



USIPeace Briefing

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Coming Soon to a Country Near You: *Kosova Sovereignty*

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Why does the United States support Kosovo's independence, even putting at risk its relations not only with Serbia but also with Russia? And how does Washington plan to contain the consequences?

It is often assumed that Washington's position is based on a sense of moral obligation, deriving not only from the mistreatment of Albanians under the Milosevic regime but also from American promises since. While this factor unquestionably weighs on the side of the Kosovars, it is not I think decisive. Understanding Washington's support for Kosovo's independence requires an analysis of the consequences of further delay as well as the consequences of moving ahead, even in the absence of a UN Security Council resolution.

Moral Obligation Exists But Is Not Decisive

Considering first the question of moral obligation, there can be no doubt but that it exists. Washington was the prime mover behind the 1999 NATO intervention that saved the Albanian population of Kosovo from Slobodan Milosevic's attempt to expel them from Kosovo, which resulted in perhaps 10,000 deaths and the displacement of roughly half the Albanian population of around 1.7 million people. That war ended with a Security Council resolution 1244, which allowed the Albanians to return under NATO and UN protection and led in turn to the expulsion of about half the Serb population of Kosovo, about 150,000 people. In the American view, resolution 1244 foresaw a process by which Kosovo's status would be decided in the future, by inference largely in accordance with the will of its population, which was already clear. The acknowledgement of Yugoslav (now without doubt Serbian) sovereignty in resolution 1244 appears only in the preamble.

At the time of its drafting, Russians, Americans and Europeans all regarded resolution 1244 as highly beneficial to the Kosovars and NATO, and prejudicial to Belgrade and Moscow. Among other things, having the UN take over Kosovo as a protectorate as a consequence of an intervention that NATO undertook without Security Council approval indirectly and implicitly gave the results of the intervention a Russian seal of approval. When in addition the Americans blocked a Russian military maneuver to take possession of Pristina airport, Moscow's humiliation seemed complete.

The Americans from the passage of resolution 1244 onward have made increasingly explicit promises to the Kosovars that they would never be returned to Serbian

sovereignty and that they would realize their independence ambitions. The Contact Group went half-way in this direction as well, when it launched the negotiations on final status led by former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari with the explicit condition that Kosovo could not be returned to its former status, which certainly will have sounded to the Albanians like an echo of the American promise of no return to Serbian sovereignty.

Belgrade and Moscow did not however see things this way. Slobodan Milosevic snatched something like victory from the jaws of defeat when he agreed to end the NATO/Yugoslavia war with a UN Security Council resolution. He was unconcerned with the specific wording. From Belgrade's perspective, the important thing was the fact of the resolution, which established Kosovo as a UN protectorate. The only universally acceptable way of changing its status thereby became another UN Security Council resolution, or at least the consent of all five permanent members of the council.

History is littered with American diplomats who thought they were smarter than Slobodan Milosevic, who in a similar fashion snatched a kind of victory from the jaws of certain defeat at the end of the Bosnian war when he got a Dayton agreement establishing Republika Srpska as an internationally validated entity on 49 per cent of Bosnia's territory, rolling back Muslim/Croat territory from 65 per cent to 51 per cent. The Americans, triumphant at the end of both NATO interventions in the Balkans (Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999), are now finding it difficult to do what they want to do most: extricate themselves from the region, leaving behind stability that can be maintained by the Europeans.

Milosevic's election defeat in 2000 left his successors with a choice: whether to take advantage of the Russian veto over Kosovo's future status (and continue to insist on Republika Srpska as a separate entity within Bosnia, with the potential to threaten its independence or its annexation to Serbia) or to seek a quick settlement of Serbia's outstanding "national" issues and turn the country towards a European vocation.

Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic let it be known to anyone who would listen that he did not care about the national issues and would happily settle them quickly, in return for greater prosperity for Serbia's citizens. A former leftist with no interest in supporting the Serbian Orthodox Church, Djindjic would likely have offered partition of Kosovo at the Ibar River—three of Kosovo's northern municipalities were majority Serbian before the NATO/Yugoslavia war (in fact their territory had once been part of Serbia proper and was transferred to Kosovo by Tito in order to increase the Serbian population there). The fact that no important Serbian Orthodox monuments or churches are located in the north would not have bothered Djindjic, who was much more interested in the notorious Trepcia mine, once Kosovo's largest employer.

Of course it is impossible to know precisely how the international community or the Kosovo Albanians would have reacted to Djindjic's interest in a quick deal. Hashim Thaci and other Albanian leaders were convinced at the time that they could negotiate with Djindjic, but they would likely have refused to give Serbia the half of Mitrovica municipality that lies north of the Ibar, as Mitrovica municipality had an Albanian majority before the war. They would have wanted in compensation for the northern three municipalities the Albanian-majority municipalities that lie in the Presevo valley of southern Serbia. Serbia would have resisted. Presevo lies adjacent to Serbia's main north/south route to its primary access to the sea at Thessaloniki.

The assassination of Djindjic in March 2003 abruptly terminated the possibility of a quick territorial settlement. In due course inheriting the Serbian prime ministry, Vojislav Kostunica—the nationalist who had beaten Milosevic at the polls—ended any thought of a quick territorial settlement and instead laid claim to sovereignty over all of Kosovo. Kostunica also abandoned Milosevic's two preferred solutions to the Kosovo problem: repression and expulsion of the Albanians by force of arms. Laying claim to

Djindjić's mantle as leader of "democratic" forces in Serbia, Kostunica dug in for a long-haul but non-violent effort to re-establish what he regards as Serbia's rightful place as the sovereign power in Kosovo.

In the meanwhile, the international community—prompted in part by Milosević's behavior in Kosovo—had moved in the direction of recognizing what is termed "the responsibility to protect," a doctrine that includes the notion that a state can lose its sovereign right to non-intervention by severely mistreating its own population. While there are those in Washington still resisting specific applications of the responsibility to protect—and worried about its implications for American military and humanitarian capacity—there are relatively few knowledgeable people who would contest the notion that Milosević's murderous behavior towards the Kosovars in the late 1990s, when they were expelled in large numbers from Kosovo and forced to take refuge in Macedonia, Albania and elsewhere, has as a practical matter made it impossible to return Kosovo to Serbian sovereignty.

On top of this, UN efforts in Kosovo—in particular the "standards before status" effort that the UN made its byword in recent years—have more or less clearly implied to the Kosovars that if they behave themselves—in particular in their treatment of minorities, especially the Kosovo Serbs—they would get "status," which has increasingly become synonymous with "independence." This is as much Belgrade's doing as Pristina's: until very recently, Belgrade made no effort to discuss possible models for Kosovo status other than independence, insisting instead that it be returned to Serbian sovereignty while offering a vaguely defined "more than autonomy, less than independence." Under that neo-colonialist formula, it appears that the Kosovar Albanians would be expected to govern themselves without financing from Belgrade, without representation in Belgrade's institutions and without sovereignty, meaning that at least in principle they would be at the mercy of Serbia's security forces.

The moral argument does not, however, lead immediately to the conclusion that Kosovo must become independent, or that it must become independent now. After all, it could be kept in its current UN protectorate status for some time more—Belgrade has proposed 20 years. Certainly the moment does not seem propitious for deciding Kosovo's status: US/Russian relations are at a post-Cold War nadir, Belgrade argues that giving Kosovo independence now will bring extreme nationalists to power in Serbia and inspire separatist movements elsewhere, and the Kosovo Albanians have still not met all the standards the UN said it would insist upon. Would we do better to wait? And is independence really the only answer?

Why Independence? Why Not partition? Why Now?

Once upon a time, not very long ago, Serb journalists would ask why Serbia couldn't get with Kosovo the same deal Iraq has with the Kurds: in principle, Iraq is a sovereign state but the Kurds govern themselves. This is a reasonable question: in fact, not all that many years ago I wrote with my colleagues a paper laying out eight possible "status" options for Kosovo (Kosovo Final Status: Options and Cross-Border Requirements, USIP Special Report No. 91, July 2002).

The answer is telling: the Kurds not only occupy the presidency of Iraq, but also several other high positions (the Foreign Minister, a deputy Prime Minister and several ministries). They not only govern themselves but also receive a guaranteed percentage of Iraq's oil revenue and their laws in most areas prevail over any made in Baghdad. Moreover, no Iraqi government would try to send either police or army units to Kurdistan without the Kurds' permission. Kurdistan has its own army and police. Serbia has not even considered offering to Kosovo any of these provisions; none of them would survive 60 seconds as a proposition in the Serbian parliament.

Serbia has done nothing whatsoever to make it attractive for Kosovo to remain under Serbian sovereignty. Since the Kurdish case may be regarded as extreme, consider Sudan, where a war at least as brutal as the one Serbia conducted in Kosovo ended with an agreement that makes a former insurgent from the South not only president of Southern Sudan but also First Vice President of the entire country, with Southerners integrated in key government positions, the national army and the national parliament. North and South share the country's main source of revenue (oil). Again, Serbia has offered none of these propositions to Kosovo. They are unthinkable in Belgrade.

They are also unthinkable in Pristina. While a Kurdish tribal chieftain will happily send a first son to serve in parliament in Baghdad, if only to ensure that Kurdish interests are well protected, no head of family in Kosovo would even consider sending anyone to serve in parliament in Belgrade. Kosovo Albanians have not participated in Serbian elections since their constitutionally guaranteed autonomy was abolished in the late 1980s, and they abandoned all Serbian institutions (schools, social and health services, pensions) in the early 1990s. This was well in advance of the Serbian effort to chase the Albanians from Kosovo, when the Albanians were still pursuing a policy of non-violence.

Serbs and Kosovo Albanians have chosen separation over integration. Few Kosovo Serbs speak more than a few words of Albanian; Kosovo Albanians, most of whom are under 20 years old, no longer learn Serbian, though older and more educated people may well speak it. While in Albania, there are Albanians who are Orthodox Christians, in Kosovo an Albanian who is an Orthodox Christian would be considered serbianized. There are certainly Albanians and Serbs who know each other well and engage in normal discourse—especially at the local level—but intermarriage is rare and there is no sense of common national or cultural identity; this has been increasingly the case for the better part of two decades.

The simple fact is that virtually 100 per cent of the Albanian population of Kosovo wants what it calls "independence," which in the Kosovar lexicon means separation from Serbia and freedom from ever again having to worry about its police, paramilitaries and army. The Serbian state has no interest in Albanian views; it today claims the territory on historical and religious grounds and disowns the people. Kosovo, some Serbs say, is the Serb Jerusalem, meaning that it belongs forever to Serbia no matter how few Serbs live or visit there.

This is not something Americans understand. Sovereignty in the American context comes from the people; the state is their creation and has authority only so long as the people consent. You will of course find instances in which the United States is less than strict in adhering to this notion—the Saudi state can hardly be described as deriving authority from the consent of the governed. But in Kosovo, where no other American interests are at stake, it is hard for Americans to sympathize with a state that has so obviously lost consent. It is just as hard for Serbs, who view their church as the progenitor of the Serbian state, to understand what difference Albanian consent makes.

Why not partition Kosovo? I've discussed above some of the difficulties that would have arisen in any negotiation over partition, but these are not the reasons the Contact Group ruled it out of bounds at the beginning of the Ahtisaari-led negotiations. From an international perspective, the main reason for ruling out partition was the likelihood—many would say the certainty—that partition would lead to more efforts to move borders in the Balkans to accommodate ethnic differences. If the northern municipalities of Kosovo were to be partitioned and given back to Serbia, Albanian demands would likely not stop at Presevo but would include municipalities in northwestern Macedonia, a number of which have Albanian majorities. That in turn would reignite Bosnia's Republika Srpska's interest in joining Serbia.

This “partition domino” scenario looks unattractive from the American perspective, especially as it would result in a rump Muslim state in Bosnia and potential conflict among Greece, Bulgaria and Albania over Macedonia. There have long been Washington-based advocates of a generalized partition along ethnic lines in the Balkans, but they have clearly been in the minority, having failed to demonstrate that the results would not be inimical to US interests. A generalized partition scenario would also be inconsistent with American support for multiethnic societies. Here, again, American concepts of democracy are fundamental: it is the individual and her rights who counts, not the group. A true democracy should not need to rid itself of people who are culturally or linguistically distinct.

But is partition avoidable? The northern three and one half municipalities in Kosovo have de facto been under Belgrade’s authority for the past eight years. Serbs in those municipalities receive their education and social services from Serbia, they drive cars with Serbian license plates, and for most practical purposes the area is part of Serbia. The UN police and NATO patrol there, but they have little real authority. What would make the north any more a part of Kosovo than it has been since the UN took over?

The most immediate answer is “nothing.” No matter what is done on the status issue, the north will remain a de facto appendage of Serbia proper for a long time to come. If the years of UN protectorate have not undone Belgrade’s hold on the north, it is unlikely that the EU-led mission envisaged for the post-status period will quickly do better. The best that can be hoped for is no de jure partition, followed by a lengthy process of reintegration, not only of the north with the rest of Kosovo but also of Kosovo with Serbia, which is Kosovo’s largest market, likely largest supplier and investor, and greatest security threat. The ultimate solution for northern Kosovo is EU integration, when the borders will disappear in any event.

If partition can be ruled out, there is still a question of why the international community should proceed with Kosovo independence now and not wait. The answer is that the consequences of waiting are likely to be worse than the consequences of proceeding, though admittedly neither is an attractive proposition.

Let us assume, as a thought experiment, that a decision is taken at the Security Council to postpone final status for twenty years. What would be the consequences? The current crop of Albanian politicians in Pristina, who have promised independence sooner rather than later, would quickly be swept away, to be replaced by far more radical figures advocating Greater Albania, many of them Kosovo Liberation Army veterans and some likely still involved in clandestine activity. In Belgrade, something similar would happen: nationalists would be enormously strengthened. Leaders like Djindjic’s heir, Serbian President Boris Tadic, who have wanted to put the national question behind them, would be enormously weakened. The national question, which has plagued Serbia since the early 1990s, would remain open. Serbia would align itself with its savior, Russia, and continue to resist NATO membership.

While it is always difficult—and never edifying—to predict violence, it is difficult to see how a Serbia run by extremists and a Kosovo run by extremists would not clash. If they do not, Serbia, which has many Albanians still on its secret service payroll, might still provoke violence. The most likely victims would be the Kosovo Serbs, the majority of whom live more or less integrated with Albanians in enclaves and villages south of the Ibar river. The March 2004 riots—which involved both Serbs and Albanian, but with the Serbs getting the shorter end of the stick—are a clear warning of what the violence might look like.

It is unlikely, however, that the Albanians would attack NATO—which shoots back (more Albanians were killed in the 2004 riots than Serbs because of this, and NATO has toughened its rules of engagement since)—and much more likely that they would attack

the UN, which is the institution that stands in the way of independence. It would take little violence against UNMIK, the UN Mission in Kosovo, to cause the Secretary General to remove it, thus ending the 20-year experiment in postponing a decision soon after it had begun. Delay—even a short one—is at least as risky to regional peace and stability as moving ahead with a status decision.

In fact, one of the compelling reasons for moving now is that UNMIK is near the end of its natural life. This was a very ambitious UN mission that took on the task of governing a territory containing close to 2 million people after a ferocious bout of ethnic cleansing. It was never easy, but mistakes accumulate over time and make it harder. Scandal, incompetence and local resistance have combined to make it clear to all concerned that UNMIK cannot continue—a fresh effort is needed. That is what the EU offers, but the task will be infinitely more difficult if the EU does not get there in time for an orderly transition from UNMIK.

How Can the Consequences Be Contained?

If, as seems likely, Kosovo will declare independence within the next few months, is it possible to contain the consequences? How should the international community act to prevent threats to peace and stability and increase the likelihood of a successful transition?

The best approach appears to have been ruled out by the failure of the Ahtisaari plan to find acceptance in Belgrade and Moscow. Deciding Kosovo's status in a Security Council resolution would have meant that Kosovo could set no precedent (except that such things should be decided in the Security Council), it would have meant the full weight of the Council behind the extensive protections for Serbs provided by the plan, it would have meant clarity over the territorial extent of Kosovo, it would have meant a clear mandate for the EU mission to follow on after UNMIK, and it would have meant Kosovo would start its life as a sovereign state with recognition by its biggest and most important neighbor.

Unfortunately, that is not to be, because Belgrade has blocked, using the threat of a Russian veto, adoption of the Ahtisaari plan. While I can only admire the diplomatic skill with which Belgrade has taken advantage of Moscow's interest in "containing" Washington and thereby helping Putin's reelection, the result is an own-goal from the point of view of democratic transition in Serbia and the welfare of the Kosovo Serbs. Frustrating Kosovo's independence ambition, even temporarily, will strengthen nationalist political forces in Serbia and heighten the risks of violence against the Kosovo Serbs.

The likely scenario now appears to be this: the Contact Group having reported to the Secretary General that the additional round of negotiations has failed to find a solution to which Pristina and Belgrade can agree, the Secretary General will take the matter up, likely on December 19, with the Security Council but not take any decision immediately. In the meanwhile, the Kosovo assembly will pass a declaration of independence and at some point other states will recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state. The EU at some point in this process will announce that it will deploy its civilian presence and a rule of law mission, as much as feasible in response to a statement by the UN Secretary General.

The devil here is in the details. Delay at any stage risks instability. What is needed is a carefully orchestrated and quick scenario, one that is visibly the result of coordination and cooperation among Pristina, Brussels and Washington, and as many other countries as possible. Too many European and American diplomats have referred too often to UDI, a "Unilateral Declaration of Independence." That would be a mistake. As my RAND colleague James Dobbins points out, what is needed is CDI, a coordinated or

cooperative declaration of independence followed instantaneously by recognition conditional on implementation of the Ahtisaari plan.

This is asking a lot of the Albanians. Ahtisaari leaned over backwards in developing his plan to accommodate Serb requirements, in hopes of buying their approval. In addition to extensive protection for Serb monuments and religious sites, the plan gives Serb communities in Kosovo a wide degree of autonomy and Belgrade the right to support them directly. While there may be merit in these concepts, it was a serious negotiating mistake to make such a handsome offer up front, with any quid pro quo. The Serbs had made clear that they could not be bought and that Kosovo independence would have to occur over their objections. The result is that we are now asking the Albanians to implement the Ahtisaari plan without Serbian acceptance and recognition of the new state. The Albanians have nevertheless accepted, and the Kosovo Assembly has committed itself to the Ahtisaari plan. We need to make the recognition process as smooth as possible; otherwise, the tenure of the current crop of relatively moderate Kosovar leaders is likely to be short.

The way to do this is to leave as little time as possible for troublemaking between the Contact Group's report to the Secretary General and as broad international recognition as possible. The EU would like to reach consensus on recognition; waiting for that would be like waiting for Godot. Cyprus and perhaps Greece and one or two other countries could hold matters up long enough to allow troublemakers to intervene. If everyone is left to their own devices, Pristina would declare independence one day, capitals thinking about recognition would each start their own processes, the EU would have a discussion at foreign ministers level and within a few months Kosovo would have a critical mass of countries joining in recognizing it. By that time, troublemakers in Kosovo, Belgrade and Moscow will be having a field day.

Timing is not everything. Optics are important as well. CDI would ideally mean that recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty is visibly part of a broader deal: Pristina gets recognition, but it in turn must protect the Serbs in Kosovo in accordance with the Ahtisaari plan and accept NATO and EU supervision for an indefinite period into the future. Something like this might work: a meeting in Brussels or New York shortly after December 19 at which as many countries as possible deliver acts of recognition in exchange for Pristina's commitments, in writing, to the Ahtisaari plan as well as careful NATO/EU supervision. This scenario would at least serve to illustrate that those recognizing Kosovo are doing so as part of a bargain, not unilaterally, and that Kosovo's independence offers no precedent for unilateral acts elsewhere. The UN Secretary General's blessing for the NATO/EU effort would also be very helpful.

That will be little comfort to Belgrade, where the consequences of Kosovo independence are all too predictable: nationalists will gain, including at the elections likely to be held early next year. The Radical Party, already the largest vote-getter in Serbia will increase its representation in Parliament, but will still likely be unable to govern without the cooperation of one of the more moderate parties, likely as usual Prime Minister Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia. The Radicals have in fact been part of Kostunica's majority in Parliament for several years already, and they govern a number of Serbian cities. While their ideological roots are clearly unacceptable in the European context—they were both the originators and perpetrators of many crimes in both Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990s—their behavior in government and out since the fall of Milosevic has been generally "democratic," in the sense that they play by the rules of the game.

There is no point in Washington or Brussels worrying about whether the Radicals come to power in Belgrade—if that is Serbia's democratic choice, so be it. It would arguably be better to have them openly in power than their current stealth mode, in which they vote with the government and partake of its patronage but are never held accountable,

because they have no ministers. No Balkans country has been able to continue its democratic transition without alternation in power, which effectively has been blocked in Serbia in order to keep the Radicals out of government. In Croatia, Macedonia and even Bosnia, it is arguable that bringing extreme nationalists into power in a situation where democratic institutions are reasonably consolidated, which they are in Serbia, is a vital step in making them more responsible and converting former warmongers into viable democratic, generally right-wing, political parties.

Belgrade has been openly talking of expelling ambassadors from countries that recognize Kosovo and even breaking diplomatic relations. This should not be a serious concern to Washington or to most European countries. Serbia needs the US and Europe a good deal more than the US and Europe need Serbia—any break in diplomatic relations is not likely to last long, and in one important respect it might be a relief to the EU, which could then stop worrying about how it will fit Serbia into the queue for membership. The US ambassador in Belgrade should keep his bag packed.

Despite these immediate problems, the longer-term impact on Belgrade is likely to be salutary. The Kosovo issue has strengthened nationalists in Serbia since the fall of Milosevic. Once it is removed from the Serbian political scene, there is really little for the nationalist parties to talk about, and less for them to deliver. They will need to turn their attention to bread and butter issues. Serbia has been highly constrained by Kosovo for many years; it is time to remove the ball and chain, allowing Belgrade to pursue a truly democratic course and a European vocation.

What about the broader impact? In Macedonia, a lot depends—as it always has—on the relative sagacity of both its Macedonian and Albanian citizens, who have repeatedly stepped back from the brink. The Macedonian government for some years has supported an early decision on Kosovo's status, provided it does not include partition. Skopje prefers independence to continuation of uncertainty, which not only unsettles the almost one-quarter of the population that is Albanian but also makes Macedonia an attractive target for Albanian extremists crossing the border from Kosovo.

Macedonia has been riled recently by Supreme Court decisions that limit rights Albanians thought guaranteed in the 2001 Ohrid agreement, which ended an Albanian insurgency. The EU and US should be doing everything they can to shore up Macedonia against any consequences of Kosovo's independence, but it should be clear that the consequences of Kosovo's failing to gain independence would be much worse. In that event, the implicit bargain Macedonia's Albanians have made with the international community—we stay in Macedonia if Kosovo gets what it wants—would be off. Pan-Albanianism, which has lost its appeal in all but the most obscure corners of the Albanian political sphere, would then rear its head and give Europe and the US real problems.

In Bosnia, problems could arise because some in Republika Srpska would claim that it, like Kosovo, should declare independence as well. The recent agreement negotiated by the international High Representative on improved functioning Council of Ministers, streamlined procedures for the Parliament and an agreed Action Plan on Police Reform is precisely what is needed to ward off such spirits. The issue of Republika Srpska's status, which some regard as parallel to that of Kosovo, is not: Republika Srpska is a result of ethnic cleansing, carried out against its Muslim and Croat populations. Moreover, Serb secession from Bosnia, likely followed by Croat secession, would create a rump Islamic Republic dependent on the Muslim world, something neither Washington nor Brussels (nor Belgrade nor Zagreb when they think about it) wants.

Looking farther afield, Kosovo's independence could be read in Chechnya, Tibet, Abkhazia, Transdnestria and Kurdistan—to mention but a few places—as setting a precedent. Kosovo is not unique, despite the many claims to that effect by European

and American diplomats. There are other culturally and linguistically distinct places where people have been mistreated by their own government, chased from their homes and even from the country and as a consequence withdrawn their consent to be governed. Kosovo is however different: none of these places have been under UN administration for a lengthy period and promised by the Security Council a process by which their status will be decided, at least in part in accordance with the will of its people. Anyone who is truly worried about the precedent Kosovo's independence will set should make sure the decision is taken in the Security Council, something the Russians have definitely not done.

It is in fact hard to understand both Moscow's and Belgrade's recalcitrance. The advantages to both of a decision in the Security Council are so apparent that one has to wonder why they have not been willing to compromise—Washington and Brussels would have been content with a decision that ended the UN protectorate and welcomed the new international presence and NATO, without mentioning status (though they would have still proceeded to recognize an independent Kosovo).

The obvious conclusion is that they are trying to excite conflict and instability. For Moscow, giving the Americans things to worry about seems to have become a reward in and of itself. For Belgrade, which knows that failure of Kosovo to gain independence will re-ignite pan-Albanianism, the benefit lies in re-igniting pan-Serbianism and thus opening the door to greater Serbia, albeit a smaller one than Milosevic envisaged. Belgrade has made no secret of its interest in grabbing part of Kosovo and Bosnia. Delay and the violence it will cause are likely to give it the opportunity. So, too, would provocation, which could be arranged either through the Kosovo Serbs (especially those in the north) or through Albanians on the Belgrade payroll, of which there are still sufficient numbers. Washington and Brussels need to make it absolutely clear to Belgrade that provocation will lead to serious consequences.

Conclusions

The time is near for quick and agile diplomacy. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, which started with wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, could lead once again in Kosovo to violence and instability. European and American diplomats agree that "Kosovo independence is inevitable." The trouble is that when a European diplomat says something is inevitable, he means you only need to wait for it to happen. When an American diplomat says something is inevitable, he means it is time to make it happen.

This gap can and should be closed: the Americans have gone along with a lengthy negotiating process, one that started later and dragged on a year longer than it should have. They are now going along with further delay while the EU and the Security Council discuss the matter yet again.

Pristina and Belgrade in the meanwhile need to be doing what is needed to preserve peace and stability. A patriotic Kosovar today should be doing everything he can to reach out to the Kosovo Serb community and ensure its protection. If there is violence against Serbs, recognition will be impossible. A patriotic Serb today should be preparing for what is—as both Americans and Europeans call it—inevitable, and doing everything he can to ensure that Serbia does not make the mistake of provoking violence or cutting its ties with Europe and the US.

The boundary between Kosovo and Serbia proper has been established in the same place for more than 30 years. All that is being done is to change the status of that boundary, from the boundary of a province to the border of a country. We cannot and should not redraw that boundary to accommodate ethnic differences, since doing so would unquestionably lead to continuing disputes. Serbia endured a similar change a year and a half ago, when Montenegro gained independence. It got over the hurt quickly, and is

now busily reestablishing through economic means the close ties that are natural between the two independent states. That should be the model for Kosovo.

Unfortunately, Belgrade has instead been threatening an economic embargo against Kosovo, and there is a possibility as well of using agents provocateurs to stir up trouble. The Serbian security services have representatives in all Serbian enclaves in Kosovo, and there are surely Albanians still on their payroll. Kosovo needs electricity from Serbia as well as many staples; an embargo could be a serious problem to a community already under severe economic stress. It is difficult to see however how Serbia would benefit from destabilizing newly independent Kosovo, unless it wants to frighten the Serbs south of the Ibar river into leaving and encourage the Northern Serbian communities to declare their own "independence," as a prelude to annexation by Serbia.

Won't Kosovo independence also lead to continuing disputes? Perhaps. But the more definitively the issue is resolved, the less likely Belgrade will want to reopen it, especially once it signs a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU. This argues for decisive action, taken quickly after the next Security Council discussion, on a demonstrably cooperative basis, including clear guarantees for Kosovo's Serbs. If that can be done, the worst may be avoided.

American officials are fond of pointing out that the US has repeatedly intervened to protect Muslims from war and dictatorship. This eminently valid claim will be devalued if the so far successful international intervention in Kosovo ends in tragedy. A satisfactory outcome is within reach. As President Bush said in June: "at some point in time, sooner rather than later, you've got to say enough is enough."

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