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### Kosovo: Status with Standards

By [Daniel Serwer](#)  
**April 15, 2004**

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The anti-Serb rioting by Albanians in Kosovo March 17-19, which resulted in Serb and Albanian deaths as well as substantial damage to Serb property and churches and the removal of thousands of Serbs from their homes, requires a U.S. and international community response.

So far, discussion has been polarized between those who advocate immediate independence for Kosovo and those who want to shut off that possibility. The former argue that the rioting demonstrates that Kosovo cannot be kept in limbo for much longer and that the international protectorate has to give way to self-determination. The latter argue that misbehavior should not be rewarded, that multi-ethnicity in Kosovo has failed, and that the only prospect for maintaining the Serb population in Kosovo comes from physically separating Serbs and Albanians and maintaining Serbian sovereignty.



Riots in Pristina, 2002

Photo Courtesy [CIVPOL.org](#)

These positions are not new and will not resolve the problems arising from the events of March 17-19, 2004. In order to develop an appropriate response to the rioting, we need to consider what happened as well as why and how such events can be prevented in the future. The U.S. Institute of Peace convened a small group of knowledgeable people April 7, 2004 to analyze some of these issues.

The views summarized below reflect the discussion at the meeting; they do not represent formal positions taken by the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

#### **Extremism, discouraged youth, and delays on final status were an explosive mix**

While investigations continue, this much seems clear: a report attributing the deaths of three Albanian children to Serbs triggered some inflammatory media coverage and rioting by both Serbs and Albanians in [Mitrovica](#). Still not fully identified organizers exploited spontaneous demonstrations to mobilize thousands of younger Albanians to protest by marching on Serb populations and destroying homes, vehicles, and religious facilities as well as attacking the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Violence spread to at least a dozen locations throughout Kosovo.

These events occurred in a broader context. On the one hand, the radical election victory in Serbia's

December parliamentary elections, the formation of a nationalist government in Belgrade, and loud declarations in Serbia about the need to hold on to Kosovo raised Serb hopes as well as the specter among Kosovo's Albanians of a return to Serbian rule. On the other hand, cooperation of all the main Albanian political parties with the painstaking "Standards Before Status" program of the United Nations left many Albanians impatient and created a large political space for those who advocate immediate, unconditional independence and are prepared to use violent means to get it, through ethnic cleansing of Serbs from Kosovo. The rioting seems to have surprised Kosovo's three main political party leaders, but lesser figures in their parties may well have joined with others in veterans' and other organizations to incite and organize violence.

Adding fuel to the fire were Albanian youths who are feeling increasingly trapped and hopeless. Kosovo's economy, which benefited in the immediate aftermath of the NATO/Yugoslavia war from international presence, assistance, and remittances, is now slowing. International work and travel opportunities for Kosovars are extremely limited. Many lack adequate personal documents, and many countries do not accept UNMIK documents. Few find it possible to get visas to visit the United States or Europe. Unemployed, isolated, and discouraged, some young people joined the outburst against Serbs—whom they regard as oppressors—encouraged by leaders who seemed to offer a quick solution to Kosovo's final status at the expense of the Serbian population.

### **The international response has been inadequate**

While publicly both NATO (KFOR) and UNMIK are claiming that they responded quickly and effectively, there are many signs that this was not the whole story. Although KFOR mobilized over-the-horizon reserves quickly to restore order, the NATO response suffered from national caveats to the rules of engagement, which in some cases even prohibited crowd control and deployment outside a defined sector. Caught flat-footed by limited emergency planning, UNMIK hunkered down because of security threats and failed to distinguish itself. It is not clear that the Special Police Units available to UNMIK were used effectively.

As the situation in Kosovo calmed, the public international response focused mainly on not rewarding misbehavior and therefore emphasized continuity with previously planned steps: presentation of the implementation plan for "Standards Before Status" (Standards for Kosovo) and maintenance of a mid-2005 review date. A policy of "Riots Before Status" was rejected. High-level visits by U.S. and European officials to Pristina focused on keeping a steady course and not giving in to extremists. Under secretary of state Marc Grossman's visit to Pristina was essential in signaling continuing U.S. interest in Kosovo.

At the same time, there is growing recognition in Washington and in European capitals that business as usual will not do. "Standards Before Status Plus" is now the watchword. The Contact Group is planning to meet before the end of April in Pristina and to continue to do so every six weeks. There is talk of opening a Belgrade/Pristina "conversation" at the political level that focuses on critical issues. UNMIK has convened a crisis review board to consider what went wrong.

What the international community has not yet done is to develop a strategic plan for countering extremism and rewarding moderation. Kosovo Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi has garnered international praise for his bold and courageous efforts to disperse crowds and end the violence. But the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) that he leads have not gained anything tangible. To the contrary, they have had to take on the burden of rebuilding. The ambiguous and unhelpful initial statements by Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova and Kosovo Assembly President Nexhat Daci, which emphasized independence as much as ending the violence, have caused international grumbling but nothing more.

The Albanian political parties joined together after the fact in making an excellent statement against the violence, initiated by party leader Hashim Thaci, and the Decani monastery has credited Ramush

Haradinaj and the local mayor with preventing a march on the monastery. It is less clear that the political party leaders were completely effective in controlling their own party officials and members during the violence. The international community has asked for but so far not gotten disciplinary action against those involved. Civil society organizations also made a strong statement after the fact, but will need additional funding to translate their statement into action.

Unlike all other areas in the Balkans, which avail themselves of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (IBRD) loans, Kosovo can receive only relatively small grants, because its undetermined status prevents it from signing the sovereign guarantee required by international financial institutions (IFIs). This is a serious economic handicap that sharply limits job creation and economic progress, especially as international assistance of other sorts and remittances are now declining. In addition, Kosovo has been prevented so far from privatizing many state assets, again because of its undetermined status (and objections from Belgrade). While many socially-owned companies in Kosovo are thought to be largely worthless, they tie up large quantities of real estate and other resources needed for economic growth.

### **More needs to be done**

The details are still unclear, but the ingredients of the violent explosion are all too evident: political extremism, hopeless youth, and slow movement on the status question proved a powerful combination. Reassertion of "Standards Before Status" is a necessary but far from sufficient response. In order to prevent future violence, an effective response strategy should aim to:

- Discourage extremism and reward moderation;
- Provide youth hope for a better future through employment and educational opportunities; and
- Give renewed momentum to the process of determining final status.

This cannot be done within the context of "Standards Before Status" as presently conceived and requires more than the "Plus" the international community is currently contemplating. Outlined below are a series of measures, most of which UNMIK would need to initiate, that together would make a significant impact in achieving what might be termed "Status With Standards":

- Aggressively pursue and prosecute perpetrators of the violence, focusing on leadership figures and those with responsible positions in political parties and Kosovo institutions.
- Survey and repair the damage done and encourage all the displaced to return to their homes, with KFOR and UNMIK providing intensified security.
- Strengthen the PISG by creating an Interior and a Justice Ministry, institutions that will be needed no matter what is decided on final status. Initially they would play advisory and intelligence-gathering roles in support of UNMIK's security responsibilities, consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 1244.
- Strengthen the PISG further by creating an international affairs secretariat (consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 1244) under the prime minister authorized to establish representational, information-gathering and trade promotion offices in other capitals, including Belgrade, Tirana, Skopje, Washington, and Brussels.
- Arrange for acceptance of UNMIK documents by all EU members and neighboring states.
- Begin pilot projects to test decentralization of governance on a geographic, not an ethnic, basis.
- Sharply increase support to educational opportunities and civil society organizations committed to non-violent resolution of Kosovo's problems.
- Review press coverage and pursue legal remedies against those found to have incited violence.

- Review and reform the curriculum being used by both Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo's schools, establishing a common curriculum for the history of Kosovo.
- Enable the IMF and IBRD to make loans in Kosovo.
- Proceed with privatization.
- Improve UNMIK/KFOR/PISG emergency communications and coordinated response.

In addition, there is a need to enhance U.S. government commitment to Kosovo, following up on under secretary Grossman's visit there and underlining that the United States intends to proceed with a final status decision as soon as sufficient progress has been made in the treatment of Serbs and other minorities. The United States should initiate a vigorous effort to define the process, strategy and negotiating agenda for achieving final status. This would require either appointing a special envoy to work out with the Contact Group and the United Nations the modalities of deciding on final status or appointing an American to the position of special representative of the UN secretary general when that position next opens.

The Security Council has not passed a resolution on Kosovo since the end of the NATO/Yugoslavia war. The time is coming for it to set the parameters for a Kosovo final status decision. Any new resolution should include ironclad international guarantees of Serb and other minority rights and safety as well as the following four "no's":

- No return of Kosovo to governance from Belgrade;
- No partition of Bosnia or Macedonia;
- No alienation of Serb property or monuments in Kosovo; and
- No violence.

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United States Institute of Peace - 1200 17th Street NW - Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 457-1700 (phone) - (202) 429-6063 (fax)

