



# KOSOVO

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## Partitions within partitions

By Ivan Eland, Washington Times

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080228/COMMENTARY/269223968>

Kosovo, the Albanian-dominated Serbian province that has enjoyed autonomy under United Nations tutelage since the NATO-Serb war of 1999, has declared its independence. The United States rapidly recognized the new independent state.

Some fear violence. The Serbs and their Russian allies who back them both refused to recognize Kosovar independence. The Serbs could attempt to use violence or subversion against the new state. On the other side, the restive Albanians — who comprise 90 percent of the Kosovo's population — could oppress the 10 percent Serb minority. But neither scenario is inevitable.

Historically, when only a small ethnic or religious minority lives in a majority area, there usually is much less violence because the minority isn't seen as a threat. Only when a large minority is present do tensions typically boil over and fighting ensue.

For example, the 1921 partition of majority-Protestant Northern Ireland from predominantly Catholic Ireland resulted in decades of violence in the North, because the large Catholic minority (more than one-third of the population) was seen as a threat to the Protestant majority, and vice versa. In contrast, Protestants are less than 10 percent of the population of Ireland itself and have lived in peace with their Catholic neighbors.

Although some violence has occurred between the predominant Kosovar Albanians and the minority Serbs in the province, for the long term the number of Serbs is probably small enough to allay most Albanian fears. Besides, the international community has pressured the Kosovar Albanians to provide substantial security guarantees for the Serb minority.

A greater issue may be that many Serbs regard Kosovo as the cradle of their civilization and many Serbian religious and historical shrines are located there, including Gazimestan, site of an important 1389 battle with the Turks.

History shows that nationalities are often much less willing to trade off or substitute for land with such "intangible" value than they might be for economically or strategically valuable land. The Serbs may feel compelled to fight over these sites.

One possible solution would be a partition within a partition: Just as Kosovo was carved out of Serbia, the lands containing the Serbian shrines could be carved out of



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Kosovo and given back to the Serbs. That may happen anyway if Serb areas secede formally from the new state and return to Serbia or are governed de facto from Belgrade.

For understandable reasons, the Albanian majority rejects this idea because it wants the largest country possible. Less understandable has been the cold reception of the United States, which seems more concerned about playing hardball with Serbia's Russian allies than defusing the potentially explosive future situation.

The most stable long-term solution to the Kosovo problem is to adjust the new country's border so Serbia can retain some — if not most — of the historical and religious sites considered central to Serbian nationhood.

Although the new state of Kosovo would be slightly smaller, it would be more secure and wouldn't have to rely on the United States and NATO for protection. Such a settlement also might prevent a future Serbia-Kosovo war — which could escalate to a confrontation between the United States and Russia. But the Serbs might also have to compromise on which historical or religious sites would be reabsorbed into Serbia. Less important sites might have to be ceded to Kosovo.

This partition within a partition would give Kosovo the best chance of a long-term stable relationship with its powerful Serbian neighbor. As in the Middle East, giving up land for peace is the right path to long-term stability and security. Though dispassionate analysts can define fairly well where a political settlement would end up, cooling red-hot ethno-religious animosity is much more difficult.

A start down that road in Kosovo would be to abandon the West's objections to the "partition inside a partition" option.

*Ivan Eland is a senior fellow at the Independent Institute and author of "The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed" and "Putting 'Defense' Back into U.S. Defense Policy."*