

Kosovo train-wreck warnings

By James Lyons

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It is expected that early on in 2008, probably February, the United Nations-supervised Albanian Muslim Administration of the Serbian province of Kosovo will make a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI).

The United States has said it is prepared to recognize Kosovo, despite the objections of the Serbian government and more importantly, despite the fact that Russia, a key ally of Serbia, does not want Kosovo independence.

While unclear, it is likely a number of European countries starting with the United Kingdom, France and Germany will follow Washington's lead. Several other countries, notably Spain, Cyprus, Romania, Slovakia and Greece say they will not recognize Kosovo's UDI. The UDI would be undertaken without approval from the U.N. Security Council because of the vigorous objection of Russia and China, who claim no sovereign state's territory can be detached without its consent. Further, as pointed out by George Friedman in his Stratfor article, there was an absolute consensus that post-World War II borders of Europe were sacrosanct. Therefore, no borders would shift.

Most ominously, Russia with its newfound resurgence under Vladimir Putin's guidance has stated its willingness to support Serbia against what they would consider an illegal occupation of Serbian territory. The current Serbian government is divided on whether it would be prepared to use force to protect its citizens in a breakaway Kosovo, but there have been clear indications that Moscow is prepared to provide military assistance if Serbia requests it.

A government crisis in Belgrade would certainly unfold in the wake of a Kosovo UDI and U.S. recognition. This certainly would solve Serbia's dilemma about requesting Russia's offer of aid.

As described in a recent article in Stratfor, Washington and Moscow seem to blunder into what is described as an "asymmetrical" crisis. The U.S. seems intent on letting the Serbian province of Kosovo break away and apparently sees the issue of no great importance.

Russia on the other hand, sees the situation very differently. Moscow has warned it will not accept independence for Kosovo. Mr. Putin has put his prestige on the line. He cannot afford to back down as Boris Yeltsin did. And therein lies the crisis.

This is an "optional" crisis. We cannot overlook the fact that the dominant element in the local Albanian administration are commanders from the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army that have known ties to the global jihad movement and organized crime. Further, more than 300 mosques have been built in Kosovo, funded mainly by Saudi Arabia where the radical teachings of the Wahhabi sect are promoted.

From a strategic viewpoint, we are endorsing formation of a "Taliban-like" state in the very heart of Europe. It is difficult to see what advantages exist for the U.S. to force a resolution for Kosovo, especially one that threatens to unleash instability in the troubled region, as well as a broader political showdown with Russia, and China too. Not only do we have enough

serious issues with those countries, over Iran, Taiwan and North Korea, the U.S. can ill afford with our ongoing efforts in the Middle East to commit additional military forces to a new confrontation in the Balkans.

With an unemployment rate of up to 70 percent, no one who has been to Kosovo, as I have, can doubt we are looking at the creation of a failed, nonviable rogue state. This, notwithstanding claims by the House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman that somehow Muslim-led governments will embrace the United States for supporting creation of a Muslim state in the very heart of Europe. They will embrace us the same as Iran did after our elimination of their archenemy Saddam Hussein.

There is no reason for the secretary of state to be beholden to the Holbrooke Cabal in the State Department. A recent op-ed by Richard Holbrooke, President Clinton's former ambassador to the U.N., urged the U.S. to move forward with Kosovo's UDI — a position also embraced by Hillary Clinton's campaign. Oddly, even Mr. Holbrook concedes that supporting Kosovo's UDI would set the U.S. toward a "train wreck" with Russia.

Before the Kosovo UDI turns into what the Russian Foreign Ministry has called "crossing the Rubicon" and a possible "uncontrolled crisis," someone in the Bush administration needs to call for a long overdue reassessment of our Kosovo policy. America has much more important business to take care of that we cannot afford to jeopardize over a seemingly minor dispute to vindicate a Clinton agenda item.

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