

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

May 21, 2003

STATEMENT of AMBASSADOR WILLIAM G. WALKER

Mr. Chairman -- Many thanks for the opportunity to appear before the committee. I stress at the outset that I appear as a private citizen, but one with the perhaps unique experience of having led two international missions in the Balkans just prior to my 2001 retirement from the State Department.

On the question before us, the future status of Kosova, I am a firm advocate of full independence, now or as soon as humanly possible to obtain. I realize this is easy to say, less facile to accomplish. But let me very briefly state my case.

First, to continue to view Kosova as a non-detachable part of what little remains of the former Yugoslavia, however the relationship might be constructed in terms of local autonomy, is – in my opinion -- a recipe for disaster. The citizens of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia all wanted out from under Belgrade dominance. They achieved it. Why not the citizens of Kosova?

Belgrade had more than ample opportunity during the 1990s – and for decades before – to demonstrate by its methods of governance – what the Albanian/Muslim majority population could expect under its control. Belgrade totally missed that chance!

As head of the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission (1998–99), the first international presence Milosevic allowed to enter Kosova, I (and 1400 other international observers) witnessed the final eight months of Belgrade's governance. It consisted of brutal repression, unadulterated racism, denial of the most basic civil and human rights to the Albanian majority, and fostered hatred, ethnic strife and violence whenever it suited the regime's needs.

As I testified to recently before the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, that was precisely the policy carried out by Milosevic and his henchmen. And, sad to say, it is an attitude that still resonates and has advocates in today's Belgrade. I for one am not confident that the

present Serb leadership fully learned the lessons of the Milosevic years, i.e., that if you want a people to belong to your nation, you do not do everything possible to humiliate, repress, and exterminate them. In my opinion any attempt by the international community to reconnect Kosova with Serbia, however thin that connection, however loose the federation, however ample the conditions of autonomy, stands no chance of success. To do so would bring the far greater risk of renewed ethnic conflict.

Three years of working with Kosovars convinced me that the vast majority share the values, aspirations, and attitudes represented in this chamber. They want employment, decent living conditions, freedom from crime and violence, the rule of law, opportunities for their children – all in a democratic, western-style, open and tolerant society.

I believe the Clinton administration made a mistake in the aftermath of NATO's liberation of Kosova, by ceding to the UN the pro-consul role in Kosova. Being the pro-consul is an intoxicating role to play. I know. I was the American pro-consul in El Salvador for 3 ½ years as the United States tried to mentor, to push the government of another small, war-torn nation towards peace, democracy and reconciliation. I later was a UN pro-consul in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia – the SRSG – as administrator of a large UN peacekeeping mission protecting a Serb enclave from the Croat regime in Zagreb. Believe me, once obtained, such power and authority is hard to relinquish. For some it is intoxicating, for others it is lucrative.

There are four possible paths, strategies that might be pursued to move Kosova towards final status: (1) reintegration with Serbia-Montenegro; (2) continuation of UNMIK administration, with no timetable or discussions of final status until certain "standards" are met; (3) partition, with a Serb majority portion sliced off and joined to Serbia; and (4) independence.

I have described why the first option, reintegration, is unworkable.

The second, continuation of the present UNMIK occupation -- with no clear indication of what comes next, when or how – only prolongs the uncertainty that has led to virtually no investment, either domestic or

foreign, no building of a political class with experience in decision making and governance, and the risk of yet another entity forever dependent on the whims, the follies of the international donor community.

The third path, partition, is perhaps the most insidious of all, for it would put international blessing on the concept of redrawing national borders based on ethnicity. Such would have immediate negative impact on Bosnia, and perhaps lend encouragement to those seeking to carve out a “greater Albania”, a “greater Serbia”, and stimulate a host of others with similar ethnic dreams.

Only the fourth path, that of independence, offers the possibility – repeat the possibility, not the certainty -- of a Balkans moving away from the tragic ethnic, religious, linguistic legacies of the past. I have confidence that the aspirations, the talents, the will of the people of Kosova – Albanians, Serbs, Roma, and all – once unleashed, once unfettered, stand the best chance of bringing peace and stability to a region where all too little of these has been evident in the recent past.

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