



U.S. Kosovo Policy Is Bad for Israel

James Jatras and Serge Trifkovic

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Executive Summary: Strong American support for the independence of Kosovo is detrimental to Israeli interests. The US position is based on the view that a solution to long-standing conflict can and should be imposed on the parties by outside powers. In addition, the new state's creation seeks to award part of a nation's territory to a violent ethno-religious minority; futilely hopes to curry favor with the Islamic world through appeasement; effectively gives a fresh impetus to the ongoing growth of Islamic influence in Europe; and denies the fact that the putative state's leaders are tainted by terrorism, criminality, and well-documented links with global jihad. Most importantly, it betrays a cynically postmodern contempt for all claims based on the historical rights and spiritual significance of a land to a nation.

It is in Israel's interest to reiterate its already-stated position that any solution to Kosovo should be based on the agreement of both parties in dispute. In addition, the Israeli government should declare that it will not extend recognition to any self-proclaimed "state" unless its independence is approved by the UN Security Council.

Background

There is a small piece of disputed land, rich in history but poor in everything else, whose preponderant population of two million Muslims wants to turn into a sovereign, internationally-recognized state. While that ambition is supported by the United States, the European Union, and much of the international community, such an act would open a Pandora's Box of geopolitical, legal, moral and security issues, and create a black hole of lawlessness, endemic corruption and *jihad*-terrorism.

Surprisingly, the territory in question is not in the Middle East, but in Europe. The status of Kosovo, Serbia's southern province (Kosovo and Metohija), remains contentious eight years after it came under UN/NATO control in the spring of 1999.

In the very near future, Washington is expected to make its final push to separate Kosovo from Serbia and establish an independent Muslim Albanian state. A four-month round of negotiations is continuing until December 10, with the mediation of a US/EU/Russian "Troika." These talks are proving to be as unsuccessful in reaching a compromise solution as earlier efforts had been under Martti Ahtisaari, the previous

UN mediator. Mr. Ahtisaari produced a plan, unveiled in February 2007, that would award independence to Kosovo, over Serbia's objections. Only the certainty of a Russian veto in the Security Council prevented the plan's adoption.

The unlikelihood of a negotiated agreement is a direct result of Washington's promise of independence to the Albanian separatists "one way or another" (in the words of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice), which means the Albanians have no incentive to compromise. No less than its predecessor, the Bush Administration is committed wholeheartedly to the Kosovo Albanian cause. Since the UN Security Council route has been blocked, the prospect looms for later this year of a unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence and US recognition, despite absence of a UNSC Resolution providing for such recognition.

Washington is exerting pressure on EU countries to break with their stated policy of acting within the UN framework, and go along with Washington. The United States also looks toward key non-EU allies –Canada, Turkey, and Israel among the foremost prospects – to follow its example and extend recognition to a self-proclaimed state of Kosovo.

The unilateral independence scenario may play out as early as December 10, the date the Troika is due to report to the Secretary General on the result of its efforts. The US has threatened to recognize Kosovo after a unilateral declaration of independence, but fortunately, neither the declaration nor the recognition is certain. Washington still might be dissuaded from that step if it had reason to think other countries, notably its closest allies, would not follow the US example.

While it may not be readily apparent to most Israelis, Jerusalem's decision whether or not to follow Washington's lead may be among the most crucial factors in the unfolding drama. The prospect that Israeli political leaders are prepared to display a degree of clear-headedness and realism sadly lacking in Washington, and say *No* to Kosovo's separation from Serbia, may be one of the most influential factors in inducing Washington to step back from the brink of a disaster in the making.

Implications for Israel

While most Israelis may assume their country has no stake in the outcome of the Kosovo question, Washington's proceeding with its current course would in fact adversely affect Israel's interests in a number of ways:

1. It would set the precedent that a solution to an intractable political and territorial quarrel can and should be imposed by outside countries, even if one of the parties rejects the proposed solution as contrary to its vital national interests. While the question of how Israel should come to an accommodation with Palestinian aspirations for self-rule has resisted efforts to find a negotiated settlement, no one suggests a solution imposed from outside would likely be in Israel's interest.
2. The theory that outside powers can award part of a state's sovereign territory to a violent ethnic or religious minority would put in question not only Judaea and Samaria – which, in any event, are not formally part of Israel – but even such areas as the southern Galilee and parts of the Negev, where non-Jews have, or may eventually

acquire, local majorities. Israel's Muslim population is now just above 20 percent, roughly the same as Serbia's if Kosovo is included. If Albanian Muslims can demand separation from Serbia today, and citing alleged past mistreatment, why cannot Israel's Arabs do the same tomorrow?

3. Washington's plan to circumvent the Security Council to avoid Moscow's veto would amount to a devaluing of Russia's veto in the Security Council. Such an action is likely to devalue the power of the veto as such, at least as concerns a Permanent Member's protection of smaller states. In light of how many times anti-Israel UNSC Resolutions have been thwarted by a US veto, damaging the power of the veto *per se* is detrimental to Israel in the future.

4. As has been pointed out by many American policymakers, an overt motivation of US policy on Kosovo is to curry favor in the Islamic world. Such a notion betrays an incredible naïveté about the *jihadist* mindset, which has never been impressed with concessions. One only need look at American efforts to help create a Palestinian state, to bring "democracy" to Iraq or Afghanistan, or to provide aid to Osama bin Laden and other *mujaheddin* against the Soviet Union to see the value of *jihadist* gratitude. A victory in Kosovo would merely stimulate the *jihadists'* demand for further concessions elsewhere.

5. Creation of a second Islamic state in the Balkans (after Bosnia, which is regarded as a Muslim country even though its population is majority Christian) would help further the growth of Islamic influence in Europe. Such influence, based on the growing Muslim presence in key European countries, already has contributed to those countries', and the EU's, growing anti-Israel tilt, as well as to anti-Jewish violence in Europe.

6. Proponents of Kosovo independence scoff at Serbia's claim that Kosovo represents not just any part of their country but its heart and soul – "Serbia's Jerusalem." Such a dismissive attitude betrays a cynical contempt for the essence of any nation's life, which must rest on a common historical acknowledgment of its moral and spiritual identity, without which a people ceases to be a people and is little more than a random mob. If Serbia can be deprived of its Jerusalem today, what's to say "al-Quds" will not be demanded of Israel tomorrow as the capital of an independent "Palestine"?

7. Proponents of Kosovo's independence overlook or flatly deny the fact that Kosovo's top Albanian leaders are tainted by terrorism and criminality, and that their record indicates an endemic inability to run a stable, civilized polity. In the same vein, today's Pristina or Podujevo are reminiscent of Gaza or Ramallah – Saudi-financed mosques, armed men, and roadside rubbish heaps included.

No one pretends it will be easy for Israel to stand up to its closest friend and ally on an issue many Israelis may consider peripheral. Yet, it must be kept in mind that Israel's sound position on Kosovo may itself be a factor in holding Washington back from a serious error in judgment.

Israeli Influence

There are two main areas in which Israel can make a positive, perhaps decisive, contribution.

Firstly, the Israeli government can restate its position publicly and forcefully – against an imposed solution. When Serbia's then-Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic visited Israel last year, his Israeli counterpart Tzipi Livni clearly stated Israel's position against an imposed solution. It can communicate this in bilateral contacts with Washington and with other capitals, notably in Europe. It would also be appropriate for the Knesset to act on a resolution to this effect.

Secondly, the impact of Israeli opinion on the public policy community in the United States should not be underestimated. Among the American advocates of Kosovo independence are many sincere friends and supporters of Israel who have no notion that their advocacy might have a negative impact on Israel. Such advocates are found among media, public policy groups and think tanks, advocacy organizations, and other centers of influence representing in particular the US Jewish community, liberals, neoconservatives, and elements of the Christian community.

In addition, Israel's military and defense experience with terrorism is widely respected in American defense, intelligence, and homeland security sectors, both in and out of government, and in both the Executive and Legislative branches. It is important that every such contact in the United States be informed by their Israeli interlocutors that the wrong solution for Kosovo would have an adverse impact on Israel.

Conclusion

Since the 1999 NATO war against Serbia, the Kosovo question has faded from the horizon of the American and Israeli policy communities. This has allowed the proponents of Kosovo's forcible and illegal separation from Serbia to gain the upper hand in formulating American policy. That does not mean, however, that the misguided policy cannot be recast if the relevant perspectives, including the impact on Israel, are brought to bear. For Israel's well-being, if for no other reason, that process needs to begin as soon as possible.

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*Mr. Jatras, Director of the Washington DC-based American Council for Kosovo, is a former Foreign Service officer and former Senior Analyst with the US Senate Republican Policy Committee.*

*Dr. Trifkovic is Foreign Affairs Editor of Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture published by The Rockford Institute, and the author – most recently – of Defeating Jihad: How the War on Terror May Yet Be Won, in Spite of Ourselves.*

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