



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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

---

November 21

## It's hard to imagine a worse outcome for the Balkans

By Simon Jenkins, The Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,2214357,00.html>

This one we can see coming. On December 10 the second round of so far abortive talks on Kosovan independence will expire, bringing to a crisis the unfinished last chapter of the west's 1990s "Balkanisation of the Balkans". In Brussels this week European ministers will make a final effort to forestall the decision of the newly elected Kosovan government to declare unilateral independence of Serbia. Since Serbia is equally determined not to grant it, irresistible force has met immovable object.

This is not a clash of tinpot dictators but one of democratic outcomes. Kosovo's independence is the clear wish of its electors, just as it is not the wish of Serbia's. The latter have long regarded Kosovo as part of their emotional and historic integrity. The auguries presage a return to conflict.

The instinct of British politicians and media is to declare that something must be done. It is usually then to do nothing and then something messy, and finally to say that something should have been done earlier as it would not have been so messy. This is what happened successively in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. In each case militant separatists were encouraged, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to seek independence from whatever regime ruled in Belgrade, which they duly obtained with considerable shedding of blood.

Faced not just with the break up of Tito's wider Yugoslavia but with the defection of the core provinces of Bosnia, Montenegro and Kosovo, Serbs under Milosevic tried to hold them by force. They treated the Kosovans so cruelly that the outside world was moved to intervene. While most countries, including America, tut-tutted and for three months dropped bombs, probably hastening the carnage in Kosovo, Tony Blair rightly divined that only a ground invasion could reverse a humanitarian outrage. In this he was successful.

But what did he expect to happen next? As in Afghanistan and Iraq, Britain is, like the US, inclined to shoot first and plan afterwards. In Kosovo the outcome was to reward "terrorist" separatists with a country of their own, albeit smaller than Wales. Men who, were they Serbs, would be hauled before a war crimes tribunal are now hailed in the west as heroes.

For eight years Kosovo has enjoyed de facto autonomy under the protection of 17,000 Nato troops. These have allowed the regime to "reverse-cleanse" the province of half its Serbs, including virtually all the 40,000 who once lived in the capital, Pristina. There are barely 200,000 left, just 10% of the population. Although the new prime minister, the former guerrilla Hashim Thaci, declares that "Kosovo is ready for



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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

---

independence", he cannot mean it. Kosovo is a Nato protectorate under UN administration, with more aid per head than any state in Asia or Africa. What Thaci wants is not independence but the luxuriant post-intervention dependency enjoyed by Bosnia, Sierra Leone and the embattled regimes in Baghdad and Kabul.

To this the Serbs remain implacably opposed. Even moderate opponents of Milosevic's reign regard the enforced dismemberment of their nation as excessive punishment for the barbarities committed by the Serb army in 1998. Nor will they let it rest. Like the Basque country for Spain and the Falklands for Argentina, Kosovo will always be a cause celebre for Serbia.

Independence for Kosovo clearly accords with current realpolitik, but realpolitik is seldom the end of the matter in the Balkans. Russia says it would veto Kosovo's acceptance into the UN, and to that extent Kosovo would be an illegitimate state.

Nor is Russia's attitude purely due to Slav solidarity. Moscow is understandably averse to western troops coming to the aid of separatist movements wherever there is insurrection or cries of genocide, least of all within bombing distance of the Caucasus. Russia is supported in this view by Spain, Greece and Cyprus, each with separatist problems. And what does Britain, so keen on Balkan partition, say to the Pashtuns or the Kurds when they demand independence?

These are not diplomatic niceties. Already guerrillas of the shadowy Albanian National Army are reportedly roaming the Serbia/Kosovo border, partly financed by a massive heroin trade. Already Serbian militias are arming against them, preparing to defend their compatriots under siege inside Kosovo.

At best, resumed hostilities would mean further savage ethnic cleansing and a repartition of Kosovo. At worst, it would mean a long-running border war, with western troops sucked into defending Kosovan irregulars and Russia into defending Serbia's sovereignty. It is hard to imagine a worse outcome to Britain's glorious "mission accomplished".

Any visitor to the Balkans soon learns that what in Westminster seems a landscape of black and white, goodies and baddies, is in truth all grey. Britain has been party to the military partition of a sovereign European state at the instigation of its separatists, albeit with justice and local majority opinion on their side. Such self-determinations are never straightforward, as the English know in their dealings with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The prospect of war has commentators screaming that "something must be done". I have not read one sensible answer to the question: what? Had Nato negotiated some sort of delegated sovereignty for Kosovo with the post-Milosevic government in Belgrade, Pristina hardliners might have been faced down and Serbia's notional integrity preserved.



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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

---

That day has passed. It is easy to "hope" that Thaci and the Serbian prime minister, Vojislav Kostunica, might see the virtue of compromise and agree to go their separate ways under some sort of UN "sovereignty umbrella" (once proposed for the Falklands). But with Russia behind the Serbs, and Europe and America behind the Kosovans, why should leaders in either Belgrade or Pristina risk the wrath of their electorates by compromising? Once steeped in such dependency, no one feels any pressure to back down.

Kosovo is a western protectorate. There is no pressing need for de facto autonomy to become de jure independence. Pristina has as much autonomy as it can use and should be ordered to tone down its senseless confrontation and leave Serbia a shred of pride - on pain of a genuine independence it would certainly not like. In any resumed war, Kosovo would not be a winner.