



# KOSOVO

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## Kosovo prelude to Georgia?

By James George Jatras, Washington Times

<http://washingtontimes.com/news/2008/sep/07/kosovo-prelude-to-georgia/>

In anticipation of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, President Bush said "Georgia's territorial integrity and borders must command the same respect as every other nation's."

Critics of Russia's action include Sens. Barack Obama, Joseph Biden and Joseph Lieberman; Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; former United Nations Ambassador Richard Holbrooke; and many others in the bipartisan establishment.

Among the specific criticisms are Russia's violation of the sovereign territory of Georgia, a fledgling democracy and a member of the United Nations; a disproportionate response to Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's attempt to settle South Ossetia's status by force, including Russian military operations well outside of South Ossetia; and Moscow's tardiness in withdrawing its forces under a deal brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Evidently irony is not much appreciated in Washington. It seems critics have forgotten President Bush's recognition of the independence of Kosovo, a province of democratic, U.N. member Serbia. President Bush's reference to "every other nation" whose "territorial integrity and borders must command the same respect" apparently has at least this one exception. If he can violate the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, which guarantee sovereign borders, what right does he have to accuse others of doing the same?

If Moscow stepped over the line in its crushing military response to Mr. Saakashvili's offensive, what do we call 78 straight days of NATO's bombing throughout Serbia, destroying most of that country's civilian infrastructure? If Russia is to be faulted for imperfect implementation of the Sarkozy agreement, what can be said about Washington's violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244, which ended the 1999 Kosovo war and reaffirms Serbian sovereignty in the province?

The standard reasons cited for making Serbia an exception to the rule we demand in Georgia is that NATO intervened to stop genocide of Kosovo's Albanians and that they will never again accept being part of Serbia. But after the war actual casualties among all ethnic groups - whether by military action, atrocities committed by both Serbs and Albanians, and the toll of NATO's bombing - proved to be far fewer than those cited in justification for the war. Compared to South Ossetia's much smaller population, mutual accusations of genocide against South Ossetians and Georgians,



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respectively, are proportionally larger than those at issue in Kosovo. And are South Ossetians and Abkhazians less adamant that they will not submit to Tbilisi's rule than Kosovo's Albanians are with respect to Belgrade?

It also should be kept in mind that Kosovo's legal status is very different from that of entities in the former Soviet Union. Under the Yugoslav constitution - the same authority that justified the secession of Croatia, Slovenia, etc. - Kosovo, part of Serbia since before Yugoslavia was formed, has no legal claim to independence. In contrast, the 1990 Soviet law on secession - which was the legal basis of the independence of Union Republics such as Georgia - required that autonomous entities within their borders be allowed, via referenda, to remain in the Soviet Union, and by extension its successor, Russia.

Thus, while Kosovo's status as part of Serbia is unquestionable, South Ossetia and Abkhazia can make a good case they were part of Soviet Georgia but never the current independent state of Georgia. (The same would apply to Transdniestria with respect to Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh with respect to Azerbaijan. When will they follow suit?)

By trashing the accepted international "rules of the road" on Kosovo, Washington has created what amounts to the rules of the jungle. Each power acts as it will, either to suppress restive minorities or to compromise other countries' borders: The United States tries to force Serbia to accept Kosovo's independence and pressures other countries (without much success) to recognize it; Georgia tries to subdue the Ossetians and the Abkhazians and fails; Russia moves to establish the Ossetians' and Abkhazians' independence and now also will try to secure wider recognition. In turn, the U.S.-supported separatist Kosovo Albanian administration itself threatens a miniature version of Mr. Saakashvili's South Ossetia offensive to subdue Serbian enclaves, where the remaining one-third of the province's prewar community finds refuge. Where does the logic of "big fish eat little fish" end?

In Kosovo, Washington sowed the wind, and now Georgia has reaped the whirlwind. Only a return to the negotiating table to address comprehensively Kosovo, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and similar trouble spots elsewhere can prevent this malignant precedent from spinning further out of control with incalculable consequences for global peace and security. With each step down this road it will be harder to put the genie of might-makes-right back in the bottle.

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