



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

---

June 30, 2008

### Masters and servant

By James George Jatras, The Prague Post

<http://www.praguepost.com/articles/2008/06/25/masters-and-servant.php>

For a country nearly 20 years removed from Soviet domination, the Czech Republic doesn't always act like a sovereign and independent state — at least when it comes to its relationship with my country, Big Brother across the Atlantic. Indeed, at times it seems that Czechs have only exchanged one set of overseers for another.

Case in point: Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek's March 30 statement, "If we did not have to recognize Kosovo, I would never do it." A few weeks later, Foreign Affairs Minister Karel Schwarzenberg announced Prague's recognition and upgrading of the Czech Republic's liaison office in Pristina to an embassy. Echoing Topolánek, Schwarzenberg noted, "Our government had no other choice."

Both before and after recognition, there was little doubt where Czech public opinion and much of the Czech political establishment stood on the Kosovo question. The action was resisted by both the Christian Democrats, whose ministers in the government voted against it, the opposition Social Democrats and, of course, the Communists. President Václav Klaus told the departing Serbian ambassador he was ashamed of what had been done.

Perhaps most outspoken was former foreign affairs minister and UN special rapporteur for human rights Jiří Dienstbier, who noted the bitter irony of the Cabinet voting on Kosovo in Teplice, in the territory ceded to Germany under the 1938 Munich Agreement. Most of the world's countries have declined to recognize Kosovo's illegal claim of independence due to their own restive minorities or because they have a "sense of shame," said Dienstbier.

Topolánek and Schwarzenberg did not disclose why they felt compelled to act contrary to the wishes of the Czech public, but Dienstbier did: "The pressure exerted on the 'disobedient' ones is huge, both by America and the EU's 'elite members.' It's hard to say how many will succumb to that pressure."

Translation: Prague had received the edict from on high, and that was that.

Such craven capitulation to the United States, and to the more lickspittle of our European satellites, would be troubling enough if it were limited to Kosovo. But it isn't. How many Czechs favor deployment in their country of the radar base that Washington claims will defend Europe against Iranian missiles? How many support having Czech soldiers serving in Afghanistan and Iraq? But, as with Kosovo, what the Czech people think isn't important.



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

---

On almost every question of national significance, the views of many Czech politicians diverge sharply from what the people want. Can it be that, after decades of Soviet, and before that German, overlordship, Czechs have so meekly surrendered their sovereignty to a new master? What accounts for the spectacle of Czech officials falling over themselves in their rush to obey commands from Washington even more abjectly than their predecessors heeded those from Moscow?

As an American, I can't help but wonder how this works. After Parliament and the people have voiced their opinion, does someone in the Czech government just dial up the U.S. Embassy in Prague for instructions? Or do they call Washington directly? Are threats involved, or do we have our European allies so well-trained that threats are unnecessary?

Perhaps Czech leaders have developed such cozy personal ties with their friends in Washington that they identify more closely with them than with their own countrymen. Both Klaus and Topolánek were in Washington earlier this year for photo ops in the Oval Office with President George W. Bush, then a private chat with Vice President Dick Cheney. Topolánek even brought a gift for Bush, a fine Czech shotgun — minus the ammunition, since regulations prohibit transport of loaded weapons on government aircraft. It seemed like a pretty good trade for the U.S. side: The Czechs give us a shotgun, and in return they have to take our radar system.

The standard explanation for such behavior is that the Czech Republic is a little country that can't afford to defy its "partners" in NATO and the European Union. But the EU doesn't have a unified position on Kosovo. Slovakia had the courage to refuse. Even tiny Cyprus managed to say no. And nothing in the North Atlantic Treaty can force any country to accept components of the missile system. But the Czech government would apparently rather place its own people under retargeted Russian nuclear weapons than allow citizens to decide the radar question by referendum.

Prague's current subservience is as baffling to me as it is disturbing. I served most of my professional life in the apparatus of the U.S. government, at both the State Department and in Congress. My early career was dedicated to restoring the freedom and independence of countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Later, I worked to extend the reach of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America. Perhaps it was misplaced idealism, but it never occurred to me at the time that the main result, and perhaps intent, of such efforts was not freedom in the ordinary meaning of the word, but creation of a unipolar global order.

These concerns may sound odd coming from an American, especially from a conservative Republican.



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

---

After all, my country supposedly receives the benefits of this “allied solidarity.” The freedom and unity of the Czech Republic is not my concern, but that of the Czech people. Why should I care if the Czech lands are reduced to our very own Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren?

Here’s why: Our European and other friends have become enablers of our post-Cold War hegemonic binge. When someone has had too much to drink, real friends take his car keys away, not offer to join him on a joy ride. If my country had friends who would stand up to us and just say no when a narrow clique in Washington hatches schemes for destructive escapades, our global adventurism would be restrained. We would have less occasion to find ourselves stuck with limitless and costly commitments in distant parts of the world that do not concern us, embroiled in other peoples’ quarrels in which we have no business. We Americans would benefit most of all.

A Czech Republic that had rediscovered its dignity, independence and solidarity between people and government would be a true friend of America. Let Czech citizens vote on the radar deployment — and for what my opinion is worth, reject it. Withdraw your soldiers from harm’s way in Mesopotamia and the Hindu Kush. Revoke your recognition of Kosovo through a democratic vote in parliament. Czechs, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains! And in doing so, you will be doing my country a big favor as well.

— The author is an attorney, a principal at Squire Sanders Public Advocacy in Washington, D.C., and director of the American Council for Kosovo. Before entering the private sector he was for many years senior foreign policy adviser to the U.S. Senate Republican leadership, and before that an officer in the U.S. diplomatic service.