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Kosovo Futures, Western Dilemmas

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After Kosovo's Illyrian beginnings two millennia ago, history records an almost unbroken sequence of invasion, annexation, and subjugation. Roman legions conquered and colonised. Byzantine armies followed, finally defeated at Pantina in 1170 by the Serbs. The Serb occupation and settlement in the Middle Ages was thorough, creating a capital at Prizren and an Orthodox patriarchy at Peæ. After the infamous Kosovo Polje battle (Gazimestan) in 1389, the defeated Serbs were pushed out and a five hundred year Ottoman domination commenced. With the Turks came Islam. And, when the disintegrating Ottoman Empire was expelled from Kosovo in the First Balkan War of the last century (1912), Serbs reasserted their control and held it until 1999.¹

Such a cursory summary of Kosovar history does great injustice to the intellectual and cultural substance of Albanian Kosovo's society. Yet, without question, these geopolitical highlights evoke the suffering that one small territory and its inhabitants were forced to endure because of competing great powers and empires. As these forces' armies marched, Kosovo

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¹ This historical summary draws on standard sources such as E. Hosch, *The Balkans: A Short History From Greek Times to the Present Day* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1972), B. Jelavich and C. Jelavich, *The Balkans* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965) and A. Logoreci, *The Albanians: Europe's Forgotten Survivors* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977).

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repeatedly served as a field of battle, a front line, and a place from which to extract resources or to inflict retribution. Its people did not choose this fate.

This melancholy past need not predict the future. Today's French-German solidarity has replaced a litany of past interstate wars; South American military juntas, for more than a century almost a monthly occurrence, are now rare and isolated; Southeast Asia's decades of wars and interventions have ended, and reform if not democracy propels these countries towards development and openness.

Sadly, the tardy and desultory international responses to aggression and mass atrocities in regions such as Kosovo have been encouraged by the assumption that "history determines". "Centuries-old ethnic conflicts" has been, for Western media and politicians, the most common preface for discussions of *anything* Balkan. Instead, Kosovo has alternative futures that must be understood for what each might offer or deny to ethnic Albanians, Serbs, Roma and others who live in and near Kosovo.

For the principal Western countries and multilateral institutions, however, the various futures for Kosovo represent poorly understood alternatives, all coloured by political distaste for the danger and expense of being deeply engaged. The US National Security Advisor, Condoleeza Rice, made clear the Bush administration's preference for limiting US forces' "exposure" in the Balkans² – and Washington is certainly not alone in wishing to draw down troop levels in Kosovo. But, to implement any peaceful future for Kosovo, a substantial and robust international military, police and civil assistance presence will be required for years. The disparity between domestic political sensitivities and the geopolitical requirements of post-conflict peacekeeping also lie at the core of Western dilemmas.

Western dilemmas are compounded by American and European fears of strong nations and weak states. Strong nations are peoples who exhibit high levels of cultural coherence, human capacity, and normative consensus. Ernest Renan was right to the extent that a "spiritual principle" more than race, language, religion or geography lie at the core of "nation";³ and, by thus focusing on "soul", he touched upon the notion of what Benedict

² Rice's comments, originally made to the *New York Times* in October 2000, created a "wave of anxiety" in Europe. In retrospect, such remarks added momentum to the EU's plans for its own capacity for crisis intervention. See, for example, W. Drozdiak, "Bush Plan Worries Europeans," *Washington Post* (24 October 2000) p. 7.

³ E. Renan, "What is a Nation?", in Bhabha, H. K. (ed.) *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 8-22.

Anderson has popularised as an "imagined community".⁴ Underpinned by coherence, capacity and consensus, the imagined community of nation is powerful indeed.

When embedded in a weak institutional framework of limited authority, such strong nations can be perceived as threatening the larger order – contributing, dangerously, to the anarchy of an international system. Weak states are those that cannot assure the provision of public goods such as security, justice and well-being. They are low-capacity political systems that might become demagogues' prime targets.

Albanians in Southeastern Europe are not now militarily or economically powerful. Still, Albanians' endurance and will – in Kosovo, the state of Albania, or scattered in Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro or elsewhere – plus their increasing numbers suggest considerable potential. The combined millions of Albanians in Southeastern Europe, their solidarity in 1999 during the conflict in Kosovo, and their perseverance against vastly superior Serb forces gained both Western respect *and* nervous Western assessments. American analysts and policymakers, reviewing information in 1999 about the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) leadership, financing and international ties, were not sanguine about either the goals or means of such a force in the early months of KFOR.⁵

Expecting the worst from historical precedent, wanting to avoid commitments, and fearing the eventual disintegration of weak states amid resolute national identities are, together, certain predictors of weak and vacillating Western Balkan policy. James Gow's in-depth analysis of the West's *immobilisme* in the face of Serb aggression in 1991-95 focuses on the "lack of political will". He notes that US and European interests were really nothing more than to contain the conflict so that the international order and principles in which they had invested much were not endangered.⁶ Establishing a cordon around the fight, rather than leaping into it, however, was very *willful*. Such *willful* avoidance of responsibility can, moreover, be attributed: to the West's mistaken sense of history, fears of engagement's human and economic costs, and profound confusion about a region where nations are strong and states are weak.

⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁵ Comments at a CIA/US State Department meeting on post-war Kosovo at Meridian House, Washington, DC, 15 July 1999.

⁶ J. Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) p. 327.

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Future options

Kosovar Albanians, and most Albanians in neighbouring states, are of one mind: Kosovo should become fully independent. Such an option is not preferred by Western governments, NATO or the EU, after an 5 October 2000 popular uprising in Belgrade pushed Slobodan Milosevic out of the Serbian presidency.

The Serbian coalition government of President Vojislav Kostunica and Prime Minister Zoran Djindic, is seen as democratic in origin if not entirely in policy or personnel. Such an image has elicited widespread support in Washington, Brussels, and other European capitals. With that support has come a publicly tacit, but privately vocal, message to Kosovar Albanians and Montenegrins – do not generate further disintegration of what was Yugoslavia any time soon.

American emissaries such as James O'Brien carried that message to Pristina and Podgorica, the Montenegrin capital, in late 2000. Milo Djukanovic, president of Montenegro, pressed ahead, and met with quick and decisive snubs in Washington from Secretary of State Colin Powell in early February 2001 (who simply refused to meet with him). By early 2002, Western pressure and Montenegro's fragile political consensus led to a deal whereby Belgrade and Podgorica would remain in a union, albeit one far more limited than most Serbs wanted.

For Kosovo, some futures are possible but highly improbable. An open-ended, large Western military presence – *à la* a half century in Korea or twenty-five years on Cyprus – will be precluded by many countries' domestic politics and the demands on forces and personnel after 11 September 2001. Observer missions and police units are other matters. But, a Kosovo confined perpetually to the status of an international protectorate is neither supported in Western capitals nor among Kosovo elites or population. One former KLA general told this author, for example, that "...the departure of KFOR will be the day of our real independence".⁷ One of the senior advisors of President Ibrahim Rugova was more equivocal, stating that "the eventual withdrawal of NATO and other armies will have to occur...for our political development to begin".⁸ Still, Kosovar Albanians seek their own state, not a protectorate.

Statehood, sovereignty and independence can all appear in different configurations. That these concepts no longer fully overlap is truer now

⁷ General Agim Ceku in conversation with the author.

⁸ Private conversation with the author in March 2000.

than at any time since the Westphalian nation-state became dominant in Europe and was implanted in other continents. A state remains best denoted as a set of institutions that exercise supreme political authority within a geographically defined territory.⁹ The relevance of territoriality, however, has diminished as actors without "territory" affect and even control more resources and agenda-setting power.¹⁰

Table 1 - State, Sovereignty, Security

Statehood	Sovereignty/Independence	Security
<i>Full Statehood</i> (internationally recognised and represented)	sovereign state, largely unconstrained by dependencies	Indigenous armed forces and alliances
	state, sovereignty constrained by dependencies	Alliances and bilateral commitments, armed forces secondary
<i>Affiliated Statehood</i> (internationally recognised; limited representation)	state in confederation, non-sovereign in defence	Indigenous armed forces part of confederation defence; some international security ties
	political unit in confederation, non-sovereign in foreign policy, border control, defence, currency	Indigenous armed forces as part of confederation defence with no international security ties
<i>Non-State</i> (no international recognition or representation)	Independent political unit (e.g. province) in new federation	Federal military with no deployment in province; international observer and police presence
	non-independent but autonomous political unit (e.g. province)	Federal military with limited deployment in province; international observer presence
	non-independent, non-autonomous political unit (e.g. province)	Substantial federal military presence; no international observer presence

⁹ This is the Weberian formula restated by E. S. Greenberg, "State Change: Approaches and Concepts", in Greenberg, E. S. and T. F. Mayer (eds) *Changes in the State* (London: Sage, 1990) pp. 12-13.

¹⁰ For a discussion of such trends and their implications see D. N. Nelson, "Great Powers and Global Insecurity," *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1997, pp. 341-63.

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Sovereignty, however, implies effective control (supremacy, dominion) over that territory and its population – usually by a state and its government.¹¹ Independence is a far looser term, implying autonomy, and substantial freedom from external control.

Thus, a nation or political unit could be largely independent, but neither sovereign nor a state. Conversely, statehood *per se* may not ensure much in the way of sovereignty or independence. The political hegemony of a large neighbour can be ensured through the rule of a party that is fully subservient to an external political movement. Equally effective in compromising sovereignty or denying functional independence are conditions when most food, energy or other critical commodities are controlled by external actors.

Kosovo futures, whether acceptable to ethnic Albanians or not, may thus lie along a statehood continuum from varieties of “non-state” options, through several “affiliated state” variations, leading to “full statehood” (see Table 1).

Non-state futures for Kosovo, not desired by Kosovar Albanians but preferred by the West, would deny all international recognition and representation. While the degree of autonomy and independence within a non-state formula can range widely, there would be no presence in the United Nations or other international organisations in which statehood is a criterion of membership. Neither would Kosovo be eligible for international financial institutions’ support reserved for sovereign entities. In such a condition, Kosovo’s future would revert to that determined from Belgrade, enforced by a renewed federal military presence inside Kosovo. International observers or police, plus peace or human rights NGOs might remain as a condition of *de facto* Serb sovereignty.

A non-state scenario is likely to the degree that a robust international military presence is excluded – a presence required both for its contribution to internal calm, and its external deterrent effect. If the West commences a military withdrawal, it may be the West, ironically, that seeks Serbs’ return, once again misreading history, while being driven by fears of over-commitment and of strong nations and weak states.

Such a judgement is not arbitrary. Rather, it is clear that a non-state “solution” – although not a solution – for Kosovo’s near-term future would

¹¹ Daniel Philpott succinctly denotes sovereignty as “supreme legitimate authority”. See his article “Ideas and the Evolution of Sovereignty,” in Hashmi, S. H. (ed.) *State Sovereignty: Change and Persistence in International Relations* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) p. 17.

require of the West fewer security obligations. Were a non-state Kosovo guaranteed substantial political independence as a province in a new Yugoslav federation, particularly if the Kostunica-Djindjic government satisfied Western desires to see all war criminals prosecuted, the United States and Western Europe would unquestionably prefer this option to affiliated statehood or full statehood. The reason for such a preference is clear; anything beyond a non-state Kosovo future implies greater and more burdensome international security commitments.

In the instance of affiliated statehood, Kosovo could be internationally recognised while having limited international representation. Federal military deployments into Kosovo might be small or geographically confined. Yet, since the indigenous armed forces of Kosovo (the lightly armed Kosovo Protection Corps) would be regarded as part of a confederal defence system, the degree to which Kosovar ties would be created and maintained with other countries' defence ministries and armed forces would be delicate. An affiliated state might be highly independent if only defence were earmarked as a confederation matter. If non-sovereign in border control, currency and foreign policy, a Kosovo government would be far less independent – at the margins of a "state" even inside a confederation.

Full statehood, too, varies by the amount of dependency. To be sovereign, to exercise authority for a given people in a given territory, does not exclude constraints on policy options. However, even without substantial and debilitating dependencies, it is certain that security guarantees for sovereign states must be offered and maintained through alliances or other multilateral commitments. Security (a balance between threats and capacities) for fully sovereign states requires more than international observers and police, and more than a collection of bilateral diplomatic and military arrangements. Put simply, political units that lay claim to full statehood and sovereignty require a broader and deeper sense of security. Security guarantees for an internationally recognised sovereign state are made credible with a willingness to go to war.

Kosovo Albanians will not accept the "non-state" option. The United States and West European powers will not accept full statehood because of demands for ongoing security guarantees. A public "spin" on such a Western position, however, would portray it as an effort to halt further disintegration and fragmentation in Southeastern Europe.

Affiliated statehood, recognised internationally albeit with substantial arenas of policy lying at a confederal level (particularly defence, border

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control and currency), thus seems Kosovo's most likely future. It is a direction fraught with many uncertainties that require detailed preparation and negotiation. Still early in the Kostunica period of Belgrade politics, discussions about affiliated Kosovo statehood have not yet been placed on the table; Washington and Brussels, fearing that pushing Serbia too fast might unsettle reformists' hold on power, have waited. Likewise, while such a status eventually might be one with which Ibrahim Rugova can live, Hashim Thaci (who had, during the 1999 war, been a Kosovo Liberation Army leader) and his associates won't be convinced.

But the complexities of an affiliated statehood for Kosovo – entirely separate from Serbia, but linked nonetheless – will require detailed and lengthy discussions. A less-than-fully sovereign, or not-quite-independent statehood is not entirely novel, but is usually attempted with very small, geographically separate entities. Zanzibar's status within Tanzania comes to mind, as might the "commonwealth" status of Puerto Rico in the United States. Loose confederal systems, in which central authority is very weak, are rare – the CIS, perhaps, being a modern example begun as Moscow desperately sought to retain some of its interests in the "near abroad". Also unsuccessful was the late 18th century American attempt, from 1781 to 1787, to use the "Articles of Confederation" as the basis for a loose union of independent states.

Still, affiliated statehood for Kosovo, Montenegro, Vojvodina and Serbia, might be the "only" option since both Kosovo and Montenegro are unwilling to continue a federal state sure to be under Serb dominance and the West can't swallow full statehood. If preparations for this option are not commenced while KFOR is still intact, people from the region know that a return to tragedy is not implausible. But does the West know?