

The Kosovo Status – Key to Balkan Stability

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In approaching the Kosovo status process, the United States has been guided by three basic interests. First, any settlement must increase stability in the Southeast European region. Second, the Kosovo status process should encourage the growth and development of democratic institutions. Finally, it should advance the Balkan region along the path toward full integrations with Euro-Atlantic institutions. Those paying attention to the three goals I have outlined here will notice that the word “independence” has not yet appeared. While the United States supports the idea that Kosovo should be independent, we have only expressed such support in the context of achieving the larger goals of stability, democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration.

In discussing the U.S. approach to regional stability in Southeast Europe and to Kosovo’s status, it is important to keep in mind that these are issues of common interest to both the U.S. and its European allies. We all have significant investments in peace in the Balkans and much to lose should another round of conflicts occur. Similarly, it is clear to leaders on both sides of the Atlantic that the status quo in Kosovo is unsustainable; no one is interested in a permanent protectorate. After more than seven years of political limbo, the people of Kosovo, and Serbia, deserve greater clarity about their future.

While the current focus is strongly on Kosovo’s future, it would be well to remember that Kosovo’s pivotal moment occurred in the past – the 1999 NATO decision to use force to halt the humanitarian disaster caused by the Milošević regime. This led to the end of Serbian control over Kosovo, replaced by UNMIK administration. UN Security Council resolution 1244 mandated an “interim” UN administration but left ambiguous what Kosovo’s future status would be. This was a necessary

decision at the time as there was no prospect for agreement on Kosovo's status and, for the time, the ambiguity allowed for the end of the conflict.

This ambiguity continued to be useful for several years as UNMIK was able to encourage the growth of the institutions of self-government and NATO could consolidate a safe and secure environment. It became clear, however, that this situation could not be prolonged indefinitely. In 2005, Norwegian UN Representative Ambassador Kai Eide concluded that further progress on implementing UN standards would not be possible until Kosovo's status was settled. Although all Contact Group members understood that there was no prospect for agreement between the parties, the status process began as Eide had recommended. UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari conducted the process in accordance with the Contact Group's Guiding Principles which maintained that there should be no return to the pre 1999 situation and that no party should be allowed to prevent the process from being completed. Not surprisingly, given U.S. membership, the Contact Group Principles aimed for a situation that would improve prospects for stability and democracy and facilitate Euro-Atlantic integration.

When Ahtisaari submitted his Comprehensive Plan in March of this year, headlines around the world reported that it was a plan for Kosovo independence, even though the word "independence" does not appear in the proposal. Indeed, the focus on this word is unfortunate as it has diminished attention on several important issues. The key provisions of the settlement plan are those that provide for effective democratic government, minority rights, security, and international supervision. There are significant challenges to implementing the settlement that will require considerable efforts both from Kosovo's people and the International Community. Despite these difficulties, however, we believe that Ahtisaari's proposal provides the best way forward.

We believe a new UN Security Council Resolution would provide the cleanest means of putting the Ahtisaari plan into effect. UNSCR 1244's ambiguity has been useful in the past, but it does not help with a clear outcome. 1244's provisions, including UN authority over Kosovo, are tied to an "interim period" that is not further defined. While it could be

argued that the Eide report and the start of the status process marked the end of the interim period, this is not definite. A new resolution, replacing 1244 would mark an undoubted end of UN administration in favor of self-rule. The new resolution will not, however, make Kosovo independent. Decisions about recognition of sovereignty are national ones, and it would set a negative precedent for the UN to take on the role determining questions of sovereignty.

So much for describing the current situation. I'm sure everyone here is more interested in what is the U.S. view of the next steps. How do we proceed from here? Implementing the Ahtisaari plan will not be easy, but there are a number of existing tools under existing Euro-Atlantic security structures that can be useful. The Partnership for Peace has had extraordinary success in such areas as developing security sector cooperation and democratic control of armed forces and has provided aspiring NATO members with important tools for their membership preparations. The Riga Summit decision to allow three more Balkan countries to participate in PfP was a clear signal that the security situation in South-east Europe is becoming more normal. (Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia).

The vision for regional security was articulated by Ministers at the 2001 Budapest Ministerial in the SEECAP Declaration: "History has taught us that we can best enhance stability by acting together, and in coordination with NATO and the wider Euro-Atlantic community of democracies."

The important idea from this document was that security should be a shared responsibility. As all peoples of the region are affected by security risks, all must be involved in the security structures that manage these risks. Just as we cannot have a stable Southeast Europe without resolving Kosovo's status, we similarly cannot leave Serbia behind as the region progresses. Serbia has to have a European future along with its neighbors in the region.

Finally, I want to note that the U.S. Government understands the importance of its role in the Balkans region. We plan to participate in KFOR until its mission is completed. We will also contribute to the future International Civilian Office and provide bilateral assistance as appropriate

in cooperation with our European Allies. With increased stability from a clear future status for Kosovo, the development of democratic institutions as prescribed by the Ahtisaari Plan and a clear road to Euro-Atlantic integration provided by NATO's vision of cooperative security and future EU membership, we can take the most important steps that will allow the Balkans region to take its place as part of what President Bush has described as "Europe whole and free."