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JOHN B. JACKSON AND THE BEGINNING OF U.S.-MONTENEGRIN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

ABSTRACT: *“John B. Jackson was an industrious and professional diplomat who represented the United States all over the world, including Western and South-Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Jackson was instrumental in United States Government’s decision to recognize Montenegro and he was the first U.S. Envoy to the country, from 1905 to 1907.*

KEY WORDS: *John B. Jackson, United States’ diplomacy, first U.S. ambassador in Montenegro*

John Brinkerhoff Jackson enjoyed a long and varied diplomatic career. He served in the U.S. diplomatic ranks from 1890 to 1915 all over the world, including Western and South-Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.¹ Jackson was different than the average American ambassador of his time in that he was able to make a career of foreign diplomacy. The more standard experience of his peers was the honor of a one-time ambassadorship and then a return to the United States to a more profitable private position. Jackson strove to become an effective professional diplomat. He cultivated personal relations with leading Europeans while he was posted in Berlin and he spoke German, French, Spanish, Italian, and Greek.² The *New York Times*, praised Jackson as “a clever and industrious diplomat”³

Jackson also served during a unique period in the history of U.S. foreign relations. The Spanish-American War and the presidency of Theodore

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¹ A full accounting of Jackson’s service as a Chief of Mission can be accessed at: <http://www.history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/jackson-john-brinkerhoff>

² See Philip Jackson to Knox, April 22, 1909, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Numerical and Minor Files, 1906-1910, M862, Roll 226.

³ “Some Diplomatic Promotions,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1902, p. 8.

Roosevelt marked a sharp expansion in American international engagement. President Roosevelt embraced and expanded America's role in the world and he shaped the U.S. government to better promote its interests abroad. He reorganized the staffing of the White House to improve its response to foreign events and he worked to replace the spoils system of promotion for U.S. diplomats with a merit-based system to improve professionalism. Jackson was well-poised to take full advantage of these trends and they helped him in his work regarding Montenegro.

It was Jackson who convinced Washington to begin diplomatic relations with Montenegro. He was able to do so due to his knowledge about the country and the respect that he enjoyed in Washington due to his diplomatic skills. In 1903 Jackson heard that Bulgaria would be added to the three countries in which he was already representing the United States (Greece, Romania, and Serbia). He wrote to Secretary of State John Hay to suggest that Montenegro also be added.⁴ Jackson felt that recognizing Bulgaria but not Montenegro would be undiplomatic, because Bulgaria was still under Turkish sovereignty while Montenegro was independent.⁵ Furthermore, he pointed out that the Prince of Montenegro was the father-in-law of the Kings of Italy and Serbia and that the Prince's influence was increasing in the region, especially regarding the Albanians and the Adriatic coast. Jackson predicted that railroad and telegraph construction in Montenegro would interest American businessmen and that American diplomatic representation in Montenegro would be commercially beneficial.⁶ Jackson also noted that the addition of Montenegro to his mission would render his work "still more interesting at a trifling increase in expense." He was careful to explain to Washington that the possible financial burden associated with recognizing Montenegro would be minimal. This was important because the U.S. Congress had to approve the expense and the federal budget was very limited at that time. Secretary of State Hay accepted Jackson's arguments and informed Congress that it was: "important to our public interest that the United States have diplomatic representation in Montenegro."⁷ Congress eventually agreed and in March

⁴ Jackson to Hay, February 2, 1903, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Greece, 1868-1906, T159, Roll 14.

⁵ Jackson to Hay, March 6, 1903, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Greece, 1868-1906, T159, Roll 14.

⁶ See, for example, Jackson to Hay, October 6, 1903 and September 3, 1904, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Greece, 1868-1906, T159, Roll 15.

⁷ See Hay to Jackson, October 26, 1903, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801-1906, Balkan States, M77, Roll 17; and House of Representatives, 58th Congress, 3d Sess., Document No. 83, "Explanation of Appropriation for Foreign Intercourse," p. 3.

1905, cleared the way for Jackson to become Minister to Greece and Montenegro and Diplomatic Agent to Bulgaria.⁸

As a result of Jackson's urging, the United States recognized Montenegro and Jackson became the first American Ambassador to the country. He was anxious to travel from Athens, where he kept his residence, and get to Cetinje to present his credentials to the royal government (and he was somewhat desperate to avoid the summer heat). But his visit was postponed during the summer of 1905. He was finally able to reach the capital, traveling through Kotor, by the end of October.⁹ The Prince provided a lavish reception including a military presentation and a band that played the song "Hail Columbia," which was the U.S. National Anthem at the time. Jackson spoke with the Prince in French and the two exchanged warm remarks. The Prince asked Jackson to thank President Roosevelt for opening relations with Montenegro and for Roosevelt's recent efforts to help end the war between Russia (Montenegro's close ally) and Japan.¹⁰ The following day, the Prince hosted a formal dinner to honor Jackson. Jackson spoke at length with the Prince about the Prince's plans for a more representational government and economic improvements for the country.¹¹

Even though Jackson was only able to visit Montenegro once a year he kept careful tabs on events in Cetinje and kept Washington well informed about the country. For examples, he sent copies and his analysis of the Prince's speeches, the new constitution, and examined the ongoing development of parliamentary government. Jackson also reported on commercial endeavors such as the construction of ports and creation of the national bank, as well as the ongoing fighting along the Albanian border. Jackson informed Washington that the Prince was improving the military and hoping to continue his expansion of Montenegrin territory. Jackson also provided assistance to Montenegrin citizens who wanted information about their relatives who had emigrated to America. After he was re-assigned to Persia, Jackson made a special point of travelling to Cetinje in 1907 to personally present his letter of recall to the royal court and he exchanged warm words of farewell with the Prince.¹²

⁸ House of Representatives, 58th Congress, 3d Sess., Document No. 83, "Explanation of Appropriation for Foreign Intercourse," p. 3.

⁹ See Adeo to Jackson, May 3, 1905, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801-1906, Balkan States, M77, Roll 17; and *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1905, p. 664.

¹⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1905, p. 664-7.

¹¹ Jackson to Root, November 1, 1905, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Montenegro, 1905-1906, T525.

¹² Jackson to Root, October 27, 1907, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Numerical and Minor Files, 1906-1910, M862, Roll 226.

Jackson did well to dedicate himself to learning about Montenegro and the region. After his last year as Ambassador to Montenegro, Jackson claimed that he had studied the Balkans so thoroughly that he was the most informed living American on the subject.¹³ He was also able to draw upon his earlier diplomatic experience and personal connections in order to safely navigate a difficult assignment. One can almost hear the straining of his efforts in his description of his work during this period. "It is manifestly impossible," he wrote, "for one man to gain a sufficient knowledge of several countries at the same time and to establish the requisite personal relations, to enable him to 'do' anything of importance, as he cannot devote his attention to any one country without neglecting the current work connected with the others, and without running the risk of creating ill feeling with their authorities as a result of such neglect."¹⁴

Nonetheless, Jackson also did well to recognize what he could practically attain in the region. He accurately described the American interest in Montenegro and the surrounding counties during his time as "platonic rather than active."¹⁵ This was an honest reflection of the small amount of American influence and involvement in South-Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century. American policy toward Montenegro was limited to attempting to create economic opportunity and did not extend into purely political matters. Still, Jackson deserves personal credit for the opening of U.S. relations with Montenegro. It was no small feat to convince Washington to follow his advice. As a rule, the U.S. Congress did not want to spend money to send American diplomats to countries where the economic and political ties with the United States seemed overly distant. Jackson prevailed due to his hard-won reputation as an effective career diplomat and because of his efforts to educate his superiors in Washington about Montenegro.

¹³ Jackson to Bacon, September 7, 1907, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Numerical and Minor Files, 1906-1910, M862, Roll 226.

¹⁴ See, for example, Jackson to Hay, October 6, 1903, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Greece, 1868-1906, T159, Roll 15.

¹⁵ Jackson to Hay, February 2, 1903, U.S. National Archive II, Record Group 59, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Greece, 1868-1906, T159, Roll 14.

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Summary

According to author, the American interest in Montenegro and the surrounding counties, during the first years of XX century, was “platonic rather than active.” This was an honest reflection of the small amount of American influence and involvement in South-Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century. American policy toward Montenegro was limited to attempting to create economic opportunity and did not extend into purely political matters. Still, J.B. Jackson deserves personal credit for the opening of U.S. relations with Montenegro. It was no small feat to convince Washington to follow his advice. Jackson prevailed due to his hard-won reputation as an effective career diplomat and because of his efforts to educate his superiors in Washington about Montenegro.