

“Independent” Kosovo: Anatomy of a Western protectorate

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“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

With these words, the Second Continental Congress issued the United States Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. It declared the cause impelling the American people towards separation to be the attempt by the King of Great Britain to seek “the establishment of an absolute Tyranny.”

On February 17, 2008, in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, the province’s Assembly also declared independence. Their document could not be more different from the world-changing rallying cry of the US declaration with its proclamation “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

In a document servile to the Western powers, their institutions and representatives—and written in language meant as an appeal to faceless bureaucrats in the US State Department and European Commission—Kosovo’s leaders accept without question its status as a protectorate governed by a foreign overlord. In much the same way as neighbouring Bosnia has been ruled for the last 10 years, all the major decisions about the country’s economy, public spending, social programmes, security and trade will remain in the hands of a NATO/United Nations/European Union occupation administration.

In one sentence, we are told that Kosovo is now an “independent and sovereign state” that “reflects the will of our people”; in the next, that this is in “full accordance with the recommendations of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and his Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement.” Former Finnish president Ahtisaari submitted his plan for “supervised” independence in March 2007 but met opposition from Serbia and Russia, which rightly saw it as a contravention of international law. Although Ahtisaari’s proposal was withdrawn, it still drove the timetable for independence and now forms the backbone of the declaration.

In the declaration, which runs to just 27 paragraphs, his name appears eight times, including:

* We accept fully the obligations for Kosovo contained in the Ahtisaari Plan, and welcome the framework it proposes to guide Kosovo in the years ahead.

* The Constitution shall incorporate all relevant principles of the Ahtisaari Plan.

* We invite and welcome an international civilian presence to supervise our implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan, and a European Union-led rule of law mission.

* We also invite and welcome the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to retain the leadership role of the international military presence in Kosovo and to implement responsibilities assigned to it under UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and the Ahtisaari Plan, until such time as

Kosovo institutions are capable of assuming these responsibilities

* Kosovo shall have its international borders as set forth in Annex VIII of the Ahtisaari Plan,

And just in case, the last paragraph repeats, “We hereby affirm, clearly, specifically, and irrevocably, that Kosovo shall be legally bound to comply with the provisions contained in this Declaration, including, especially, the obligations for it under the Ahtisaari Plan.”

From the start, Ahtisaari’s plan insists its 15 articles and 12 annexes “will take precedence over all other legal provisions in Kosovo” and details how a “future international presence” will enforce them. Many of its provisions have already been brought in under the UNMIK regime, and the document merely sets them down formally.

The plans tells the Kosovar people that their newly “independent” country will have “an open market economy with free competition” and will “establish with the European Commission, and in close cooperation with the International Monetary Fund, a fiscal surveillance mechanism.”

Recent reports show how the Kosovar economy is already dominated by international capital. By the end of 2006, there were six banks, two of which were under full foreign ownership and which controlled more than 70 percent of total bank assets. It was a similar story in the insurance sector, where six out of nine companies are mainly in foreign ownership and manage 70 percent of insurance assets.

Ahtisaari’s plan also demanded further privatisation of publicly owned enterprises (POEs) and socially owned enterprises (SOEs) by the Kosovo Trust Agency (KTA). The international members of the Board of Directors have the power to suspend decisions of the KTA, and the two largest international donors to the KTA have the right to attend meetings as observers.

Already, the KTA has sold off hundreds of POEs and SOEs whose origins lie in the Tito regime.

By June 2007, the KTA had transferred 510 SOEs to new companies (NewCos) and sold them off to investors in a competitive bidding process. Many workers have been sacked or forced to accept minimal compensation, and the whole process has been mired in accusations of corruption.

The Ahtisaari plan also prescribed the structure of Kosovo institutions, most of which will have to have members of the “international community” sitting in them. The government will consist of 12 ministers and the Assembly of 120 members apportioned by ethnicity in a situation where many in the minority population have been driven out or live behind barricades and razor wire. There will be a 21-member Commission to draft a constitution and a Constitutional Court composed of nine judges, three of whom will be appointed by the president of the European Court of Human Rights. The Kosovo Judicial Council will have 13 members, 2 of whom will be from the “international community” and oversee the appointment of judges. A new Kosovo Security Force (KSF) will be established consisting of no more than 2,500 lightly armed active members and 800 reserve members whose main job will be restricted to

crisis response, explosive ordnance disposal, and civil protection. Kosovo will also establish a Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to regulate civil aviation activities.

Acting as Kosovo overlord will be an International Civilian Representative (ICR), “double-hatted” as the EU Special Representative (EUSR), who will be appointed by an International Steering Group (ISG) comprising France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, European Commission, NATO and Russia. The ISG will have sole power to decide when the ICR’s work is done. Two days before Kosovo declared independence, Pieter Feith, a former political advisor to NATO in Bosnia-Herzegovina, was appointed ICR/EUSR and Fletcher Burton, former US consul general in Leipzig, Germany, was appointed his deputy.

The ICR has powers to enforce the Ahtisaari plan, including the authority to overturn laws adopted by Kosovo authorities and ratify the appointment of public officials and remove them. In addition, the ICR will appoint directly certain state officials including the auditor-general, the director-general of the Customs Service, the director of tax administration, the director of the Treasury, and the managing director of the Central Banking Authority of Kosovo. The Assembly may not formally approve the Constitution until the ICR has certified it.

The Ahtisaari plan also called for a European Security and Defence Policy Mission now created as the Eulex mission to “monitor, mentor and advise on all areas related to the rule of law” and a NATO-led International Military Presence (IMP), which will absorb the 16,000 NATO troops currently in Kosovo. The IMP has the power to “use all necessary force where required and without further sanction, interference or permission.” The IMP will provide protection to the Serb minority and religious monuments, oversee the formation of the KSF and dissolution of the Kosovo Protection Corps, largely a fire-fighting force composed of former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. The IMP will be able to take over CAA functions and re-establish military control over the airspace if necessary.

The plan also dictates the structure and powers of municipalities, educational institutes and the police force. It also demands Kosovo pay its share of the external debt, and if an agreement cannot be reached, the ISG will nominate an international arbitrator whose “debt allocation shall be irrevocable.”

Politicians and officials from Kosovo and the West have declared that all this is necessary to ensure a peaceful transition to independence and provide a stable environment for investment and membership of the European Union. However, the new ICR/EUSR Feith told the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, “Expectations are high.... People expect that their quality of life and economic circumstances will improve rapidly” and warned, “Neither the EU nor the Americans will be able to fulfil their high expectations.”

Kosovan economist Ibrahim Rexhepi adds, “We must get rid of the illusion that independence will bring tonnes of dollars into our streets.... The economic crisis is likely to continue. To restart the metallurgy, food industry and energy (sectors) takes time and a lot of investment.”

Even to dignify Kosovo with the term country, let alone one that is independent, makes a mockery of the term. Kosovo has a population of about 2 million people and covers an area of 10,887 square kilometres, or 4,203 square miles. It has one of the most underdeveloped economies in Europe, with a per capita income estimated at US\$2,328 in 2004.

The US state of Connecticut would make a more viable country. It is bigger, is not landlocked and has a population of 3.4 million. Its per capita income was US\$47,819 in 2005, more than 20 times that of Kosovo.

Kosovo is almost entirely dependent on production outside its borders. It exports less per capita than any other country in Europe—just €77 million. Although analysts have made much of an increase in private sector activity, non-housing private investment stood at just €284 million in

2006, and it is dependent on scrap-metal recovery and geared to satisfying the consumer needs of the international officials and Kosovan elite.

After nine years of UNMIK occupation, little has improved for the vast majority of Kosovo’s population, and in many respects it has worsened. Nearly 80 percent of the population have experienced a decline in living standards since 2003. More than half of Kosovo’s inhabitants are unemployed, and real wages are stagnant. Those that have work receive an average €220 (about US\$320) per month. More than a third of the population live on less than €1.50 per day. Attempts to raise pensions and wages have been blocked. Those that are better off rely on remittances from relatives working abroad. Poverty is so widespread and all-encompassing that, somewhat ironically, the province has the lowest levels of inequality in Europe. But the gap between the richest and poorest is growing.

Little wonder that there was a record low turnout in last year’s elections—43 percent, down from 80 percent in elections soon after the Kosovo war—indicating a staggering decrease in support for the political parties installed after 1999.

Back in 1999, after the Western powers backed by various liberals and radicals had thrown their support behind demands for self-determination for Kosovo and the NATO bombing of Serbia, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in “After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War,” “The bombing of Yugoslavia has exposed the real relations that exist between imperialism and small nations.”

The statement continued, “The great indictments of imperialism written in the first years of the twentieth century—those of Hobson, Lenin, Luxemburg and Hilferding—read like contemporary documents. Economically, small nations are at the mercy of the lending agencies and financial institutions of the major imperialist powers. In the realm of politics, any attempt to assert their independent interests brings with it the threat of devastating military retaliation. With increasing frequency small states are being stripped of their national sovereignty, compelled to accept foreign military occupation, and submit to forms of rule that are, when all is said and done, of an essentially colonialist character.”

Nearly a decade later, this prognosis has proven correct. Not only has Kosovo’s creation been carried out in violation of any concept of national sovereignty for Serbia, but in no sense can what has been created be considered a sovereign entity in its own right. Rather, Kosovo is being used as a pawn in the Great Power rivalries between the US, Europe and Russia, with terrible consequences for all the peoples of the Balkans, irrespective of their ethnicity.



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