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The United States Should Welcome a New Era for Kosovo

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After Kosovo's seven years as a U.N.-administered protectorate, the time has come to free its people from the deadweight of international trusteeship and determine its final status. U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari recently proposed to the U.N. Security Council that Kosovo become independent of Serbia. This proposal, which includes firm guarantees for the protection of Kosovo's Serb minority, deserves the support of the Bush Administration, the European Union, and the NATO alliance. It promises to pave the way for the establishment of a fully democratic, and ultimately stable and prosperous, nation-state.

The continuation of the status quo is simply untenable. Ethnic Albanians make up 90 percent of Kosovo's population, the vast majority of whom wish to be independent and whose leadership have supported the Ahtisaari plan. As Lady Margaret Thatcher said in 1999, "It would be both cruel and stupid to expect the Albanian Kosovans now to return to live under any form of Serbian rule."¹

The U.N. operation in Kosovo (UNMIK) costs a staggering \$240 million a year and has fostered a debilitating culture of dependency.² Without clarity on Kosovo's final status, meaningful reform and progress will not occur. It is now time for Kosovo to have a clear vision of its future for the first time in nearly a decade.

A Security Guarantee. Kosovo will enjoy stability and security only when its final status is settled. While independence may eventually achieve stability and security, the international community must

continue to guarantee both in the short term. International supervision will be necessary to ensure that Kosovo's transition occurs without Serbian pressure or aggression. In the longer term, the United States, through NATO, should offer a security guarantee to Kosovo to deter any belligerence by Belgrade. By recognizing Kosovo's independence and guaranteeing its security, the world community will send a powerful message that Kosovo's sovereignty will be protected and that interference will be met with repercussions.

At the same time, by inviting Serbia into its Partnership for Peace program, NATO is using the carrot as well as the stick. Through NATO, the United States must continue to encourage Serbia to move toward integration into the Euro-Atlantic framework. While it is highly unlikely that Serbia will accept Kosovo's independence in the short term,³ Belgrade can at least be persuaded to take the path of least resistance.

The Administration should also send a clear message to Moscow that it will not tolerate any Russian interference. Moscow's concern for the protection of Serbian minorities in an independent Kosovo is specifically addressed in Ahtisaari's plan, designed to prevent a repeat of the appalling ethnic violence of

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March 2004. Ethnic Serbs will hold broad rights to guarantee their position within a multi-ethnic democracy. If ethnic violence is to be avoided once again, Kosovo's status must be determined sooner rather than later. Further sclerosis or indecisiveness will only encourage destabilizing elements both inside and outside of Kosovo.

Moscow may seek to wield its veto power at the U.N. Security Council over this issue. Washington, London, and Paris must make every diplomatic effort to avoid this, assuring Russia that Kosovo is a special case and will not set a precedent in the region. While Kosovo could be granted independence through a series of bilateral recognitions, the Security Council route is preferable, and the absence of a Russian veto would send Serbia a potent message that resolution of the Kosovo question must occur through peaceful means.

The Need for Foreign Investment. Kosovo can no longer rely on international aid for its economic development. Certainty about its political climate is critical to fostering investment and growth.⁴ With increased stability and predictability, Kosovo can expect greater economic development, which is essential to its future. Sustainable economic development will also reduce chronic unemployment, currently estimated at 35 to 50 percent.⁵

Kosovo already has the foundations of a sound market economy.⁶ Kosovo's membership in the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) has created solid regional trade and investment opportunities, with access to a market of 20 million people.⁷ Both the European Union and the United States must seek to build on this foundation.

With its vast single market, the European Union can both incentivize Serbia and aid Kosovo's economic development. Holding out the promise of market access, free trade, and full accession, the European Union should negotiate with both Serbia and Kosovo to actively encourage conclusion of a deal on Kosovo's final status.

The United States should show its commitment with a free trade agreement, either bilaterally with Kosovo or with CEFTA as a whole. As stated in President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy, free trade is an important tool in advancing American strategic interests.⁸

Conclusion. Less than a decade ago, Kosovo was a war-torn entity facing a bleak future. But with the unanimous support of the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, NATO, the United States, the Western Members of the Kosovo Contact Group, the United Nations, and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, U.N. Special Envoy Ahtisaari has managed to unite most of the international community on Kosovo's future. Neighboring countries, including Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bulgaria, are also broadly supportive. This is a major achievement.

While it is likely that the final agreement will be subject to intense negotiation and review before it is agreed later this year, the principle of Kosovo's status as an independent nation must remain paramount. As *The Economist* noted, independence is now inevitable, but the question is whether the process will be "controlled" or "uncontrolled."⁹ Inaction would guarantee failure at achieving a controlled outcome.

1. Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to the International Free Enterprise dinner," April 20, 1999, at www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=108381.
2. United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, "UNMIK Fact Sheet," October 2006.
3. The Serbian Parliament adopted a resolution rejecting Ahtisaari's plan for Kosovo's independence on February 14, 2007.
4. Levent Koro, "Kosovo's Economic Outlook in Development & Transition," United Nations Development Program Kosovo, December 2006
5. UNMIK Fact Sheet.
6. Levent Koro, "Kosovo's Economic Outlook."
7. UNMIK Fact Sheet.
8. National Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2002), at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html.
9. "Veto Threats: Kosovo and Russia," *The Economist* (U.S. Edition), March 24, 2007.

The cost of Kosovo's reconstruction and recovery from June 1999 through 2004 was a whopping \$2.76 billion, and more than 16,000 NATO troops are still deployed there.¹⁰ For this significant investment to produce returns, the West must proceed with the option that has the greatest chance of achieving peace, progress, and stability, as well as the least risk. No plan will be without its risks, and it would be foolish to assume immediate success,

but after 14 months of negotiations and the exhaustion of other options, Ahtisaari's plan offers Kosovo at least a chance for an enduring future.

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10. UNMIK Fact Sheet.