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The US Foreign Policy Role in Achieving the Rambouillet Agreement

Rambouillet Anlaşmasının Sağlanmasında ABD Dış Politikasının Rolü

Abstract

The Rambouillet Conference (February-March 1999) is the most serious and successful effort of the International Community to end the Kosovo War. This paper provides details on the commitment and determination of US foreign policy to end the war and achieve peace between the parties to the conflict. The fight between the KLA and Serbian forces, especially the massacre of 45 civilians in Recak, assessed as a crime against humanity by US Ambassador William Walker, served as the starting point for harsh reactions from the White House and President Bill Clinton himself, who urgently called for organizing a conference to stop the war and to establish peace.

US policy in cooperation with the Contact Group managed to persuade the parties to enter into talks in Rambouillet. The conference opened on February 6, 1999, led by Presidents Hyber Vedrine and Robin Cook, and lasted until February 23. During the Conference, the commitment of US diplomacy, through the State Secretary Medelin Albright, was decisive, managing to convince one of the parties, the Kosovar one, to accept the proposed agreement. It was again American diplomacy and politics that pushed forward the idea of limited international military intervention on Serbian troops, as a imposed solution to stop the war and restore peace. NATO airstrikes began on March 24 and lasted 78 days. Even in these military actions, US political and military engagement played a crucial role.

Keywords: Rambouillet conference, US foreign policy, war in Kosovo, NATO, etc.

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Öz

Rambouillet Konferansı (Şubat-Mart 1999), Kosova Savaşını sonra erdirmeye yönelik Uluslararası Toplumun en ciddi ve başarılı çabasıdır. Bu çalışma, çatışma tarafları arasındaki savaşı sonlandırmak ve barışı sağlamak için ABD dış politikasının taahhüt ve kararlılığına dair ayrıntılar ortaya koymaktadır. KKO ve Sırp güçleri arasındaki çatışmanın, özellikle Reçak'ta 45 sivilin katledilmesinin, ABD Büyükelçisi William Walker tarafından insanlık karşı işlenen suç olarak değerlendirilmesi, Beyaz Saray ve savaşın durdurulması ve barışın sağlanması için acil bir konferansın düzenlenmesini dile getiren Başkan Bill Clinton tarafından sert tepkilerin başlangıç noktasını teşkil etmektedir.

ABD politikası, Temas Grubu ile işbirliği içerisinde, tarafları Rambouillet'de müzakerelere başlamasını ikna etmeyi başarmıştır. Konferans 6 Şubat 1999 tarihinde Başkan Hyber Vedrine ve Robin Cook yönetiminde başlamış ve 23 Şubat'a kadar sürmüştür. Konferans boyunca, Dışişleri Bakanı Madeleine Albright aracılığıyla ABD diplomasisinin ortaya koyduğu taahhütler belirleyici olmuş, önerilen anlaşmanın kabul edilebilmesi için taraflardan biri olan Kosova tarafını ikna etmeye başarmıştır. Benzer şekilde, savaşı sona erdirme ve barışı tesis etme çözümü olarak Sırp güçlerine karşı kısıtlı bir uluslararası askeri müdahale fikrini ileri süren yine Amerikan diplomasisi ve siyaseti olmuştur. NATO hava müdahalesi 24 Mart'ta başlamış ve 78 gün sürmüştür. Bu askeri müdahalelerde bile ABD siyasi ve askeri etkileşimi önemli rol oynamıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rambouillet Konferansı, ABD dış politikası, Kosova savaşı, NATO, vs.

Preparations of the International Community for the organization of Conference on Kosovo

During 1998, the war in Kosovo expanded on a large scale, creating a very serious and disturbing situation, where the striking targets of the Serbian forces were not only the units of the Kosovo Liberation Guerilla, but also the Albanian civilians of all age groups, who as an epilogue there were thousands killed and massacred. Concerned about the difficult situation and inhumane violence in Kosovo, US President Bill Clinton himself, who at the meeting of the National Security Council agreed that: "The United States Government must use a successful solution of the current crisis to convince all parties of their common interest in taking steps to avoid further incidents, cooperating with the Verification Mission in Kosovo (MVK) and promoting positive changes on the ground, as well as a temporary political solution"¹.

Despite the fact that there were such reactions from the White House to the cessation of hostilities in Kosovo, especially the plight of the civilian population there, Serbian forces were intensifying their military operations on an even larger scale. In early 1999,

1 National Security Council, Washington, Document, Nr: 0160, January 11, 1999. <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16197>

more precisely on January 15, 1999, Serbian forces killed and massacred 45 civilians in the village of Recak in Shtime, without sparing children, women or the elderly.

The first to see and report the massacre was US Ambassador William Walker, the head of the OSCE, who called it a “crime against humanity.” Regarding this macabre event, Ambassador Walker had organized a press conference and said: “I accuse the Serbian police and military forces of being responsible for this massacre. A few days ago, the Kosovo Liberation Army released 8 Serb soldiers, we were expecting a measure of reciprocity. And what we have in its place: the killing of 45 innocent civilians. I want to know who gave the order. They must be brought to justice. I am not a lawyer, but in my opinion, a crime against humanity has taken place here.”²

The Recak massacre prompted the international community to urgently intervene to end the war in Kosovo and resolve its problem.³ US President Bill Clinton, during the annual file on American television channels, stated, “We, together with our NATO allies, are pressuring the Serbian government to end its brutal repression in Kosovo, to bring to justice and to ‘given the people of Kosovo the self-government they deserve.’⁴ In addition to the US President, the Contact Group, convened on January 29, 1999, called on the parties to end the violence and commit to the process of negotiations leading to a political solution.

Afterwards, the ministers of the Contact Group agreed that representatives of both parties in Rambouillet should initiate negotiations. Co-chairs Huber Vedrine and Robin Cook were appointed for these negotiations, with the direct involvement of the Contact Group. The Contact Group also called on the parties to seize the opportunity for negotiations to reach a solution that offers peace to the people of Kosovo.⁵ Following the engagements of international factors, the Contact Group and the US, meetings began with the representatives of the parties for the preparing delegations in the next talks for a solution acceptable to both parties. Secretary of State Albright had made it very clear to the parties, especially the Serbs, to seize the opportunity to reach a peaceful solution and to stop the war, which states: “The people of Kosovo and the FRY as a whole now have a window of opportunity, hangs if their leaders take advantage of this opportunity. The solution depends on the leadership of both sides, especially the authorities in Belgrade. Either they stop fighting and agree on a temporary peaceful solution, or they will face the consequences that NATO has written today.”⁶ By this we mean very clearly that the United States Government was determined that the parties enter into negotiations as soon as possible and reach an agreement that would bring peace and stop the war in Kosovo.

2 Bardhyl Mahmuti, *Mashtrimi i madh* (Prishtinë: Çabej, 2015), 82-83.

3 James Pettifer, Miranda Vickers, *Çështja shqiptare. Reformësimi i Ballkani*, (Tiranë: AlbPaper, 2007), 301.

4 Daily paper “Koha Ditore”, 21 Janar, 1999.

5 Contact Group Chairman’s Conclusions – London, 29 January 1999.

6 Secretary of State Madelein K. Albright Statement on NATO Final Warning on Kosovo. Washington, DC, January 30, 1999. As released by the Office of the Spokesman U.S. Department of State, see: <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statments/1999/990130.html>

The Rambouillet Conference and the US Diplomacy Role

The Contact Group, the United States of America and the European Union agreed firmly for an international conference on Kosovo, intensifying activities to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. The diplomatic efforts resulted in the solemn opening of the February 6, 1999 conference in Rambouillet castle. The conference was solemnly opened by French President Jacques Chirac, whose country was host. French and British diplomats Hyber Vedrine and Robin Cook were chosen to lead the conference. The latter emphasize the opportunity that this conference will offer in reaching an agreement between the parties involved in the conflict. On this occasion the British Foreign Minister said: “We have met to resolve a conflict for the benefit of the people of Kosovo and it will be the people in the FRY who will pay dearly for the failure of this agreement. Let us start working on reaching this agreement, which will ensure peace for Kosovo and the region.”⁷ Talks began the following day between the parties, which were mediated by negotiators Christopher Hill for the US, Wolfgang Petrich for the EU, and Boris Majarski for the Russian Federation, who had been appointed by the Contact Group. At the beginning of the negotiations, the Contact Group had focused only on the political part of the agreement, which was not only complex but also crucial in the long-term.⁸

The positions of the delegations were completely opposite, thus the parties insisting only on their positions. After receiving the report from the Contact Group, the Albanian delegation carefully considered the first chapter; it was considered an acceptable draft, but it raised the most important requirements of holding a referendum at the end of the transitional phase and preservation of the KLA.⁹

In this first and intense phase of the talks that took place, it was the issue of a referendum after the three-year period that would result in Kosovo’s independence and the KLA’s demilitarization. These two issues were vital to the people of Kosovo and at the same time to the delegation that represented them, however; they were unaccepted and rejected by the Serbian party. Nevertheless, the talks in this very first phase were seen exceeded to reach a deal by the US, the EU, Contact Group and the international community. Initially, both parties to the conflict remained steadfast in their stances on the Contact Group and mediator’s draft proposal. Paying close attention to talks, ministers Robin Cook and Hyber Vedrine visited delegations at the conference on February 9.

During the discussion with the Kosovo delegation, the ministers showed their interest to see how far the discussions between the parties had come and emphasized the importance that the parties must work intensively. Minister Hyber Vedrine said: “The Contact Group is united. The world expects a lot from us. What has started is very difficult. Delegations need courage to accept compromises. We want to see how far we have come. The Contact Group shall make a comparison in 7 days. Mr. Cook and I will be back at the end of the week to see what has been achieved. Whereas, Minister Robin Cook spoke briefly, saying: “As you

7 Adnan, Merovci, *Kështjella e mos Marrëveshjes*, (Amerkos: Prishtinë, 2019), 67.

8 Wolfgang, Petrirtsch & Robert, Pichler, *Rruga e gjatë në luftë: Kosova dhe Bashkësia Ndërkombëtare 1989-1999*, (Koha, Prishtinë, 2002), 177.

9 W. Petrirtsch, & R. Pichler, *Rruga*,... 180.

know, the Contact Group has done a lot to bring the parties together to negotiations.” This is not just about the Contact Group, but about the United Nations Security Council, the EU and the entire international community, who are concerned about the progress of the talks. The key result that everyone wants to know is this: “They want both sides to come to a solution here. We have the same responsibility as we do, but you need to show determination to reach a solution. It belongs to you. I hope you will continue to scrutinize the documents so that we can report that this is working successfully. I want to hear your explanations on what to expect.”¹⁰ The visit of the ministers to the Kosovar party, and Contact Group’s positions left a message to the Kosovar delegation that they should make every effort to achieve what the entire agreement demands, which would enable the international community to move towards Kosovo. Whereas, the engagement of the Kosovar delegation did not stop at discussing and elaborating all the contents of the materials in coordination with international mediators, making efforts to approach a proper settlement of the agreement, especially on political, constitutional and even security and NATO forces. Marc Weller, who was a legal expert at the conference expressed himself about the great commitment of the Kosovar delegation, saying: “In fact the Kosovo delegation had worked very intensively all the time.”¹¹ The most sensitive points of discussion for the Kosovo party remained those of military affairs and the future of the KLA and of Kosovo’s status after the transitional period, by which its main goal was to hold a referendum in Kosovo. But the Serbian party did not discuss issues related to sovereignty and military presence. The Serbian delegation demanded the full draft of the agreement, so it had not taken a single step in discussing the agreement.¹² Thus, the Serbian delegation’s attitude at the time seemed to be to stall the talks. This phenomenon was also noticed by the US government, which had demanded early measures in case of eventual failure and, inter alia, was said: “Planning should begin for the possibility of a weakening in the negotiations caused by the Serbian side, timelines indicating the actions to be taken to prepare for NATO action, the withdrawal of the KVM and the withdrawal of the Embassy.”¹³

Even the US President Clinton in his annual radio speech to the American nation had addressed the issue of Kosovo in achieving a peace agreement there, saying America would contribute with about 4,000 American troops to securing peace for Kosovo. He adds: “I believe America should contribute to the security of peace in Kosovo, and I look forward to working with Congress to make the final decision.” He also stated that “peace in Kosovo is important to the United States, with the support of Congress and the American people we can make a difference.”¹⁴

10 Rexhep Qosja, *Paqja e Përgjakur*, (New York, 1999), 74.

11 Marc Weller, *Shtetësia e kontestuar, administrimi ndërkombëtar i luftës së Kosovës për pavarësi*, (Koha, Prishtinë, 2009), 220.

12 Petritsch, & Pichler, *Rruga...*, 181.

13 NSC, Washington, Dokument nr 1059, February 12, 1999. <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16197>

14 President Clinton, Radio address to the nation, released by the Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, DC, February 13, 1999, see: https://1997-2001.state.gov/policy_remarks/1999/990213_clinton_kosovo.html

The stalled talks by the Serbian party since the first week, forced Secretary of State Albright to come to Rambouillet earlier than planned, agreeing to participate in negotiations to assist and bring the parties to the talks.¹⁵ Albright arrived in Rambouillet on February 14, bringing with her the American position and power changing the atmosphere radically, increasing the chances to forever end the conflict in Kosovo, especially changing Serbian party's discourse.¹⁶ Once arriving at Rambouillet, the State Secretary gave a clear message to both parties: "I have come here with a clear message for the both parties because they are facing with an obstacle. This obstacle leads to disaster, chaos and more killings, and this sends us in the other direction to lead back to a rational solution that would achieve peace, democracy and human rights for all the people of Kosovo."¹⁷ After the meetings with the parties, she left a very clear message: "The parties are well aware of the consequences of failure, either to work productively in Rambouillet, or to continue the war in Kosovo. The threat of NATO air strikes remains true."¹⁸ Seeing that the parties were far from reaching an agreement, Secretary of State Albright with Contact Group colleagues extended the deadline for talks for the second and final week not beyond February 20th.¹⁹ The US President Clinton also expressed great interest during the talks in Rambouillet, for whom Kosovo had become a part of American diplomacy, that he himself testified when he said: "America has a national interest in achieving this peace." He further stated that "the time to stop the war is now." This shows that US diplomacy was persistent in stopping the war and reaching an agreement between the parties involved in the war.²⁰

The most important issues that remained to be settled between the parties were the political and military ones. "While the negotiators, or rather their legal experts, had spent difficult hours with the Serbian delegation, trying to melt their voluminous comments into points that could be reviewed, the Kosovo delegation was still not responding to its comments."²¹

The US government showed interest in the matter, asking negotiators to submit the draft to the Kosovar party. This stance is expressed in a document of the US National Security Council, which states that: "Negotiators must show the Kosovo delegation military and security annexation as soon as possible."²² The negotiators presented the draft to the parties on February 18, but the parties disagreed. For the Serbs, the project had not changed

15 Madeleine Albright, *Zonja Sekretare, Autobiografi*, (Dudaj, Tiranë 2003), 464.

16 Jacques Baudouin, *Lindja e një demokracie*, (Buzuku, Prishtinë 2019), 169.

17 Secretary of State Madelein K. Albright Press Availability. Rambouillet, France, February 14, 1999. see: <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statments/1999/990214.html> D.S. Department of State

18 Secretary of State Madelein K. Albright Press briefing following meeting with Contact Groupe on Kosovo, Paris, France, February 14, 1999. Shih: <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statments/1999/990214a.html> D.S. Department of State

19 Secretary of State Madelein K. Albright Press briefing following meeting with Contact Groupe on Kosovo, Paris, France, February 14, 1999. See: <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statments/1999/990214a.html> D.S. Department of State

20 Clinton Sets U.S Kosovo Commitment at 4,000 Troops. See: <https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=41955>

21 Weller, *Shtetësia*,, 222.

22 N.S.C, Washington, Document nr 1127, February 17, 1999. <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16197>

substantially, and for the Albanian party the creation of a two-room system within the FRY was unfavorable given the decisions taken within these two chambers, taken in the first room, meaning that in the first chamber the decisions are taken by the Serbian side in all aspects, both in terms of security and political issues, with which the Albanian side certainly did not agree, because in this project their demands had not been included. Also, the contribution and cooperation of the Kosovo delegation so far in these talks was not appreciated. The deep concerns of the Kosovar party were the changes made to the new project, which required the Kosovo side to renounce the referendum, security issues and the future of the KLA. “The Kosovar delegation needs to be sure that the draft agreement meets its essential concerns, especially as the deadline approaches. The purpose of an air campaign against Serbia should be to reduce its capacity to use force against Kosovars.”²³

It is important to note that President Clinton praised the work of the Albanians during the negotiations, who had shown the courage to move towards peace with the proposals put forward by negotiators and NATO allies. Clinton, meanwhile, had told Serbian leaders that they had a choice to either join the peace deal, or NATO stands ready to use force, if the Serbs fail.²⁴ Despite the commitment of US negotiators Hill and EU Petric to achieving any results, it was impossible. Thus, Secretary Albright’s commitment was crucial in this respect. Her return was crucial. Madeleine Albright’s presence gave confidence to the Albanian delegation. She had appreciated the discipline and unity of the Kosovar party in the negotiations for the purpose of the agreement, even though the Kosovars had not yet accepted any element of the interim political agreement. “The remaining issues can be resolved with a great deal of reasonable effort,” Albright said later. Belgrade has taken every opportunity to avoid and delay the deal. As for the Serbian delegation, Albright said, it is responsible for stalling and delaying talks, as well as for failing to reach full agreement.²⁵ Arriving in Rambouillet on February 20, she had begun to hold separate talks with the parties on a solution that would open the way to an agreement. After Kosovo delegation discussions with the international experts, the Secretary of State reunited to discuss with the Kosovar party at 4:00 p.m. to seek their approval for the agreement. At this meeting, the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said: “I have found out that you are working, but we will have a meeting at 4:30 p.m. with the Contact Group. The Serbs will probably disagree, but you dare not say ‘NO’. So say ‘YES’ and we will help you.” Hashim Thaçi then said: “We are with America and we will be. We have to say that 3 years after we have the opportunity to declare the independence of Kosovo.” Madeleine Albright added: “We will not stop your dreams. But for 3 years you form the roots of institutions in Kosovo, then you can move on. After 3 years it is not known what will happen in Belgrade. So, say ‘YES’ and you have America in Kosovo, or ‘NO’, and you are left without us. I will go to

23 NSC, Washington, Dokument nr 1128, February 18, 1999. <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16197>

24 President Clinton and French President Jacques Chirac Joint press conference released by Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, DC, February 19, 1999, see: https://1997-2001.state.gov/policy_remarks/1999/990219_clinton_kosovo.htm

25 Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Press conference on the Kosovo peace talks, Rambouillet, France, February 20, 1999, see: <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statments/1999/9902220.html>

the CG meeting at 4:30 p.m. and order, think and answer .”²⁶

Neither party was able to sign the agreement by the deadline. The Contact Group then decided that the negotiations would continue until February 23 at 3 p.m.²⁷ When it became known that the Kosovar side might not sign the agreement, the Contact Group’s attention, and especially the US’s, was very high, so the Secretary of State spent a lot of time inviting key members of the Kosovo delegation²⁸. After the meeting and the offer she gave to the Kosovar delegation, she appreciated their work highly. “Albanians are working hard, and I think they are moving towards a ‘yes’. Serbs, on the other hand, are refusing to be included in the basic part of the agreement, which is the military aspect. If we have agreements from both sides, then we will have enforcement force. If the allegations fail because the Serbs do not say YES, we will bomb. If the talks fail because the Albanians have not said yes, we cannot support them and, in fact, we must stop whatever assistance they receive from outside. If it fails because both sides say ‘NO’, then there will be no bombing of Serbia and we must try to find a way to reach an agreement.²⁹ The US did not want that Kosovar party not to sign the agreement, so it assumed its dominant role in convincing it. Ms Albright’s focus was to persuade the Kosovo delegation, and in particular Hashim Thaçi, to accept the agreement.³⁰ The US Secretary of State determination to reach reconciliation and obtain approval from the Kosovar party, and in particular from KLA representatives, increased the intense commitment of Hill and Petrich negotiators to convince the latter together with US jurists to agree. “During the night of February 21-22, American jurists in the castle devoted most of their time to working with Albanians. At 5:25 p.m. on February 22, they submitted a draft letter that had to be signed by Madeleine Albright, if things went according to plan. The controversial words “the will of the people” were replaced by “the will expressed by the people.” An introductory letter was attached to the sheet with a proposal for the new wording, in which it was written: Rambouillet, 22 February, 1999 This letter concerns the wording (attached) proposed for Chapter 8, Article 1 (3) of the Interim Framework Agreement. We will consider this proposal, or any other formulation, that affirms the right of the people of Kosovo to hold a referendum on Kosovo’s final status after three years. Yours, Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State³¹

In the latest efforts by Secretary Albright, and later by State Department spokesman James Rubin, the latter became inseparable in accompanying discussion with Thaçi’s about acceptance of the agreement. Thaçi accepted the agreement on February 23 at 15:30, in the presence of Christopher Hill, James Rubin and Wolfgang Petrich.³² After reaching a common agreement by all the head members of Kosovar delegation, they came up with a joint statement in which they showed the unity of reconciliation on their part, and the full

26 Merovci, *Kështjella*,, 248.

27 Weller, *Shtetësia*,, 225.

28 Ibid, 226.

29 Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Press availability on the Kosovo Peace Talks, Rambouillet, France, February 21, 1999, see: <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statments/1999/990221a.thml>

30 Dario Malnar, *SHBA-ja dhe Kosova*, (Koha, Prishtinë, 2015), 208.

31 Tim Judah, *Kosova luftë dhe hakmarrje*, (Koha, Prishtinë 2000), 262.

32 Baudouin, *Lindja*,, 186.

consensus statement reads: “1. The Kosovo delegation by consensus declares that it may sign the Agreement within two weeks, after consultations with the people of Kosovo, with the political and military institutions. 2. To carry out these consultations, the delegation has voted in favor of this Agreement, as set forth in the February 23rd negotiations, which shall be reviewed by experts only from a technical standpoint. In this context, the Kosovo Delegation invites and expects NATO’s rapid deployment on the ground as an essential part of the Agreement. 3. The Kosovo Delegation understands, and this will be confirmed by signature, that at the end of the three-year transitional period, a referendum will be held in Kosovo to determine the will expressed by the people, as provided in Article I (3) of the Chapter 8 of the Agreement. The Kosovo delegation also notes that the KLA intends to take this opportunity to undertake a conversion process and also welcomes the assurances of bilateral cooperation to carry out this process in accordance with the Agreement.”³³ At the conclusion of the press conference, US Secretary of State Albright, who also was the determinant of this agreement’s achievement said Kosovo will have a constitution, NATO will be invited to enter Kosovo to implement the agreement, the Serbian military police force shall rapidly leave Kosovo, the KLA will be demilitarized, and the international community will also begin training those who will join the new Kosovo police.”³⁴

Failure of Signing the Rambouillet Agreement by the Serbian party

The role of US policy has greatly influenced and was crucial in reaching agreement within the Kosovo delegation on the decisions that this delegation had to take. Continued efforts to convince the Serbian delegation were also to achieve the signing of the Rambouillet agreement, but it ignored the demands of the US diplomacy, European Union, or the call by the international community to sign the document that meant ending the war in Kosovo, and the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo. The international community then had already judged Serbia’s unilateral stance as a permanent threat to peace and stability in the Western Balkans under Milosevic’s leadership. As foreseen for the progress of the talks by the Serbian party in Rambouillet, the Contact Group and the international mediators decided on March 15, 1999 to continue the Rambouillet Conference in Paris. Since the first day of resuming talks in Rambouillet on March 15, the Kosovar party submitted an official letter confirming acceptance and readiness to sign an interim agreement, which was presented to it on February 23 in Rambouillet.³⁵ On this occasion, the head of the Kosovo delegation, Hashim Thaçi, on behalf of the entire Kosovar delegation, sent a letter to EU Council President Joschka Fischer and EU Special Envoy Petrich affirming the acceptance of the Agreement by Kosovo delegation and thanked the European mediators for their efforts during the talks. The letter said: “It would be an honor for us to sign the Agreement in your presence at a time and place you would consider reasonable.”³⁶ And on the day the talks continued with the trio of international mediators, the Kosovo delegation without any

33 Petrisch, Pichler, *Rruga,,* 217-218.

34 Ibid

35 Malnar, *SHBA-ja,,* 212.

36 Petrisch, Pichler, *Rruga,,* 238.

hesitating, Thaçi told mediators that on behalf of the delegation they expressed readiness to accept the Rambouillet Document in its entirety. He further concluded that the principle ‘yes’ of the Kosovo delegation to Rambouillet is now coming and becoming a powerful ‘YES’. After him, dr. Rugova spoke on behalf of the people of Kosovo and confirmed the acceptance of this agreement.³⁷ Meanwhile, when it was expected that the parties would sign the agreement, Serbian President Milutinovic had spoken out against the agreement by returning to the null point at the start of the conference. Milutinovic stated: “Serbia still does not recognize any text of the agreement and that what was discussed in Rambouillet represents only the outlines of a proposal that must be reviewed and amended in many ways to be acceptable to Serbs.”³⁸

Considering the delays, games, and other efforts of the Serbian delegation, the text of the deal in its February 23rd form was ready to be signed on March 18th.³⁹ The Kosovo Albanian delegation consisting of Hashim Thaci, Ibrahim Rugova, Rexhep Qosja and Veton Surroi gave their signatures to the transitional agreement on Kosovo to end the war there. The signing ceremony was attended by representatives of the Contact Group, the EU, ambassadors Petrich and Hill. The draft of the Rambouillet agreement was a cause for peace between the parties. The signing of this agreement by the Kosovo delegation concludes the conference for the benefit of peace. Whereas the head of the Serbian-FRY delegation Ratko Markovic, after refusing to sign the Rambouillet agreement, stated at a conference, which was convened by the Serbian delegation, “If NATO comes to Serbia uninvited, everyone will be expected as aggressor and enemy, Kosmet is a symbol of Serbia’s state and national existence, and therefore Serbia can only lose Kosmet in one way; with the military victory of the one who is currently stronger than it, but never and for nothing through talks on the green table. I will never give Kosmet voluntarily, Kosmet can only be taken by force.”⁴⁰

US President Bill Clinton reacted strongly to the non-signing of the agreement on March 18, 1999 at a White House press conference, saying “ Now that peace talks have failed, NATO must act to bring an end Kosovo crisis. As Serbian forces continued an offensive against ethnic-Albanian villages, the threshold has been exceeded to promote NATO action.” President Clinton reiterated NATO’s partnership with NATO that they are “strongly united and ready to act.”⁴¹ Not only the President himself, but also Secretary State Albright greeted the acceptance and signature by Kosovar party saying “a peaceful agreement and a future democratic self-government for the people of Kosovo.” In doing so, they have shown a willingness to cooperate with partners and the international community. On the other hand, unfortunately, the Serbian negotiators did not move forward, further refusing to engage in discussions on civilian and military implementations, thus trying to reopen previous issues in Rambouillet.⁴² In a joint statement, however, the Contact Group

37 Blerim Shala, *Libëri i Fitores*, II, (Koha, Prishtinë, 2012), 152-153.

38 Qazim Tepshi, *Kosova: Diplomacia imponuese*, (Toena, Tiranë, 1999), 156.

39 Weller, *Shtetësia*,, 258.

40 Associated Press, France: Paris: Serb delegation arrive for Kosovo talks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vzMGQ33FnM>

41 Clinton Says NATO Must Act in Kosovo, see: <https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?=42682>

42 Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Remarks on Developments in Kosovo prior to meeting with

had closed Rambouillet talks that had led so far, said “the Rambouillet Agreements are the only peaceful solution to the Kosovo problem.” They mention here the Kosovar delegation that had seized the opportunity and had given its commitment to sign the agreement as a whole, on the other hand, by failing to seize the opportunity, the Yugoslav delegation had sought to extend the Rambouillet talks to reach a deal. On this occasion, the Contact Group states that upon signing by the Kosovo delegation, the talks are closed, they can only be opened if the Serbs express readiness to accept the signing of the agreement.⁴³

US policy also gave Serbia one last chance to choose between ‘signing the agreement, or NATO military intervention on Yugoslavia’, through US Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke on March 22, who had gone on a mission, his latest to convince the then Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic, to sign the agreement and withdraw his troops from Kosovo. Other senior NATO officials had also called on Belgrade to sign the agreement, warning Milosevic with NATO air strikes that Milosevic continued to be an obstacle to the path to peace. The NATO Secretary General had stated that Holbrooke’s visit to Belgrade was the last chance for peace in Kosovo without the use of force.⁴⁴

Richard Holbrooke leaves Belgrade without agreement with Milosevic on March 23, 1999. Holbrooke’s failure with Milosevic brings back US President Clinton’s response, which strongly backs NATO Secretary General Javier Solana to launch air strikes against Serbian targets. With the full support of President Clinton, Solana instructs General Wesley Clark to launch the air strikes. On the same day, the Senate also voted for NATO military support, with a 58 to 41 vote.⁴⁵ With the consent of the Senate for military intervention by NATO towards the targets of the Serbian forces, great contribution was undoubtedly made by NATO General Wesley Clark, who says, “When the air campaign had begun, political factors became dominant in Washington.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

Based on the above data, we can conclude that Milosevic’s disobedience to the international community calls to stop the violence and war in Kosovo against Albanians, especially the widespread war in 1998 and early 1999, in particular the massacre of 45 civilians in Raçak of Stimje, which was reported as a crime against humanity by US Ambassador William Walker, prompted strong US foreign policy urge, for which US President Bill Clinton himself expresses firmly that America will not allow the continuation of violence and war in Kosovo and urgently urges the conflicting parties to begin negotiations to reach a peace agreement.

members of Congress, Washington D.C., March 18, 1999, U.S. Department of State, see; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1999/990318.html>

43 Statement by the Co-Chairs of the Contact Group Released following peace conference in Rambouillet, France, March 19 1999, see: https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/stm_990319_rambou.html

44 “Koha Ditore”, 23.03.1999, 3.

45 Bill Clinton, *Jeta ime*, (Dudaj, Tiranë, 2004), 714.

46 Wesley Clark, *Të bësh Luftë Moderne*, (Koha, Prishtinë, 2003), 487.

US policy and Contact Group engagement succeeded in convincing both parties to start negotiations and reach an agreement that would end the war in Kosovo. I also affirm that not only US foreign policy and the Contact Group, but most of all on this issue, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was engaged, who made it clear to the parties that the opportunity to reach a peace agreement, or face the consequences and that for this Americans were steadfast. The venue for talks between the US, EU and Russian-mediated parties was chosen Rambouillet in France, which began on February 6, 1999 and lasted until February 23, 1999. From this conference it is known that the parties initially opposed the agreement. The Kosovar party did not accept an agreement without the involvement of the referendum and the protectorate by NATO forces, and the Serbian party did not even discuss any agreement involving NATO military forces within Yugoslavia. Given the parties' unwavering stances in negotiating political issues, the involvement of Secretary State gave full confidence to the Kosovar party that it will have the backing of the US and its policy, after a three-year period of implementation agreement, the people of Kosovo would enjoy the right to a referendum and that this agreement fulfills their expectations. Thus, the opportunity offered by Secretary Albright pushed the Kosovo Albanian delegation to accept the agreement to sign and, which did so on March 18, 1999. The Serbian delegation rejects it in its entirety. As promised at the beginning of the negotiations that for any failure to reach an agreement by the Serbian party, NATO will intervene and settle in Kosovo, and so it happened.

On March 24, 1999, US support for the Kosovo issue, a date that ended the violence and war in Kosovo by the US, proves to be unleashed by launching air strikes on Serbian military and police targets in Yugoslavia that lasted for 78 days. In the end, without the direct and persistent involvement of US policy, through the top diplomat, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in the talks, there would be no signing of the agreement by the Kosovar delegation, and consequently; no NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, and therefore; no war ending in Kosovo.

Archival resources and documents

The National Archives in Washington, DC | National Archives <https://www.archives.gov/dc>

William J. Clinton Presidential Library & Museum clinton.library@nara.gov

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