



## **Kosovo, NATO's Failure**

**(Published in ABC on February 23, 2008)**

**Florentino Portero**

**In Commentary n° 907**

**March 24, 2008**

If there has been one thing well done regarding the management of the Kosovo crisis, it has been time management. The United States was not in a hurry; it clearly made its move; it reached its objective without too much resistance. Nevertheless, this does not hide the truly relevant fact that NATO's member states have failed in Kosovo; the intervention has not reached its objectives and now it all comes down to withdrawal of the troops as soon as possible.

The persecution of Kosovo Albanians by Milosevic's Serbian government generated a wave of solidarity among Europeans. The governments of the Old Continent felt, once again, helpless to react, and, once again, they had to go with their heads hanging, begging Washington for military intervention. Neither

Clinton nor the Congress wished to get involved in a conflict alien to America's national interests. If in the end, they did, it was to preserve NATO's cohesion, and to try to curb a policy gone adrift that could end in a confrontation between two member states of the Alliance – Greece and Turkey, if the crisis were to spill over into Macedonia.

From the Rambouillet talks until now, the United States has hinted that independence was a reasonable option. After all, they are an old colony that rebelled against its metropolis. America feels empathy for "oppressed peoples," and has an old tendency to think that if one equates states with nations, the result is more stability. It encouraged the redesign of European borders after World War I, and with it, the way was paved

for World War II. Meanwhile it removed itself in a way that left the League of Nations to suffer total meltdown. Bush wants to shelve this problem and thinks that the easiest option is territorial dismemberment. Serbia is responsible for what happened so it must pay. Senior State Department officials have justified what has happened with two arguments: the coexistence between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is difficult and a great majority of the latter wanted independence. Perfect! What will they do when the Kurds use those same two arguments to justify their declaration of independence from Iraq? What will they do when Turkey invades Kurdistan to prevent a Kurdish uprising in its own territory?

Europeans always bear in mind what happened after World War I; playing border redrawing is not among their hobbies. Yet they find themselves trapped feeling a sickening sense of helplessness due to their cowardice, but most of all, due to their lack of values. They know perfectly well, what they should have done: Make it clear to Kosovo Albanians from the very beginning that the commitment to their security was linked to the defense of Serbia's territorial integrity. That attitude would have culminated in a clash with UÇK guerrillas – something that should have been accepted as part of their commitment to military deployment. However, Europeans are not even capable of that. They submit themselves, fearing chronic confrontation, and choose to meekly follow while America dictates.

The same Europeans who were outraged by the United States' intervention in

Iraq, without a Security Council resolution explicitly authorizing it, are the ones that now consider recognizing Kosovo's independence. The segregation of a Serbian sovereign territory without the Parliament of Belgrade's consent, without EU endorsement, without a U.N. Security Council resolution, and against another resolution of this same body establishing as one of the international forces' objectives in Kosovo to guarantee Serbia's territorial integrity. Talk about being consistent! Of course, the same ones did not feel the need of a resolution either when they begged Washington to intervene militarily in Kosovo – an exceptional situation that disrupted the tiresome and sterile anti-American discourse that is the pure expression of European impotence and decadence.

It should come as no surprise that neighboring nations, or those with serious problems of national cohesion such as Spain, have refused to follow that road. Kosovo's independence does not solve a problem; it rather heightens tension both inside and outside the Balkans.

We already know it is possible to declare the independence of a territory without the consent of the sovereign state or the Security Council. We also know that moderate and parliamentary strategies do not work. Rugoba tried and he did not get anywhere. In contrast, violence sells. The UÇK scares and becomes a relevant actor to negotiate with. Just as Zapatero negotiates the territorial organization of the state with ETA and Moratinos vindicates the role of Hamas or Hezbollah. Since relativism has taken us to relinquish principles and values, and anything goes, how is one not to

acknowledge the fact that violent actors wield power? There are those who dare to express the nonsensical notion that Kosovo's independence is just an exception and will not serve as a precedent!

Everything was so clear; that is how it was depicted in the Security Council resolutions. The safeguard of Kosovo Albanians' rights did not have to alter the borders. It was not about solving the Balkan crisis by falling once more into the temptation to constitute states with a homogenous population. Yet the United States and the great European nations did so. What will happen now with the Republic of Srpska, the Serbian autonomy in Bosnia? What arguments can deny its annexation to Serbia? Kosovo's viability is doubtful. It hardly has two million inhabitants; it suffers from a low cultural level, subsistence farming, untapped mining, and two main sources of income: international contributions and smuggling. If it is about giving Kosovo Albanians the chance to be themselves, what will we do if they decide to join Albania? What arguments could we use to block the legal act of two sovereign states?

The Serbian population is experiencing humiliation with unavoidable anxiety. Not only has their territory been taken away forcefully, but in addition, they have to brave the threats of the European Union - their inevitable future, their door to development and modernization. They channel their tension into the streets, expressing it with fires and other violent acts that only worsen the situation.

©2008 Translated by Miryam Lindberg

Russia takes advantage of the crisis, and sees it as an opportunity to divide Europe. It emphasizes the unjustified behavior of the Alliance member states before the rest of the international community. The threats are still on. Moldova's Transdnier region or Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia territories - all of them with Russian majorities - could declare segregation from their respective states to join the Motherland. What legitimacy would we have to condemn those actions? Russia has even threatened to use force in order to defend Serbian interests. If Russia did, wouldn't it be done under the protection of both the U.N. Charter and Security Council resolutions?

NATO accepted the challenge to stabilize the Balkans after the disintegration of Yugoslavia; it has demonstrated that even a small crisis as Kosovo's is just too much to stomach. NATO's presence was for the purpose of avoiding ethnic cleansing against Kosovo Albanians. Instead, it has become the guarantor of ethnic cleansing against Serbs. What can we expect of this Cold War remnant in the Afghan campaign - being a full war fought by rejecting it is a war, and with the refusal of some of its members to fight, keeping the troops hidden in their quarters while the Taliban guerrilla takes over the ground?

Neither the Union nor the Alliance has measured up in this occasion. The Balkan crisis is open, and its consequences remain to be seen.