

Discussion on “Kosovo Final Status Talks”

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Kosovo Final Status talks.**

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(First ten minutes missing)

Ambassador Wisner: ... No Kosovoer, after the horror of the 1990's, 10,000 Kosovo-ers slaughtered, houses and property destroyed—no one is going back down this old road. So, I argue, there never was a choice in the beginning. There was a question as to whether Kosovo would be independent in an orderly United Nations, overseen and blessed international community, overseen formula, or whether Kosovo would move on and find her own way, independence, under much more chaotic circumstances. That was the choice we faced when the negotiation began 15 months ago, began under the grey skies of March 2004 when Kosovars, Kosovo-Albanians and Serbs went at each other's throats. We were reminded, the international community, could no longer hold Kosovo in trust for an indefinite, undefined period. I would argue beyond that today, for those of you, like myself, who've had an opportunity to visit Kosovo, you will discover immediately that a rather weak U.N. administrative presence has virtually crumbled. The U.N., by its own admission, can no longer hold Kosovo. The NATO force commander has also made himself very clear—he does not want to hold Kosovo in trust, repelling all borders, if the issue of independence is not settled.

This Kosovo will be independent. I want to repeat, it will either be independent with a U.N. Security Council Resolution and the protections entailed or, I can assure you, the Kosovars will go out on their own, and we will be faced with much more chaotic circumstances. Let me just note one more point—why, why does it matter? Why does it matter to you, Frenchmen, we, Americans, what happens in this remote corner of Europe, 2 million people, barely enough to occupy a suburb of Bombay, Cairo or any other major city in the non-core part of Western Europe, why does it matter to us? I know you've thought of it and I've asked myself the questions many times, “Jim, you've lived and served in South Eastern Europe, I believe very deeply, that the Kosovo matter is important to all of us, because it is the last territorial ethnic quarrel in what I would easily define as Europe. With the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, all the other territorial outcomes have been defined. It is only Kosovo that remains undefined.

Kosovo, undefined, is a bone of contention. It holds that Kosovo, who by justice has a right to define its own future and create dangerous circumstances within Kosovo between communities and across borders, but it also holds back Serbia. For as long as Serbia lives with ambiguity, ambiguous circumstances regarding Kosovo, Serbia herself doesn't move her way forward. Adequately represented in the attitudes of Boris Tadic, the president of Serbia, who said, “Settle Kosovo against my will, but the day after I'm on my way to Europe, I want to be a member of the European Union, I want to be a member of NATO, I want Serbia to be a full part of the Western Democratic Community”, versus Prime Minister Kostunica who's view is a rear view mirror of history, “My vision is a Serbia that stands on it's own, that's accepted by Europe, if that's convenient to Serbia, but it has also stood as an ethnicity apart, and Kosovo is part of Serbia, it's soul, it's nature is determined by Kosovo. Two radically different visions—without a settlement, Serbia is in chains.

So, my argument is that the last quarrel in Europe has got to get settled, the time is right, the anticipations of such. Kosovo has the opportunity to become an independent state in an orderly matter, if we, all of us, the Western side, stick together and face the last and most significant political obstacle, and that's Russia. What do we do about the Russians? Here, many would argue one way and many would argue another. I'll tell you what I honestly believe—I do not believe Russian reticence over Kosovo has

very much to do with some mystical form of Slavic solidarity. I don't believe that. I believe the Russians have a much sharper sense of their present interest in the subject—the music does not play in Moscow. Nor do I believe the warnings that we perceive that there is some linkage or trade-off between Kosovo and other dissident areas, the subject of linkage is important but that Abkhazia Transnistria is affected, I don't believe that.

I've come to believe two important points, which is why I go into this month of May with such anxiety about the Russian position in Kosovo that will be revealed during the course of the month if we're fortunate. And that is, I think Russian policy is in the hands of a number of individuals who participated in the events of 1999 and felt deeply personally humiliated by what was decided in 1999. Who view history, the history of 1999 as a history of shame for Russia in which Yeltsin conceded Kosovo's, Serbia's future, and they were present. Ambassador Churkin was General Mirden's deputy. He's now Russia's spokesman in New York. So if you take the personal factor and the determination of Russia to play her cards and use her influence, then I think I understand why this issue is devilishly tricky for the Russians. I cannot tell you today whether Russia will or will not veto at the end of the month, but what I can tell you, and I said this to my Russian friends in Moscow, we have said it right up through (*inaudible*)'s Rights, directly through (*inaudible*) and I suspect that the same language has been used by other foreign ministers and by America in particular, who's presidency this issue is coming to a head under is that we really don't have another choice.

Russia does not have another solution; either Kosovo is going to become independent in an orderly manner, or Kosovo is going to become independent in a disorderly manner. There isn't some other solution or new negotiation. This problem, the fact that there is no alternative, gives me a modest, modest moment of hope. Thank you.

Let me close with one more reflection which takes us back to us, the United States and France. I am not alone among the Americans in having been enormously distressed by what happened when France and the United States came apart politically over the beginning of the War in Iraq. Whatever your views are about the War in Iraq, mine have changed substantially over time. I remain deeply sorry about the impact. I'm pleased that, despite this frightful outburst of Franco-American emotion, that effective cooperation continued at many levels before, during and after the Security Council matter occurred. I, however, am persuaded that our two sides have had the intelligence to begin to get together, compelled, by my way of thinking, by sensible national perspectives. France needs the United States; the United States needs France, in Europe and beyond. And therefore, in this term of George Bush's presidency, the United States and France, under Jacques Chirac, have found a number of points of common accord and diplomatic cooperation over Iran, in Lebanon, over Kosovo. We've worked very well together.

And now you have a new president, or in ten days, a younger man, a man who has expressed his intention to forge a closer relationship with the United States, warning Americans, quite appropriately, that partnerships exist with two parties, you've got to listen to each other, but a man who's hands are going to be quite full with lots of foreign policy priorities—Europe, African, Mediterranean, in addition to the trans-Atlantic relationship. A man whose heavy agenda will be domestic, as he undertakes to complete the renewing steps that he's promised for France and that has given him his mandate at the polls.

My own view is that we, as Americans and Frenchmen, need to look back at our history with great caution. We need to remember that, under virtually every French presidency that I can remember, the president has come to office, promising a new relationship with the United States, and that the force of circumstances has put these grand visions into check after not a very long period of time. I would like to think that we can learn—that France's new president and that the government that he will be organizing will learn from this lesson, and that the right strategy for French American relations is to promise little and achieve more, to find grounds of practical collaboration, without the grand falderal of Franco-American amity, which we have to assume starts as a defining base point. We are going to be different, the times are different, the Cold War is over. We don't have the same pressures, but we have, with the arrival of new and seriously difficult issues—the climate, Russia, world economy, the Middle East, I could give you a long list—we have a lot to worry about and a lot to do.

So I'd like to think that the first steps under a Sarkozy government are going to be aimed at practical areas of high priority to the both of us, where you discuss quietly how to get your two sides together and then bring the weight of Franco-American diplomatic pressure to accomplish outcomes. And Kosovo, to come back to the opening remarks, is a perfect place to begin the month of May, for we have a challenge, an important subject that will be vital to Europe in the future. So, with those remarks, let me close up and I'll be happy to try to answer any questions.

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François Heisbourg : *Frank, it's good to see you. If I were to choose a place to begin with in the beautiful month of May, it would not be Kosovo. Like you and like Jacques Rupnik I've been dealing with the place maybe too much for my own good, and I am not sure that I would want to begin with Kosovo. I was on the Balkans Commission under Amato. We laid, to some extent, the conceptual background, which helped me to that Assembly plan. So I wouldn't quarrel with anything of what you said about plan. It defines the final stages which I find absolutely excellent. It also happens that 12 44 isn't the U. N. Security Council Resolution, that it had been developed by the U.N. Security Council, and that in order to replace it, you need another institution, which of course, leads us to Russia.*

It just so happens that there's many other important things going on in the world besides Kosovo, like Iran, and for example, in this beautiful month of May, we're also going to begin with this other beautiful place called Iran, also the Security Council burden. If Russia wants time for whatever reason, should we allow it, or indeed is there an enormous rush? But if there is an enormous rush to arrive at a decision, including one which Russia may veto this month, may that be the product of expectations which you and I may have exceedingly raised in Kosovo itself. Have you made promises to some of Dick Holbrook's friends in Kosovo? Given the stakes in Iran, and the stakes in Iran couldn't be greater, do we really want to organize a general train crash with the Russians at the moment? Or do you think that the train crash is inevitable anyway, and that therefore, in a sense, the earlier, the better?

It's a serious question and the last small question—you said that Transnistria and Abkhazia I would add south-east Asia to the lot will not be affected by what happens in Kosovo, that's what I thought I understood, "You're correct", what allows you to say that? I personally don't know, and I'm not sure that however it would be affected would necessarily be negative for us, but what allows you to say that?

Wisner: François--as I would expect, two superb questions, and I will answer them in the order that you have put them to me. Undoubtedly, we need Russian cooperation. Undoubtedly, every one of us wants to find a path to it. Undoubtedly, none of us want to revert to the habits of the Cold War, I'm not suggesting that's high on the list of probabilities, but there is no doubt in my mind as well, that there is a much greater level of tension between all of us in Russia today, as much as Kosovo month is, or even Iran month is, Darfur month, it's a typical month in the modern world where we face multiple problems, all of which are cross-cutting, for example, my African friends have said to me, "Really, do you want to put Darfur on the table in the same month you're dealing with Iran and Kosovo? Can't we pause? Can't we delay a decision on the continuing slaughter of thousands of people, so we can get some other the international?" I'm not sure we have the luxury of choice. I believe that the international community, now 15 months ago, wanted to get Kosovo settled. We have, for good reasons, extended that date, to accommodate the Serbs, to allow them to have their elections.

We've put this matter off, and the question is now, Can you put it off some more? How about putting it off till June, July, August and September, whatever. Is it possible? François, the testimony I have from the ground, my own observation, is that after hundreds of years of ethnic hostility, these eight years of hanging in suspense, these fifteen months of negotiations, it is very clear, we have a deeply unstable situation in Kosovo, that will not resist a protracted, undefined delay. Now, are you saying, could we say to ourselves, "Well, we'll put it off till October" with what promise that the conditions we're faced with in October will be any different than the conditions we're facing today, either internationally, or in our relationships with the Russians? What logic would we bring to the table? Could we say to the

Albanian-Kosovers, “You’ve got it; we’ll get you independence in October”. I could sell that deal, but I can’t prove that I could keep my word. So, I think we’ve reached an end state, not because Americans, Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, British have kind of raised Kosover expectations—the situation is inherently a situation that is unstable, that has come to a point where decision is required. It’s the best answer I can give you and I have no guarantee that if you added one, six, nine, ten, twelve months, you’d get a different response from the Russians. So far, and this is in the presence I would prefer to be careful, Russians have come with absolutely no promise in any game, in any background discussions—no promise of “How do you bring this to a close?” So, say that won’t be the case again.

How can I so boldly assert that Kosovo’s independence under a Security Council Resolution is not a precedent? This is a really serious issue, for it affects not only Russia and Abkhazia, etc, it affects the entire world. Why won’t China, for certain, abstain from this Resolution? Tibet, Taiwan? Why is South Africa reticent? Why is Indonesia reticent? Papua, Aceh? The issue of precedent is an absolute nightmare. Why are the Spaniards reserved to voice their reservation? This issue of ethnicities that find themselves displeased and want to break out and instate themselves as a sovereign state is a truly non-trivial question.

The only answer we can give you, having been part of the negotiation, is that Kosovo is unique. Where else do you have the same historical circumstances? Where else has the United Nations stepped in and exercised a full mandate of trust? Where else is a Security Resolution involved? Where else does the international community, by 1244, has been given the responsibility the future of the state? I think Kosovo, in that sense, is unique. Do I argue that other ethnicities won’t try to break out of their various prisons? Obviously, I can’t argue that, but they’d have a tough job citing Kosovo as a legal precedent; it wouldn’t carry much water. Do legal precedents matter? Do ethnicities stay inside their constraints? By legal precedent, and I come back to the Helsinki Final Declaration. As I look at Europe, it depends on how we all treat each other, how ethnicities are managed. If they are treated with dignity, justice, fairness, given participation, then perhaps the political ground exists for them to stay within their defining sovereign state. Is that easily achieved outside of Helsinki’s parameters? I don’t argue it is, but I think the international community needs to be very disciplined and not take on any cover and argue that he is, like the last one, like a Kosovo. It is up to us to be very vigilant and extremely restrained.

James Lowenstein :Let me re-frame my questions. As I understand it, Plan B is that if the Russians veto the Security Council Resolution, Plan B is that Kosovo will declare its independence. We and other Western countries will recognize, Russia will, Serbia will. What other consequences will there be in Serbia particularly, and what do you think will happen in Bosnia? Bosnia, I assume, will recognize, but don’t you think that there is a danger that the Republic of Serbs will declare their independence?

Wisner: I’m not going to play a game with you; I’m going to tell you bluntly. There is no Plan B, and for a good reason. There is no Plan B in the sense that, if we have a Plan B, and there are several different kinds of Plan Bs, you can take it from your local supermarket, that’s what will become Plan A. Plan A is to get a Security Council with an International Resolution signed on this month, and if we start out with negotiable failure, we will fail. Now, if we fail, I know what will happen. The Kosover-Albanians will declare their independence, and their isn’t one of us, no Frenchman, no American, no European, that’s going to tell them, “You can’t do that.” We have no way of enforcing that; we’re certainly not going to put our soldiers on the line and arrest them and try to suppress their move towards independence, that’s ridiculous. That’s not a plan, that’s an assertion of fact—that’s what’s going to happen.

Now, another question is, what do you do if such a thing happens? Well, the choices are not great, this is not a nice circumstance, but let’s remember that if the Albanians know they’re going to be independent, then the core of their dream is achieved. Now, to what degree do you want to engage them on that? Make them undertake the paths they undertake, the commitments they have given in accepting the continued presence of NATO. Will it be possible for the European Union to step in without a Security Council Resolution? Even if invited, all the possibilities represent huge challenges to Brussels. Challenges that, I can assure you, Brussels is not ready to undertake.

You asked for a clear, neat Plan B. I can tell you what the inevitable consequences, and if we're about the protection of peace in the Balkans, then yes recognition of independence is going to be a key card to keep the peace, but it doesn't resolve many of the other issues that will blow up in our faces if there isn't a Security Council Resolution.

Now I believe, personally, that if we aren't clear about where we are prepared to go, then Russia will never make her mind up. So, I'd like my Russian friends to think seriously about the contention I opened with this morning—there will be independence in Kosovo, whether it's done under international circumstances and it's orderly or it's done without international approval and it's disorderly, that's the choice.

Xavier de Villepin: Mr. Ambassador, thank you. Could you elaborate a little on the supposition in the Security Council, of two countries, China and South Africa?

Wisner: I'd be happy to, let me say again, in response to Jim's question, my own sense is that the Serbian state will not intervene, and I have assurances on that. What will the radios say to the hundred thousand, ten thousand Serbs still in Kosovo? I'm not so sure. What will happen in the Treviza in the North; is there a chance of Serbs infiltrating Kosovo—all of these risks we have thought through, identified and have counter-measures in our minds, which I can come back to, but there is a distinct possibility of Serbian resistance, not necessarily the official government, but in various ways, demonstrate itself in a non-official manner. China—the Chinese have a very interesting position going in, of course they have written their speech for the Resolution, I don't know what they're going to cite, but in essence, they have practically said to us, "Kosovo is a European problem. If this is what Europe wants to do, then Europe should get on with it and we, Chinese, will not impede Europe", just, and I think by implication, if we had a problem in our Asian backyard, we would expect Europe to accommodate Chinese needs and wishes. But don't ask us to sign, on the dotted line, for the breakaway of an ethnicity.

South Africa—I have a more difficult time telling you about the South African view. South Africans, on the record, have spoken about their concerns about Africa—partitions, ethnicities, precedent—why the South Africans have been so difficult on this issue, I simply am at loss to tell you, and to give a reason I would feel comfortable with, I have speculations, assumptions. But the official South African position is, "We're making up our mind and we're troubled about partition and there isn't a final view on the part of the South African side.

Jacques Rupnik: Yes, just to follow up on what you said on Serbia, the assumption that we have forward-looking would be to prepare to accept independence in backward-looking Koštunica. I have problems with this dichotomy because I see Serbian politics much more as a continuum of nationalisms and I also see that, I've just been to Serbia, that they don't think the solution is urgent, that this state can drag on, first. And secondly, they just adopted a Constitution, applauded by the international community, including the European Union, which says in its preamble, "Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia" and they were rewarded with the Partnership for Peace at the Leaders Summit for this, lifting conditionality on corporation with (unaudible)'s tribunal. So they don't think that they're under particular pressure. My own guess is that they will produce soon enough, to show that they have been cooperating on the other major issue we've been pressing them on, but they would be much more difficult than we would assume, on the Kosovo issue, especially if they feel that the rational side of causes goes back to our previous discussion on Russia. So, this is simply my follow-up to what you've just said. You have a fair-weather scenario for Serbian acceptance of this and I'm somewhat less optimistic about that, and the main party in Serbian politics is a radical party, they have won the re-election, in case people haven't noticed, and they're prime issue is that, and they will have another election coming up. You have a new constellation—Koštunica has two options, in fact, in Serbian politics, he can go with Tadic, he can also go with the other side, there is a lot of opportunity for fruition. This is not a reason to do it, and not to do it in May, but one simply be aware that it will have to be made an imposed solution because I don't see the Serbs being on board.

Ambassador Wisner: I have to agree with you a hundred percent. If I tried to describe two positions earlier, Koštunica's and Tadić's, it is about the road ahead, how would you pick up your relationship, where would you go next, but I have to agree with you that the consequences are really not certain and the danger is multiple. Now, having said that, 1244, not the Serbian Constitution, decides the future of Kosovo, or we wouldn't go anywhere. The Partnership for Peace was a very careful decision taken by Ms. Rice and then she was able to drum up support among our allies. As a signal to Boris Tadić, that is your quest, that Serbia understands she's not being abandoned.

The game for us, as Americans, is about the stability of the Balkans' future in Europe, but we have a strong wish with Serbia, we don't want to see it thrown away, go wasted. But the notion that you can just allow Kosovo to continue along with no solution, no political solution, is a fantasy. I said what I said and I meant what I said, that the U.N. mandate has run bare; it cannot be continued. NATO does not want to have to enforce peace in Kosovo and couldn't, even if it wanted to. So we don't have the luxury of choice. Belgrade can say, "That's your problem" and indeed, it is our problem, but then our solution is to get on with it and define the outcome and move on towards independence. Will Mladic appear magically from behind some mountain? Good luck, I hope so, for Serbia's good, not mine, but I've kind of given up holding my breath for Mladic. We need to get on with things if anybody's ever going to have choices; this is a good time to make choices, I suggest we take it.

Susanne Nies: I would like to address one aspect of the problems which is a religious one. I understand that, for the Serbs, maybe it's just a pretext, but for the Serbs, the religious significance of Kosovo is very high because of the presence of monasteries in some places, which means that there's original Orthodox presence in the region. I would like to know if this is an important aspect of the problem or not because the prospect implies that this new state will be a Muslim state. I have a sub-question—as we have seen some Islamic trends in Bosnia, I don't believe that they've developed very much, but they were occurring, is there such a possibility also in Kosovo?

Ambassador Wisner: Good questions. The answers to the religious issue are enormously sensitive and important and that's why the Ahtisaari Plan devotes so much to the protection of the Church. It's been very difficult to negotiate because the Ahtisaari (40.40) had to think it through and come up with the right answers, because the Serbian Church was deeply divided. There are strong arguments among the princes of the Church inside of Kosovo that we are part of Kosovo, we want to continue, we want protections, but we want to be here, and then there are others, Bishop *Artemio* (?), for example, take a very strong Serbian nationalist position, oppose the whole settlement, refuse dialogue, would define the future of the Church in Kosovo. So there are cleavages, and those won't go away easily. If the matter is settled, then we'll be protected. But what if the matter isn't properly settled? What if we do face violence? Who will be the victims of that violence? Who's likely to suffer the most? The residual Serbian community, one would have to assume. Churches without communicants? You can write all the protections you won't with an international plan, you can surround the Dečani Monastery with Italian paratroopers, but if there are no Serbs, the Church becomes a hollow concept, so I'd like to think, for the majority of Serbs, they'll put their lot in and they'll live by their cultural heritage, so that it can survive, in a multi-ethnic and a multi-confessional state. Kosovo will not be an Albanian, Muslim state; it will be a multi-ethnic, multi-denominational state.

Are Albanians of several churches the religious expressions themselves? Yes! Mother Theresa comes quickly to mind. The President of Albania is himself not a Muslim; Albanians are not like other dominantly Muslim ethnicities (Egyptians, maybe) there is a strong Christian tradition. But there is among Albanians, and those of you who know the Balkans, a decidedly low-key view of religion. It's unlikely, in Bosnia, where there have been strong representations of radical Islam and have had to be pursued quite vigilantly by the parties there and the outsiders, including ourselves—that's not existent among the Albanians, and not among the Kosovoers. And I doubt that it is going to; there is a different atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance.

Will, to answer Jim's earlier question, there be an affect of independence in Kosovo on Bosnia? It's hard to imagine that there won't be any affect, but I know in the calculations of the Serbian government, they don't want to take on Kosovo and Dayton at the same time, but more importantly, that there is real arguments and Boris Tadić would be the first one to put them on the table, to have a buffer zone between Muslim Bosnia and Serbia—there's some advantages to Serbia. I can't say "no problems", but I don't think it jumps to my mind as a top problem. I'm more concerned about irresponsible activities of Albanians and Serbs in the wake of independence that could produce panic and flight and destruction.

Pierre Hassner :What you said about how we must put all our hope and energy into the vote, but suppose the Russians do veto, suppose the Albanians declare independence uni-laterally—what will be the international presence there, what you were saying about the present situation?

Wisner: You have me in a tricky position, and I think you know that. If I said there was a Plan B to you today, I would immediately receive from the Belgian Foreign Ministry, "Don't let me let you forget that we, Europeans, must have the Security Council Resolution". And to have the Americans going out and touting some other direction, is not only what don't believe, it's also going to make trouble among us and we need to stick together. Now I'm going to turn the table back on you. If the Russians veto, do we sit on our hands? Do we do nothing? Is Europe's presence in Kosovo a favor to Kosovo or also a necessity for Europe? We may like what we're faced with but it won't be us who brought it on, for we, the United States and Europe, have tried to come up with an orderly international settlement. Can we now just walk away? It's a really tough problem, and it's going to take some hard thinking in Brussels as to how the community and its leading members will sort out the path forward.

François Heisbourg: If the Russians were to veto, following through with what you just said, would the United States still consider itself as being bound by 1244; will 1244 still be the basis for action in our presence in Kosovo?

Ambassador Wisner: Big problem. The answer is yes, but if the Albanians declare independence, if the U.N. Secretary General turns to us and says, "I can't carry out my mandate that I have under 1244, this is the very chaos that I most worry about. Do we play responsibly; do we sit still and say, "We're paralyzed; no U.N. Security Council Resolution?" Do we want to guarantee a Russian veto? Make it clear that we're paralyzed.

Jim Lowenstein: Can I comment on that? There was a third alternative which you didn't talk about, and that is partition. Was that ever considered? Because, in a way, you'd avoid a lot of these issues....

Wisner: And make a lot of others. At the outset, in the organizing principles of the contact group that backed up the Ahtisaari Negotiation—no partition. And why? Pretty simple—Pandora's Box. The Macedonian-Albanians in side of that box, having just seen the Montenegrins come free with 15%, having the (*inaudible*) Valley boiling next door with other Albanians, the last thing any of us thought made sense was to open Pandora's box, so we came down with a firm contract, including the Russians—No Partition. Kosovo's traditionally defined borders are the borders, period. There'll be no fusion with Albania. The Kosovoers have bought in, Parliament accepted it 101-1, we have a pretty good position in this regard. Now, practically speaking, let's say that the Serbian Ambassador to the country I was just visiting came up to me and said, "Give us something to save face. Give us Mitrovica north of the Ibar River (49:39). I don't know how many of you have visited the Ibar River, if somebody considers that a face-saving, it's about the nastiest piece of human real estate ever, and it only represents about 28,000 Serbs. There are +80,000, 100,000 below. So, we're going to seize Mitrovica? What's going to happen to the 100,000? It would be safe to say to you, Jim, they're out of there. So what have you accomplished? You've destroyed the presence of the Serbian community. And, by Raphael's point, the church. There are no churches north of the *ruins* (?). There are none of the great Monastic traditions, all the beautiful sites of Serbian Orthodox, they're in the South.

Jim lowenstein: Do we know there are 100,000 Serbs still in Kosovo?

Ambassador Wisner: Unpleasant questions. We don't. Those are the assumptions we're working on; the municipalities are all defined on the assumptions of populations. Once Kosovo is independent, then you can do a proper, carefully done census, we'll know what the numbers are. Will Serbs come back to Kosovo in an independent mode? I'll leave that up to the assumptions in your minds. Will we see an increase in the Serbian population? The provisions are there for it, but again I can't really talk on this.

Shan Sa : I, personally, appreciate a lot the high idea of America to create a multiple-entity state, but my question is--

Ambassador Wisner: Not just the Americans, the international community in all.

Shan Sa: My question is, if the local people are ready to accept this ideal, and if the Serbians, now they're a minority in Kosovo and Albanians, are ready to live together and respect the different religions and beliefs and Also, I personally, think that it's a very sensitive question about Kosovo, because Kosovo is the sacred land for Serbian people, because that is the land where their religion is born; so if we, European, American, Chinese or British, we decide for them to separate Kosovo from Serbia, but the Serbian people, they do not agree, are we creating a new situation, maybe it's a little bit exaggerated, as Israel and Palestine, where Jerusalem is sacred for two religions, but the local people are not ready; they don't have the tradition, education or conscience to live in this peaceful and idealist situation. So, what are you doing if Kosovo becomes independent, to keep on educating people, to teach them how to live together. You can't hold the institution by management forces. One year is not enough for the U.N., so how many years will you put in your agenda?

Ambassador Wisner: Let me try and see if I can answer that. Your questions are really well-placed and perplexing and there are no obvious, neat mathematical answers. The first point I would make is that there really cannot be a return to the past. For the last 8 years, Kosovo has not been administered by Serbia. There is no official Serbian presence in Kosovo, whatsoever, and has not been in 8 years. Even in my discussions with Prime Minister Koštunica, he never pretends that Serbia will go back to Kosovo; all he wants is the flag. Now, a few other points are on his list, but the issue isn't whether we will impose a settlement on Serbia. That settlement has already been imposed by history; that's what happened in 1999 when Serbia's forces, a Slovenian presence, Slovenian intelligence were withdrawn from Kosovo. I only ask that you keep that fact in mind.

There is no way that Serbia will ever re-incorporate Kosovo and the Serbs don't even argue with that. They argue a question of national face, respect, honor and an option for the future. Your second point is the issue of reconciliation. This is very tough. I have spent, literally, hours with the leaders of all the communities in Kosovo, arguing your argument. It's time to show the spirit of reconciliation. And, in many ways, people have. The president went to the Easter services at Decani Monastery, the ministers are regularly deployed, the Prime Minister goes to Serb village after Serb village, speaking Serbian, talking about the common cause of a new Kosovo. Are Serbs persuaded? Are Albanians persuaded? I have to assume no. But does that level of persuasion improve by not settling the future of Kosovo, or do you have at least a better chance to know where people will stand? If you do settle the question, I argue the second.

As long as Albanians don't know where they are, or Serbs don't make a choice, then you will have ethnic animosity. Let me give you a case in point. I went to a community—Serbian homes had been burned in 2004. The Albanian self-defense force was re-building those homes. The Serbian families would come during the day and say, "Can you get my roof this way and my garden wall that way?" But in the evening, they would leave and go back and live in a squalid factory, at the instruction of, what they knew, political signals from other Serbs, including the presence of the Serbian mob, who are present in large numbers in Kosovo. The day there is independence, will those people then pack up finally and go to Serbia, and into the stinking refugee camps filled with Serbs who fled Bosnia, or will they go back to their

houses and farms that existed before? I don't know that, but I know they will not make a choice until we assure independence.

Susanne Nies: Assuming that the Kosovo independence is accepted also by Russia, how are you going to guarantee good governance in Kosovo? I think that that's quite a lot—you seem concerned about these micro-states, how are you going to guarantee good governance, human rights guaranteed also for the Serbians, etc?

Ambassador Wisner: Good point. I think that the answer is there are no guarantees. I guess I've spent most of my life in new countries and I would argue that the Kosovos are as well equipped as most new countries to take on their responsibilities. They had years of autonomy under the Yugoslavs to create some sort of standards, governance. They ran themselves, pretty much, when they were denied those institutions by Milosevic, health services. Then they had 8 years with the United Nations, again not a perfect scoreboard. Are they keen to show that they can do it today? Yes. Do the U.N. administrators present give them reasonably good marks, go and look at Mr. Rutgers six-month reports to the United Nations, is all this guaranteed? No. Does the settlement agreement have, in one area, continued European direct responsibility and oversight—the police and the judiciary? Yes, that is foreseen for a number of years. It isn't going to be perfect; there is going to be a degree of criminality. But that isn't going to be the dominant factor. Do nations govern themselves better by being denied the right to govern? Or do they get a bit better when they actually have the responsibility? I leave it as an open question. We've discussed it; we've put in place the plan, a number of guaranteeing features. The spirit I can describe; the final product I can't tell you about.

Andon Sapundzi: Being the only Serbian here, what about the majority? You had 9 votes?

Ambassador Wisner: 11 votes, 11. That is the assurance of the Foreign Minister to me and to our Russian friends and also to your government. They are not going to be making a public statement in that regard.

Andon Sapundzi: The second question—what about Serbia after this? Serbia's not a part of Russia and Serbia will never become a part of the new Eastern bloc, and you spoke about president Tadic who is 100% your ally. You still know how much nationalism there is—how much Serbia is divided, even after Milosevic's death. But we still have a new generation. Even Koštunica could never intervene, he will never interfere. What about after—how can you perceive the political situation in Serbia and the radicals, 40%, coming to power?

Ambassador Wisner: This is a major issue and a severe preoccupation on all our parts. It was one of the reasons for the tough decisions on the partnership for peace. Absence of movement on the Mladic question—how could you justify taking the step forward, except to all of us, the great issue at play was the future of Serbian democracy and the home of Serbia inside the Western community. I can only tell you, as a matter of utter conviction, not just my part but up to and including my President, with whom I have discussed this very subject, is a commitment on our part that the game is about our Serbian friendship. Now, how do we make it tangible? As Americans, there will be a number of steps we'll take, we'll want to take—we will actually have significant influence regarding NATO. The European perspective is another issue—we obviously don't have the same say in that arrangement, but we have adequate understanding with our European friends that they too are about bringing Serbia into the fold. I would like to think that the day after and the day after that would be all days on the road to full Serbian participation in Europe. And overcoming this past decade of so of deep trouble between Serbia and Europe. As a member of our family and we want to work out the arrangements by which everybody gets back. Is there a specific roadmap? There are hundreds of roadmaps. We all know where we want to go; we all know the roads we have to follow. We have to create the political circumstances.

End of session.