

Despite an international consensus, autonomy for Kosovo within federal Yugoslavia is not an acceptable option to the Kosovar Albanians. They have been down that road before with few gains to show for it. Milosevic wants to restore Serb control within Kosovo and today, most certainly will not meet the demands of Albanian terrorists. Milosevic's Kosovo policies have the full support of the Serb people who get their news from government-controlled, anti-Albanian media. As mentioned earlier, Milosevic may want the conflict to divert Serbians' attention away from growing economic problems. If NATO actually engages in airstrikes against Serb forces to "encourage" them to stop their offensive against ethnic Albanians or if the threat of airstrikes becomes credible, Milosevic may offer some concessions to Kosovo. In the summer of 1998, Milosevic said he was willing to negotiate with the Albanians with a view to the restoration of a kind of autonomy and a promise to re-visit the issue of Kosovo's political status in three years time.

Many Albanians are highly unlikely to accept willingly any solution that leaves them under the control of Serbs, either in Serbia or Yugoslavia. Neither pacifist President Rugova nor the political wing of the KLA see a solution within Serbian or Yugoslav jurisdiction. The options of enhanced autonomy and republic status that were viewed positively only a few years ago, are no longer acceptable. Even if the international community could pressure the Albanian leaders into backing down, it is not clear that the Albanian militants could be made to abide by such a decision or to cease terrorist activities undertaken in the name of independence.

Can the international community bring the parties to the negotiating table and force an enduring

*...autonomy for
Kosovo within
federal Yugoslavia
is not an
acceptable option
to the Kosovar
Albanians.*

political solution? The international community may be able to entice the Albanian leaders to settle for autonomy by promising to become more involved in Kosovo, helping develop the economy, and closely monitoring human rights and Kosovo's elections. Should the KLA forces be eliminated by the Serb/Yugoslav offensive, ethnic Albanians may have no choice but to accept a solution imposed on them.

The issue of Kosovo's political status cannot be resolved today or in the near future. The positions of the two sides are diametrically opposed and unyielding. In insisting upon a political solution and greater autonomy for Kosovo, the US and

the international community are, at best, wasting their time and resources, and at worst, exacerbating an already explosive situation and, possibly, neglecting consideration of feasible moderating options. Despite the tendency to make comparisons with Bosnia, the situation in Kosovo is fundamentally different. While Bosnia had a tradition of ethnic tolerance among its three ethnic groups, Albanians and Serbs have experienced little peaceful coexistence in Kosovo.

It may be wise to set aside the question of Kosovo's political status for the moment. This strategy would provide time for passions to cool and progress to be made incrementally on a variety of less contentious issues, thereby opening up the possibility of a future settlement where one does not exist today. This is the strategy that Alexander Lebed successfully employed in 1996 to end the bitter war in Chechnya and one that Milosevic has expressed some support for with a 3-year time frame.

Whatever solutions are implemented in the coming months to protect human rights in Kosovo, in the long run only equality for the ethnic Albanians within the Yugoslav Federation offers any prospect for sustained peace between Serbs and Albanians.
