macedonia and the Dangers of Ethnic Discord”, *Current History*, March 1998, Vol. 97, No. 617, p. 119.

<sup>45</sup> Marlise Simons, “Europeans Put Off Macedonia Issue”, *The New York Times*, February 25, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Marshall Freeman Harris, “Macedonia: The Next Domino?”, *The National Interest*, Spring 1999, Vol. 55, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> The constitutional amendments adopted by the Macedonian Parliament on January 6, 1992 stipulated that: 1) “The Republic of Macedonia has no territorial pretensions towards any neighboring state”; 2) that the international borders of Macedonia could only be changed in accordance with accepted international principles in that matter; and 3) that “Macedonia will not interfere in the sovereign rights of other states or in their internal affairs”. See Jens Reuter, “Policy and economy in Macedonia”, in James Pettifer (ed.), *The New Macedonian Question*, MacMillan Press LTD, 1999, p. 32. Moreover, the Macedonian government amended another section of its constitution to reassure its ethnic minorities by describing Macedonia as a ‘civil state’ rather than as the ‘state of the Macedonia nation’. See Patrick Moore, “The International Relations of the Yugoslav Area”, *RFL/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 18, May 1, 1992, p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with General Brent Scowcroft, Washington D.C., February 8, 2005. Interview with Marshall Freeman Harris, Washington D.C., February 17, 2005.

the Bush administration judged that Macedonia could not guarantee its external stability and that it could not be recognized.<sup>49</sup>

The U.S.'s desire to act in conjunction with the Europeans was another important factor explaining the U.S. decision to delay Macedonia's recognition. According to Thomas Niles, "the decision not to recognize Macedonia's independence in 1992 was taken primarily because we wanted to be together with the European Community".<sup>50</sup> The U.S. and the EC had just ended their disagreement over the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, and President Bush was therefore reluctant to move unilaterally on the Macedonian issue. As a result, the United States decided in April 1992 to withhold Macedonia's recognition for an undetermined period of time.<sup>51</sup> Without recognition, the denied republic was not eligible for economic assistance from the World Bank or from the International Monetary Fund, and could not receive direct foreign aid from the U.S. nor from the EC.<sup>52</sup>

Did the Greek-American lobby have an impact on the U.S. decision to withhold Macedonia's recognition? According to Thomas Niles, the pressure exercised by the Greek-Americans "was not so much an issue in 1992".<sup>53</sup> David Gompert points out that the administration of George H.W. Bush was, for better or for worse, relatively insensitive to the Greek-American lobby.<sup>54</sup> The pressure exercised by the Greek government, the fear of a war between Greece and Macedonia, and the desire to act together with the Europeans are really the main factors explaining the decision of the Bush administration.

The decision to delay recognition, however, had not settled the issue, and Macedonia remained a real puzzle to the United States. On the one hand, it is true that the recognition of

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Marshall Freeman Harris, Washington D.C., February 17, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Thomas M. T. Niles, Washington D.C., January 29, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> The European Community had already withheld the recognition of Macedonia in January 1992 when it recognized Croatia and Slovenia.

<sup>52</sup> President Bush's effort to provide 10 million dollars in aid to Macedonia was blocked by the House of Representatives. Democrats on the House Foreign Affairs Committee objected the allocation because Macedonia was not recognized by the United States as a sovereign country. See Don Oberdorfer, "Macedonia Appeals for Recognition, Aid", *The Washington Post*, November 10, 1992.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Thomas M. T. Niles, Washington D.C., January 29, 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with David C. Gompert, Washington D.C., January 25, 2005.

Macedonia could have contained the Bosnian conflict from spreading southward, but at the same time such a decision would have inflamed Greek nationalism. On the other hand, the non-recognition of Macedonia left it completely vulnerable to Serbian aggressions.<sup>55</sup> For this reason, the Greek position on Macedonia greatly annoyed the United States. In the weeks following its decision to delay recognition, the U.S. stated that it would support any rapid solution on the name issue that could satisfy both parties and told Macedonia President Kiro Gligorov that the recognition of Macedonia was only a matter of time. Meanwhile, President Bush urged Greece to find an agreement with Macedonia.<sup>56</sup> Greece, however, went in the opposite direction and chose to increase pressure on the Macedonian government by closing its border with the republic and by imposing an oil embargo against it. In reaction to this measure, the Macedonian government adopted a new national flag, which pictured the Star of Vergina, the place where Philip of Macedon was buried in Greece. This decision, which was seen as a falsification of Macedonia's history, inflamed the Greek nationalist passions and dashed hopes of a quick resolution of the conflict.

The election of Bill Clinton in 1992 did not produce any change in the U.S. policy toward Macedonia. As time went on, however, the war in Bosnia became extremely violent and the Clinton administration feared that Serbia would launch an attack against Macedonia. Since the U.S. recognition of Macedonia mostly depended on the resolution of the Greek-Macedonian dispute, the Department of Defense (DOD) convinced President Clinton to send U.S. troops to the republic, as a substitute to diplomatic recognition, in order to reinforce Macedonia's stability. In July 1993, 300 U.S. soldiers joined UN troops at the border of Macedonia and Serbia to protect

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<sup>55</sup> Marlise Simons, "For the Name of Macedonia, a Burst of Greek Pride", *The New York Times*, April 17, 1992. Macedonia's foreign minister, Denko Maleski declared: "If the European Community and the U.S. government leave this land in a state of limbo, I'm afraid that our neighbors will get ideas". Blaine Harden, "In Europe: New World Order vs. Old Nationalisms; Greece Blocks Recognition of Macedonia", *The Washington Post*, June 10, 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Patrick Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

Macedonians from any Serbian attack.<sup>57</sup> This placed the United States in a very odd situation since the Clinton administration had still not recognized the republic as an independent state.

Toward the end of 1993, several European states finally chose to disregard Greek sensibilities and recognized the independence of Macedonia under the provisional name of the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' (FYROM).<sup>58</sup> By then, the Europeans were frustrated with Greece's counter-productive campaign against Macedonia's recognition, which had impeded progress for almost two years. In early 1994, the Clinton administration decided to follow the Europeans and extended recognition to Macedonia, despite Greece's strong resistance. The Clinton administration indicated that there was "a potential for instability to grow" in the South Balkans and that the recognition of Macedonia as a sovereign state and as a member of the international community would stabilize the republic.<sup>59</sup> In its official statement of recognition, the White House emphasized the internal and external stability of the republic:

Today, the United States extended formal recognition to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and declared its intent to establish full diplomatic relations. (...) This action will help promote stability in the region. We join nearly every other country of Europe in taking this step. In extending formal recognition, we have taken into account the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's commitment to peaceful cooperative relations and its respect for the territorial integrity of all of its neighbors, and the inviolability of existing boundaries. [...] We recognize that Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have outstanding differences which we expect will be resolved through good faith negotiations. [...] We also take note of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's commitment to democratic principles, to human rights, to the creation of an open, free market economy and to its desire to seek peaceful solutions to problems in the regions.<sup>60</sup>

This decision was made despite the strong opposition expressed by the Greek-American community, which indicates that the Greek diaspora was not the main factor influencing the Clinton administration on the recognition issue. A few days later, however, Greece imposed a major trade embargo against Macedonia to retaliate against Washington and Brussels'

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<sup>57</sup> *The New York Times*, "300 U.S. Troops in Macedonia To Try to Contain Balkan War", July 13, 1993.

<sup>58</sup> Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Denmark are the states that recognized Macedonia. By then, more than 40 states had extended diplomatic recognition to the republic. See Paul Lewis, "Europe to Defy Greece on Ties to Macedonia", *The New York Times*, December 12, 1993.

<sup>59</sup> David Binder, "U.S. to Recognize Macedonia", *The New York Times*, February 9, 1994.

<sup>60</sup> The White House, "U.S. Recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", *Statement by the Press Secretary*, February 9, 1994.

recognition. Meanwhile, the Greek-American community mobilized against President Clinton's decision. Several prominent Greek-Americans, among which Representative Michael Bilirakis and Senator Paul Sarbanes, began to pressure the White House and managed to persuade George Stefanopoulos, a White House advisor, to influence President Clinton on the issue.<sup>61</sup> Some members of the Greek-American community (Greek Orthodox Archbishop Iakovos, Senator Sarbanes, and a dozen prominent Greek-Americans) finally met with President Clinton in a private meeting, which was attended by Vice-President Al Gore and National Security advisor Anthony Lake. No one from the State Department was present at the meeting. Following the private reunion, President Clinton retreated from its decision to extend full diplomatic relations with Macedonia and indicated that no Ambassador would be sent to Skopje as long as the name and the flag issues would not be resolved with Greece.<sup>62</sup>

The United Nations hosted several talks on the Macedonian issue in 1994 but none produced any significant progress. In the fall of 1995, the United States Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Holbrooke, finally achieved an interim accord between Greece and Macedonia under which Skopje agreed to adopt a new flag and Athens, in counterpart, consented to lift its economic embargo.<sup>63</sup> As a result of the agreement, the United States established diplomatic relations with Macedonia, even as the name issue remained unresolved. The U.S. decision was made after both countries had shown a clear commitment to find a solution to the name dispute.

#### *Did the Greek-Americans Play a Major Role?*

The Greek-Americans did cause the reversal of the Clinton administration's decision to exchange diplomatic relations with Macedonia. This decision, however, was relatively

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<sup>61</sup> Marshall Freeman Harris, "Macedonia: The Next Domino?", *The National Interest*, Spring 1999, Vol. 55, pp. 44-45.

<sup>62</sup> Hanna Rosin, *op. cit.*, p. 11. Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkans Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the War in Kosovo*, Westview Press, Third Edition, 1999, p. 186.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War*, New York: The Modern Library, 1999, pp. 121-27. See also Duncan M. Perry, "Macedonia: Balkan Miracle or Balkan Disaster?", *Current History*, March 1996, Vol. 95, No. 599, p. 115.

insignificant considering that the U.S. had already recognized the independence of the republic a month earlier. Moreover, though Greek-American pressure slowed the process by which full diplomatic relations are established following recognition, but failed to stop it. According to Marshall Freeman Harris, who served in Macedonia in the early 1990s as a state department official, the Greek-Americans were predestinated to lose the battle over the recognition of Macedonia. They managed to win a 'fight' by making the Clinton administration retreating from its earliest decision to send an Ambassador to Macedonia, but they did not win the 'war'.<sup>64</sup> Facts indicates that the lobbying exercised by the Greek-American community was not a factor in President Bush's decision to withhold the recognition of Macedonia in 1992, nor was it a factor in President Clinton's recognition of the republic in 1994.

## **Conclusion**

Considerations of stability were at the center of the U.S. foreign policy calculation from the first day of the Yugoslav crisis to the war in Kosovo. In the initial phase of the conflict, the United States conformed to the first step of the stability model by supporting the federal state. However, once Yugoslavia disintegrated in the fall of 1991, the United States moved to the second step of the stability argument by focusing its attention on the internal and external stability of the secessionist states. Stability calculations were at play in almost every decision that the United States made on recognition. The setback of the U.S. decision to extend full relations to Macedonia was the only exception where ethnic politics did really matter.

However, historical accounts show that some circumstantial factors modified the American calculation of stability. The war in Croatia led the United States to rush its decision to recognize the republic in order to reduce the violence perpetrated by Serbian troops, despite the fact that the Croatian government had not fulfilled all the U.S. criteria of recognition. Greece's

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Marshall Freeman Harris, Washington D.C., February 17, 2005.

vehement hostility to the recognition of Macedonia encouraged the United States to delay recognition, even though Macedonia had satisfied most of the U.S. recognition requirements.

It would be presumptuous at this stage to conclude that the stability argument is reliable and generalizable to other cases. More case studies taken from different regional settings need to be investigated before any final conclusion can be made. However, this paper casts some serious doubt on the validity and consistency of the ethnic diaspora argument. The Greek-American ability to influence President Clinton in 1994 seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

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