

Aroused by Power: Why Madeleine Albright Was Not Right

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When involved in war, those who feel like benefactors are bound to congratulate the gun toting initiators. If you so happen to be on the losing end, sentiments are rather different. Complicity and cause in murder come to mind.

The late US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will always be tied with the appallingly named humanitarian war in Kosovo in 1999, one that saw NATO attacks on Serbian civilian targets while aiding the forces of the Kosovo Liberation Army. It was a distinct backing of sides in a vicious, tribal conflict, where good might miraculously bubble up, winged by angels. Those angels never came.

Through her tenure in public office, Albright showed a distinct arousal for US military power. In 1992, [she rounded](#) on the then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell for refusing to deploy US forces to Bosnia. “What’s the point of having this superb military machine you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”

Too many apologists have come out to explain why Albright was so adamant about the use of such force. Biographical details are cited: born in Czechoslovakia as Marie Jana Korbelová; of Jewish roots rinsed in the blood wine of Roman Catholicism. She fled with her family to Britain, eventually finding refuge in Notting Hill Gate. She went to school, spent time in air raid shelters, [sang](#) A Hundred Green Bottles Hanging on the Wall.

The NATO intervention – and this point was never lost on Russian President Vladimir Putin, who reiterated it in his February address – took place without UN Security Council authorisation. For the law abiders and totemic worshipers of the UN Charter keen to get at Russia’s latest misconduct in Ukraine, this served to illustrate the fickleness of international law’s supporters. At a given moment, they are bound to turn tail, becoming might-is-right types. The persecuted, in time, can become persecutors.

NATO, in fact, became an alliance Albright [wished to see](#) expanded and fed, not trimmed and diminished. The historical role of Germany and Russia in central and eastern Europe

became the rationale for expanding a neutralising alliance that would include previous “victim” countries. A weakened Moscow could be ignored. “We do not *need* Russia to agree to enlargement,” [she told](#) US Senators in 1997.

Paul Wilson, considering the Albright legacy, [wrote](#) in 2012 about the danger of following analogies in history to the letter. “Historical analogies are seductive and often treacherous. [Slobodan] Milošević was not Hitler and the Kosovar Liberation Army was not a champion of liberal democracy.”

In fact, the KLA was previously designated by the State Department to be a terrorist organisation. “The Kosovar Albanians,” [wrote](#) the regretful former UN Commander in Bosnia Major General Lewis MacKenzie in April 2003, “played us like a Stradivarius violin.” In his view, NATO and the international community had “subsidised and indirectly supported their violent campaign for an ethnically pure Kosovo. We have never blamed them for being perpetrators of violence in the early 1990s, and we continue to portray them as the designated victim today, in spite of evidence to the contrary.”

Such is the treacherous nature of the sort of perverse humanitarianism embraced by Albright and her colleagues. Such a policy, Alan J. Kuperman [remarks](#) with gloomy accuracy, “creates a moral hazard that encourages the excessively risky or fraudulent behaviour of rebellion by members of groups that are vulnerable to genocidal retaliation, but it cannot fully protect against the backlash.”

One such encouraged individual, Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani, [was all gushing](#) over Albright’s legacy.

“She gave us hope when we didn’t have it. She became our voice and our arm and when we had neither voice nor an arm ourselves. She felt our people’s pain because she had experienced herself persecution in childhood.”

The first female Secretary of State will also be linked with the Clinton Administration’s sanctions policy that killed numerous citizens and maimed the country of Iraq, only for it to then be invaded by the venal architects of regime toppling in the succeeding Bush Administration. This sickening episode sank any heroic notions of law and justice, showing that Albright was content using a wretched calculus on life and death when necessary.

On May 12, 1996, Albright was [asked by](#) Lesley Stahl on the CBS program *60 Minutes* about the impact of the sanctions that served to profitlessly kill hundreds of thousands. “We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than have died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?” Then US Ambassador Albright did not flinch. “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it.”

In September 2000, she was still crazed by the sanctions formula against Iraq, telling the United Nations [in an absurd address](#) that Baghdad had to be stood up to, being “against the United Nations authority and international law.” Meek acknowledgment was given to the fact that “the hardships faced by Iraq’s people” needed to be dealt with. What came first was “the integrity of this institution, our security, and international law.”

Albright could be sketchy on sanctions. In instances where Congress imposed automatic sanctions, Albright could express furious disagreement. When this happened to both India and Pakistan in 1998 in the aftermath of nuclear weapons testing, she could [barely conceal](#)

[her irritation](#) on CNN's Late Edition. "I think we must do something about it, because sanctions that have no flexibility, no waiver authority, are just blunt instruments. And diplomacy requires us to have some finesse."

The hagiographic salutations have been many. One, from Caroline Kelly at CNN, [is simply too much](#). Albright "championed the expansion of NATO, pushed for the alliance to intervene in the Balkans to stop genocide and ethnic cleansing, sought to reduce the spread of nuclear weapons, and championed human rights democracy across the globe."

As Secretary of State, she presided in an administration of the world's only surviving superpower, uncontained, unrestrained, dangerously optimistic. There was much hubris – all that strength, and lack of assuredness as to how to use it. The Cold War narrative and rivals were absent, and the Clinton Administration became a soap opera of scandal and indiscretion.

In her later years, she [worried about the onset of authoritarianism](#), of power going to people's heads, the inner tyrant unleashed in the playpen of international relations. She had much to complain about regarding Donald Trump, Putin and Brexit. In encouraging the loud return of the US to front and centre of international politics, she ignored its previous abuses, including some perpetrated by her office. When given such power, is it not axiomatic that corruption will follow?

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