



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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

---

September 24, 2007

## **Kosovo re-emerges as a fault line for European powers**

By Christine Spolar, Chicago Tribune

<http://www.newspress.com/Top/Article/article.jsp?Section=WORLD&ID=565090518146875628>

ROME - Any hope for a tidy or smooth resolution of the fate of Kosovo - a southern province of Serbia that NATO bombers pounded less than a decade ago and left UN protectors to rule - is fast disappearing, according to analysts and longtime observers of the unsettled region.

The Bush administration once considered a free Kosovo, clear of Serb control and ruled by its Albanian majority, to be a done deal by year's end. But a United Nations proposal to move Kosovo toward supervised independence has been deeply undercut by indecision among its proponents and resolve from a longtime Serb ally and reinvigorated Western counterweight, Russia.

Kosovo once again is a fault line for world powers and, in particular, European security. Albanians and Serbs have both rebuffed possible conditions for compromise; in recent weeks, they are negotiating only through mediators.

Emotions ran high this week before talks in London. Kosovo Albanian Prime Minister Agim Ceku said again that the Albanians could simply declare full independence if bargaining ends inconclusively Dec. 10. Serb Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica warned last week that any breakaway would "seriously endanger stability and peace, not only in Western Balkans but elsewhere."

The standoff has heightened rhetoric from both sides and the flowering anew of a jarring and vocal Serb nationalism. The Serb political class, now composed of leaders who emerged from post-dictatorship democratic elections, has united in defense of territorial sovereignty.

If Kosovo breaks free, Serbia will lose 15 percent of its territory. Politicians who came to power after strongman Slobodan Milosevic fear they will look weak if they give in to - or even contemplate - such a demand.

Serb leaders, and most notably Kostunica, who as a lawyer has focused on international law, flatly deny that Kosovo's future should be linked to its past. The peace deal that ended the war never spelled out that Serbia would ever give up Kosovo, they argue.



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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

---

"Putting a signature on this deal in Serbia, by anyone, is now seen almost like agreeing to highway robbery," Ljiljana Smajlovic, editor of the influential daily Politika, said in a phone interview.

"What's happening now is simply because of a miscalculation by the Americans. They didn't understand the opposition. Their entire strategy seemed to be to create a sense of inevitability that this would happen. They didn't listen to the Russians, and they thought Serbs could be persuaded. . . . Their insistence became a kiss of death to Serb politicians."

The war of 1999 was fought to save the Albanian minority in Serbia - a rousing majority in the south of Serbia - from brutal army attacks ordered by then Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic, a Serb who had vowed never to give in to separatist demands by the Albanians, was intent on eliminating a guerrilla group known as the Kosovo Liberation Army.

The repression turned into a slaughter and touched off the U.S.-led NATO bombing campaign. Kosovo was the final defeat for Milosevic, blamed for instigating Balkans wars throughout the 1990s, and he was specifically charged with war crimes for the Kosovo assault. He died of heart failure, while facing prosecution at The Hague.

The Kosovo war was quick but the resolution was messy. Kosovo was still inside Serbia but only a tip of the province, above the Ibar River, remained under Serb control. The UN took over administration of the province; a regional government took shape. Millions of dollars of aid were poured into building Kosovo institutions.

Among the U.S. and its allies in the war, this new peace came with a subtext: Kosovo would soon be separate and equal to Serbia. But that endgame never quite evolved. To some observers, Kosovo became a casualty of the Iraq war and, in time, a victim of circumstances.

After 2001, the Bush White House became riveted by its next war - the war on terror - and not the last. A divided European Union, larger and with members increasingly immune to U.S. dictates on foreign policy, lost both momentum and clarity over Kosovo.

Russia cut through the diplomatic malaise in recent months by seizing Kosovo for its own political advantage. The Russian maneuvers have unexpectedly breathed life back into the Kosovo conflict.

The UN proposal to wean Kosovo toward independence was submitted in March 2007 after 13 months of talks led by UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari. The Serbs immediately balked and the Russians threatened to use its UN veto in solidarity with the unhappy Serbs.



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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

---

But many observers, including prominent Serb analysts, saw other practical calculations behind Russia's professed loyalty: The Kremlin saw Kosovo as an opportunity to flex some surprising political muscle.

President Vladimir Putin was angered by U.S. plans to deploy a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe and wary of separatist demands inside his own borders. He also was keen to show, as an election season looms next year, that Russia had regained diplomatic luster under his watch.

Putin's pushback, in high-profile personal discussions with President Bush and through top negotiators, effectively drove wedges between once-reliable allies, observers said.

"The problem is that (Kosovo's uncertain status) was allowed to go on for eight years," said Mark Almond, a lecturer of modern history at Oxford University who tracks negotiations. "(European Union) cohesion has splintered, in part because there is a different - and larger - EU than there was in the 1990s. Russian influence has grown. . . . There is also a question of purpose: What kind of independence can Kosovo really have?"

"Everyone knows that Kosovo survives on EU funds plus money sent from abroad. How far is Europe willing to go to pay for Kosovo?" Almond said.

There is fear that December could be a violent month in Kosovo, with Albanians seen as particularly likely to unleash some kind of backlash over a delay in its status. But some Albanian commentators downplay the likelihood of retaliation even if the Dec. 10 deadline for talks passes.

"Albanians will never do something against the proposals of the United States," said Baton Haxhiu, a well-known journalist whose war reports earned accolades. "But I don't think the United States is willing to be in conflict with the EU or Russia either over Kosovo."

The influential think tank International Crisis Group last month called on the European Union to recognize Kosovo's independence. Washington has long supported the idea of supervised independence that would draw down the current UN peacekeeping mission in Pristina. Under the UN plan, some troops would remain, largely to protect the Serb minority, but European supervisors would replace UN administrators. Albanian Kosovars could fly their own flag and write an anthem and constitution; Serbs, particularly those in enclaves, would be guaranteed roles in government.

But in recent weeks, European countries including Spain, Greece, Slovakia and Romania have voiced trepidation. Inaction, the Brussels-based ICG warned, could mean "Kosovo would fracture." In ICG's worst-case scenario, "Serbs would reclaim



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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

---

land north of the Ibar River, Serbs elsewhere in Kosovo (would be) fleeing and eight years of internationally guided institution-building (would be) lost."

The ICG, like many observers, said current talks between the Serbs and Albanians are very likely to fail. Talks are scheduled again this month in London and then in New York. Those watching the gamesmanship inside the affected region see nothing on the horizon that suggests a good result.

"Kosovo has become an issue for everyone, and particularly those outside Kosovo," said historian Cedomir Antic of the Institute of Balkan Studies in Belgrade. "Both the United States and Russia are fighting over their own interests here. We are only a small chip in their international gamble."