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David L. Phillips. *Liberating Kosovo: Coercive Diplomacy and U.S. Intervention.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012. 256 pp. $27.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-262-01844-9.

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach

David Phillips presents a narrative account of U.S. policy toward Kosovo, focusing on the period from 1989 to the present. This book is partly a memoir. The author was a player in some of the events described, having worked on Balkan affairs for the U.S. State Department, the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, and the Council on Foreign Relations. In addition, there are extensive interviews with U.S. officials, and also with Kosovar Albanians who served as U.S. allies during the conflict. The thrust of the book is to argue strongly in favor of the Western intervention in Kosovo, especially the 1999 bombing campaign against Serbia. This war ended Serbia's dominance over the province, thus "liberating" Kosovo, as suggested in the book's title. The pro-Albanian policy culminated in Kosovo's formal establishment as an independent state, which was achieved in 2008.

Since this will be a critical review, let me state in the interest of full disclosure that I disagree with Phillips's conclusion regarding the supposedly benign character of the U.S./NATO intervention. Of course, a case can be made for the intervention, in light of the long history of Serb oppression against ethnic Albanians in the province, which preceded the war. The problem is that *Liberating Kosovo* contains serious and systematic flaws, which undermine the author's claims.

Many of the sources in this book are questionable. For example, Phillips alleges that Serb forces used poison gas against their ethnic rivals, but the only evidence presented is a claim by Stjepan Mesić, a Croatian nationalist figure who later became Croatia's prime minister. No consideration is given to the fact that Mesić was an interested party in the conflict, and the problems this presents for the credibility of his claims. At another point, Phillips draws sweeping conclusions regarding a 1986 memorandum from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and implies that this was a blueprint for ethnic cleansing. However, when checking the footnote, there is no citation of the actual text of the memorandum he is analyzing, even though an English translation of it has been published and is readily available.[1]Phillips is right to condemn the numerous Serb atrocities committed in Kosovo and elsewhere in the Balkans, but he needs to use better sources. Unreliable citations appear throughout the book. Phillips quotes someone named Kati Marton, who praised Richard Holbrooke as "a negotiator who knows history and has a sense of moral dimension" (p. 106). Marton is treated as a perfectly objective source–when, in reality, she was Holbrooke's wife. To back up a key claim regarding the breakup of Yugoslavia, Philips provides only a Wikipedia posting.

U.S. policy is repeatedly praised, with a self-congratulatory style. The basic tone is established in the foreward, which was written by Nicholas Burns, a former State Department figure. The foreward describes President Bill Clinton's Kosovo actions as "tough and courageous," while the overall policy was "heroic." The peace settlement that resulted from the policy was "fair and just." One of the key players in the policy was the "brilliant" U.S. diplomat Frank Wisner. Another player was Richard Holbrooke, who also displayed "brilliance" (pp. ix-xi). The remainder of the book that is penned by Phillips proceeds with similarly fulsome wording, often quoting U.S. diplomats who express appreciation for policies that they helped to formulate. Phillips neglects to consider the biases of his sources, and the associated problem of source credibility.

Overall, the book argues that the 1999 Kosovo intervention served an important moral purpose by preventing or at least reducing atrocities and ethnic cleansing. But if reading very carefully, one finds information that contradicts this conclusion. For example, Phillips acknowledges that "Milošević responded to NATO's bombing just as General Wesley Clark had warned. Milošević decided to take revenge on Kosovo's civilians by authorizing his forces to empty Kosovo of its Albanian popu-

lation" (p. 107). In other words, Phillips concedes that the bombing campaign may have helped to *increase* the ethnic cleansing, and that the increased atrocities had been anticipated in advance. These facts seem inconsistent with the favorable image of the bombing that appear throughout most of the rest of the book; yet Phillips never tries to address the inconsistency.

And when the bombing campaign ended, Phillips admits that Albanians "engaged in 'reverse ethnic cleansing,"' directed against Serbs and other minority groups (p. 119). Phillips adds: "The exact number is not known, but between 150,000 and 200,000 Serbs, Bosnians, and Roma were displaced" (p. 119) (note that the BBC presents higher figures, regarding the number of victims).[2] This mass ethnic cleansing seems inconsistent with the book's overarching theme that the intervention served a "liberating" purpose–yet these disturbing atrocities are touched upon only very briefly. For the most part, the conflict is presented in simple black and white terms, with the Serbs as villains, the Albanians as victims, and U.S./NATO officials as heroes.

At other points, Phillips neglects to mention important facts which are at odds with his thesis. There is considerable evidence, for example, that NATO states sought to undermine peace negotiations at Rambouillet, France, which might have produced a diplomatic settlement to the Kosovo conflict and prevented further war. According to British official John Gilbert: "the terms put to Milošević at Rambouillet were absolutely intolerable. How could he possibly accept them[?] It was quite deliberate."[3].These words were presented at public parliamentary hearings and are readily accessible. Note also that Gilbert was the chief of intelligence for the British Ministry of Defence at the time and was a supporter of the war. Yet, Gilbert's testimony is unmentioned in this book. The NATO bombing that followed Rambouillet killed between 500-2,000 civilians.[4] But this too is unmentioned.

Liberating Kosovo is useful primarily as an illustration of victor's history, and the problems that are inherent in this genre. But this book is not serious scholarship, and I am surprised that MIT Press agreed to publish it.

Notes

[1]. See "Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1986," in Snežana Trifunovska, ed., *Former Yugoslavia through Documents: From Its Dissolution to the Peace Settlement* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1999), 4-44. The document does contain a Serb nationalist tone, but there is no advocacy of ethnic cleansing or violence.

[2]. The BBC reports that 230,000 persons were displaced after the NATO bombing, a higher figure than the one given by Phillips. See Kosovo minorities 'under threat,'" BBC News, April 28, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2983509.stm.

[3]. Testimony of Lord John Gilbert before the UK House of Commons Defence Committee, June 20, 2000, paragraph 1086, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmdfence/3

[4]. Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 226.

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