

Redraw the Map, Stop the Killing

By John J. Mearsheimer
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President Clinton is still clinging to his position that NATO should accept nothing less than a settlement giving autonomy to the Albanian Kosovars inside Serb-dominated Yugoslavia. But this goal is not only unattainable, it's also undesirable. Does anyone seriously believe the Albanian Kosovars and Serbs can live together again?

Instead, NATO should pursue a settlement that partitions the province, creating an independent Albanian Kosovar state. This state would control most of current Kosovo, while the Serbs would retain part of northeastern Kosovo. It could remain independent or unite with Albania if it chose.

Autonomy is a dead letter because the Serbs have shown their attitude toward cohabitation by their savage ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo. Moreover, the 535,000 Albanian refugees who have fled Kosovo since mid-March will hardly be willing to return to a province inside Serbia, whether autonomous or not, after the cruelty they just suffered.

Finally, the United States would have to station sizable forces in Kosovo indefinitely to help NATO police any autonomy agreement. But we cannot afford to tie our military down doing such police work. The world is full of civil wars, and the whole American military would soon be committed to peacekeeping.

The history of Yugoslavia since 1991 shows that ethnic separation breeds peace, while failure to separate breeds war. Slovenia seceded from Yugoslavia with little violence in 1991 and has since been at peace with itself and its neighbors. The key is its homogeneity: 91 percent of the people are Slovenes; less than 3 percent are Serbs. Croatia fought a bloody war of secession from 1991 to 1995, finally resolved when it expelled most of its sizable Serb minority at gunpoint.

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This expulsion set a poor example for how groups should separate, but it did bring an end to the Serb-Croat conflict. Separation did not end the deep hatred between Croats and Serbs, but it did stop the violence between them.

Bosnia saw fierce fighting among Croats, Muslims and Serbs from 1992 to 1995, then an uneasy truce under the Dayton accords. Dayton created a confederated Bosnia in which the three groups were supposed to live together. This has failed, quietly but quite completely. Few Bosnian refugees have returned to their homes, and Bosnia still has no functioning central government. If the large NATO peacekeeping force in Bosnia were withdrawn, fighting would soon explode again.

Now Kosovo is consumed by a war that stems from hatreds born of the great cruelties that Albanians and Serbs have inflicted on each other in

Partition of the Balkans is the only way out.

the past. This war could have been avoided if they had been separated by political partition at some earlier point, when Slobodan Milosevic might have been more amenable to the idea.

Under what circumstances would the Serbs accept such a partition today? The NATO bombing since March 24 has fired Serb nationalism to a fever pitch, stiffening Serb resistance to any compromise. And the bombing campaign alone gives NATO too little coercive leverage to compel the Serbs to accept partition, since bombing by itself cannot defeat Serb forces in Kosovo. Serbia always has the option of hunkering down and absorbing NATO bombing until NATO publics tire of it.

But Serbia may accept partition if NATO offers it carrots as well as the stick. To entice the Serbs, NATO should offer a "grand bargain" that partitions Bosnia as well as Kosovo — moving Serbia toward its dream of a homogeneous greater Serbia.

Under this grand bargain Serbia

would concede most of Kosovo to the Albanians. In return, the Serbs would be compensated with a portion of northeast Kosovo that includes many Serbian historical sites. Serbia would also get the eastern portion of Bosnia, which is now populated mainly by Serbs. The rest of Bosnia would be transformed into an independent Bosnian Muslim state, save for the Herzegovina region, which would become part of Croatia. Finally, NATO would lift all economic sanctions against Yugoslavia if the Serbs took the deal.

NATO would also need to put heavy pressure on the Serbs to get them to accept the breakup of Kosovo. In addition to bombing, NATO must also arm and train the Kosovo Liberation Army, so the Serbs are faced with the prospect of unending warfare in Kosovo unless they accept partition.

This is not a perfect solution by any means, but it solves several important problems. First, it provides the Albanian Kosovars with their own homeland, where they can live free of Serbian terror. Second, it solves the refugee problem. Third, it requires no American troops in Kosovo, since the Albanians and Serbs would be living separate lives, and the Albanians would have guns to protect themselves. Fourth, partitioning Bosnia would allow the United States to pull its troops out of Bosnia, thus removing that albatross of permanent occupation from around America's neck.

Some warn that an independent Kosovo would spark secessionist violence among Albanians living next door in Macedonia. But an independent Kosovo would more likely dampen than spark violence in Macedonia. The main trigger for war in Macedonia will be the presence of a large, radicalized Albanian refugee population there.

The solution is to achieve a settlement that returns the Albanian Kosovar refugees to their homes. Only a partition offers such a settlement, and hence is more likely to pacify Macedonia than to inflame it.

Still, it may be that peace cannot be maintained in Macedonia. Macedonia's Slavic majority discriminates against the large Albanian minority, which makes up 30 percent of the population. If the Slavs refuse to share more equally with the Albanians, violence is inevitable. To forestall this, NATO should consider calling for a plebiscite to determine whether the Albanians want to remain in Macedonia. If not, Macedonia should also be partitioned. This is feasible because the Albanians of Macedonia are concentrated in western Macedonia, next to Kosovo and Albania.

Partition is an ugly formula for ending wars. It destroys communities and violates individual rights. It forces minorities that are trapped behind new borders to leave their homes. But there are only two other options in Kosovo: endless ethnic war or allowing the Serbs to win the war and cleanse Kosovo of Albanians permanently. Partition is clearly better than these unacceptable choices. If we shrink from it, then we merely make the catastrophe in the Balkans even more devastating. □