

## 10. The Case for Partitioning Kosovo

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NATO appears to be in a political no-win situation in Kosovo despite the much-touted military victory.<sup>1</sup> To escape that dead end, the alliance must rethink its political goals. NATO continues to insist on a settlement based on autonomy for the Albanian Kosovars inside Serb-dominated Yugoslavia. But that goal is not only unattainable, it is also undesirable. Does anyone seriously believe that the Albanian Kosovars and the Serbs can live together again after all the bloodletting that has taken place? The interethnic violence that has already occurred in the immediate postwar period confirms how unrealistic that scenario is.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, NATO should pursue a settlement that partitions the province, creating an independent Albanian Kosovar state. This new state would control most of current Kosovo, while the Serbs would retain a slice of north and northwestern Kosovo. The Albanian-controlled portion could remain independent or unite with Albania if it chose.

Autonomy is a dead letter because there is no way to reconcile Albanians and Serbs to living together in one country. There is nearly unanimous agreement among Kosovo's Albanians that full independence is the only acceptable outcome. Even the moderate Ibrahim Rugova, an influential Albanian leader who advocates non-violence, says adamantly that autonomy within Serbia is not enough.<sup>3</sup> Serbian brutalities during the spring 1999 military offensive have only strengthened the Albanian insistence on full independence. Albanian Kosovars might be amenable to delaying a final decision on Kosovo's status for three years if, in the meantime, they receive significant autonomy and are protected from the Serbs by a large NATO force. But when the time is up, they will insist on independence.

The Serbs have demonstrated their attitude toward cohabitation by their savage ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo. The 800,000

Albanian refugees who fled Kosovo will hardly be satisfied to live indefinitely inside Serbia, whether Kosovo is autonomous or not, unless the United States stations sizable forces in Kosovo to police any autonomy agreement. But we cannot afford to tie our military down doing such police work. The world is full of civil wars, and the whole American military could soon be committed to peacekeeping if we made a general policy of such deployments.

One might argue that the United States could work to reconcile the Kosovar Albanians and the Serbs to living together in a multiethnic democracy and thus create the right conditions for the eventual exit of American troops. But that is a pipe dream. History records no instance of ethnic groups' agreeing to share power in a democracy after a large-scale ethnic civil war. Such wars end only with a dictatorship that restores order by the knout, or with partition.

### **Democratic Power Sharing after a Major Ethnic Conflict Has No Precedent**

The history of Yugoslavia since 1991 shows that ethnic separation breeds peace, while failure to separate breeds war. Slovenia seceded with little violence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and has since been at peace with itself and its neighbors. The key to its peace is its homogeneity: 91 percent of the people are Slovenes; fewer than 3 percent are Serbs. Croatia fought a bloody war of secession from 1991 to 1995, which was finally resolved when Zagreb expelled most of Croatia's sizable Serb minority at gunpoint. That expulsion set a poor example of how groups should separate, but it did bring an end to the Serb-Croat conflict. Separation did not end the deep hatred between Croats and Serbs, but it did stop the violence between them.

Bosnia saw fierce fighting among Croats, Muslims, and Serbs from 1992 to 1995, then an uneasy peace under the Dayton Accords. Dayton created a confederal Bosnia in which the three hate-filled groups were supposed to live together. Refugees were to be returned to their homes, and central Bosnian political institutions were to be built. However, Dayton has failed, quietly but quite completely. Few Bosnian refugees have returned to homes in areas where they are in the minority. Indeed, members of all three ethnic factions have left their homes since Dayton, because the boundaries it established made them minorities where they lived.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Bosnia still has no functioning central government. The Croat-Muslim Federation, which is supposed to be running half of the country, is a sham. The Bosnian Croats, who have effectively joined Croatia proper, largely refuse to cooperate with their Muslim partners. The Serbs likewise remain firmly committed to partition. Most observers agree that a savage new war would erupt if the large NATO peacekeeping force were withdrawn from Bosnia.<sup>5</sup> New ethnic cleansing would be likely. Croatia and Serbia might divide Bosnia between them, suppressing the Muslims by force and leaving them stateless.

Now Kosovo has been consumed by a war that stems from hatreds born of the great cruelties that Albanians and Serbs inflicted on each other in the past. The war could have been avoided if they had been separated by political partition at some earlier point, when Slobodan Milosevic might have been more amenable to the idea.

Under what circumstances would the Serbs accept such a partition today? The NATO bombing has seemingly exacerbated rather than reduced Serbian nationalism. Although the bombing campaign eventually compelled Belgrade to accept a dictated peace settlement, there is no evidence that the Serbs have abandoned their goal of keeping Kosovo part of Serbia.<sup>6</sup> NATO can prevent a renewed attempt by Belgrade to regain control of the province only if alliance peacekeeping troops garrison Kosovo indefinitely.

While Serbia will probably not be enthusiastic about a proposal for partition, it may accept partition if NATO offers Belgrade carrots as well as the stick. To entice the Serbs, NATO should offer a "grand bargain" that partitions Bosnia as well as Kosovo—moving Serbia toward its dream of a homogeneous Greater Serbia.

### **Toward a Grand Bargain**

Under this grand bargain Serbia would concede most of Kosovo to the Albanians. In return, the Serbs would be compensated with a portion of northern Kosovo that includes many Serbian historic sites. Serbia would also get the eastern portion of Bosnia, which is now populated mainly by Serbs. The rest of Bosnia would be transformed into an independent Bosnian Muslim state, save for the Herzegovina region, which should be allowed to become part of Croatia. NATO should also be willing to lift all economic sanctions against Yugoslavia if the Serbs take the deal. Finally, the United

States and its allies might consider helping to rebuild Serbia's war-damaged economy.

This is not a perfect solution by any means, but it addresses several important problems. First, it provides the Albanian Kosovars with their own homeland, where they can live free of Serbian terror. Second, it solves the refugee problem—and not just temporarily. Third, it does not require American troops to remain in Kosovo, since the Albanians and Serbs would be living separate lives, and the Albanians would have guns with which to protect themselves. Fourth, partitioning Bosnia would allow the United States to pull its troops out of that Potemkin state, thus removing the albatross of permanent occupation from America's neck.

Some observers warn that an independent Kosovo would spark secessionist violence among Albanians living next door in Macedonia. But an independent Kosovo would more likely dampen than spark violence in Macedonia. The main trigger for war in Macedonia would be the presence of a large radicalized Albanian refugee population. The solution to the continuing social and economic strains in Macedonia caused by the flood of refugees during the war is to achieve a settlement that returns the Albanian Kosovar refugees to their homes permanently, not just as long as NATO is willing to garrison the province. Only a partition offers such a settlement, and hence partition is more likely to pacify Macedonia than to enflame it.

Still, it may be that peace cannot be maintained in Macedonia. Macedonia's Slavic majority discriminates severely against the large Albanian minority, which is roughly 30 percent of the population. If the Slavs refuse to share more equally with the Albanians, violence is inevitable. To forestall this, NATO should consider calling for a plebiscite to determine whether the Albanians want to remain in Macedonia. If they do not, Macedonia should also be partitioned. That is feasible because the Albanians of Macedonia are concentrated in western Macedonia, next to Kosovo and Albania.

Others observers argue that an independent Kosovo would be too small to survive economically and politically as a sovereign state. That is not likely to be a problem, because an independent Kosovo would probably become part of a Greater Albania. But even if that marriage did not take place, Kosovo would probably be able to survive on its own. The two richest states in Europe today on a per capita basis are Lichtenstein and Luxembourg, both of which have

less territory and smaller populations than would an independent Kosovo. The main threat to Kosovo's survival would be a direct military attack by Serbia. There are, however, three ways to minimize the likelihood of that unwelcome outcome. First, the Kosovar Albanians should be well armed so that they can defend themselves against a Serbian attack. Second, NATO should make it clear to the Serbs that they will pay a severe price if they start another war in Kosovo. Third, the United States should go to considerable lengths to ensure that Serbia is satisfied with the territorial concessions it receives in the grand bargain described above.

Still other observers caution that the United States cannot support partition in Kosovo because it will legitimize altering borders, which is a prescription for endless trouble. The unpleasant truth is that some borders are untenable and preserving them causes conflict, not peace. Moreover, the United States has never behaved as if borders were sacrosanct. Within the past decade, for example, the United States facilitated the breakup of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, and it quickly recognized Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Slovenia when they broke away from Yugoslavia in 1991 and 1992. Why should the United States treat Kosovo any differently than those remnant states? Indeed, Kosovo almost seems a more appropriate candidate for partition than Croatia was in the early 1990s. Kosovo's population before the present conflict was nearly 90 percent Albanian and only 8 percent Serbian. Croatia's population in 1991 was approximately 72 percent Croatian and 12 percent Serbian.

Another possible criticism is that partition rewards ethnic cleansing. That charge is correct, but the sad truth is that there is no viable alternative to partition, if one is concerned about saving Albanian or Serbian lives. Also, the United States encouraged and rewarded ethnic cleansing of the Serbs by the Croats in 1995, so the United States does not have clean hands on this controversial issue.

Partition is an ugly formula for ending wars. It destroys communities and violates individual rights. It forces minorities that are trapped behind new borders to leave their homes. But there are only three other options in Kosovo: endless ethnic conflict and retribution, allowing the Serbs to win the struggle and cleanse Kosovo of Albanians permanently, or allowing the Albanian Kosovars to do the same to the Serbian minority. Partition is clearly better than any of those unacceptable choices. If we shrink from it, then we merely



make the catastrophe that has already occurred in the Balkans even more devastating.

## Notes

1. This chapter is drawn from John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera, "Redraw the Map, Stop the Killing," *New York Times*, April 19, 1999, p. 23; and John J. Mearsheimer, "A Peace Agreement That's Bound to Fail," *New York Times*, October 19, 1998, p. 17. See also John J. Mearsheimer, "Shrink Bosnia to Save It," *New York Times*, March 31, 1993, p. 23; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera, "Hateful Neighbors," *New York Times*, September 24, 1996, p. 25; John J. Mearsheimer, "The Only Exit from Bosnia," *New York Times*, October 7, 1997, p. 27; John J. Mearsheimer and Robert A. Pape, "The Answer: A Partition Plan for Bosnia," *New Republic*, June 14, 1993, pp. 22–28; and John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera, "When Peace Means War," *New Republic*, December 18, 1995, pp. 16–21.
2. See Scott Glover, "Revenge Attacks Fill Police Blotter in Postwar Kosovo," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1999, p. A1; "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Abuses against Serbs and Roma in the New Kosovo," Human Rights Watch Report 11, no. 10 (August 1999), <http://www.hrw.org/hrw/reports/1999/kosov2>; and "Destruction of Serbian Orthodox Churches and Monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija (June 13–July 27 1999)," <http://www.decani.yunet.com/destruction.html>.
3. See "Rugova Says Kosovo Will Never Again Be a Part of Serbia, Even if Milosevic Ousted," Associated Press, August 7, 1999. According to the article, Rugova says Kosovo's present status as a virtual international protectorate is a mere step to full independence. "We will have a referendum, at the very latest within three years time. After that the Serbs will have no alternative but to accept our independence," explains Rugova.
4. For an overview of the Dayton Agreement's failure, see Gary Dempsey, "Rethinking the Dayton Agreement: Bosnia Three Years Later," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 327, December 14, 1998.
5. For instance, according to James Lyon, a policy analyst with the International Crisis Group, "Within a year after the international community leaves Bosnia it will explode unless the international community is able to create structural reform here that is long lasting—and that will not happen under the current policy." See "Most of Dayton Peace Accord Is Failing, Balkan Expert Says; Three Ethnic Groups in Bosnia 'Essentially Refuse to Cooperate,'" *Baltimore Sun*, July 23, 1999, p. 17A.
6. Indeed, the commander of Yugoslavia's third army, Gen. Nebojsa Pavkovic, has said that Yugoslav forces could be sent back to Kosovo "at any moment" if the UN and NATO are judged to be failing to protect the province's non-Albanian populations and secure Yugoslavia's borders. "Preparations for the return of a certain number of members of the Yugoslav army and the police to Kosovo-Metohija are in full swing," explained Pavkovic, adding that such a move was legitimate under the military-technical agreement with NATO commanders. See "Yugoslav General Says Army Preparing for Return to Kosovo," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, July 23, 1999. See also Jason Goodwin, "Learning from the Ottomans," *New York Times*, June 16, 1999, p. 29; "Serbian Laws Apply in Kosovo, Justice Minister Says," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, July 26, 1999; and "Serbian Radicals Call for 'Liberation' from NATO Occupation," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, August 9, 1999.