

Recognition of Kosovo: US Threatens Serbia's Sovereignty

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Bishop Artemije issued the following statement prior to his visit to Washington

Following today's publication of a Washington Times commentary written by former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, former UN Ambassador John Bolton and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman urging the Bush Administration to withhold recognition of a unilateral declaration of Kosovo independence, His Grace, Bishop Artemije of Ras and Prizren issued the following statement prior to his visit to Washington to meet with Administration and Congressional officials and policymakers:

As I begin my latest mission to Washington, my country is being subjected to heightened threats from the government of the United States with respect to the future of the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija. Having just returned from Berlin and consultations with Members of the Bundestag, the Administration, and think tanks, NGOs, and media, it is clear that America's European allies are increasingly concerned about the consequences of the course Washington is trying to impose on them. The U.S. response has been to step up the pressure.

For example, the press in Slovenia, currently chairing the European Union, recently revealed American officials' diktat to supposedly independent countries. In an account confirmed by Slovenian official sources, we hear American diplomats commanding the timing of a planned unilateral declaration of independence by the Albanian Muslim administration in Pristina and its recognition by the U.S. and some other governments. Even exposed is the shameful intention to trigger the crisis on the Lord's Day to thwart Russia in convening an emergency session of the Security Council.

Threats have already been issued that after an independence declaration and recognition, force would be used to shut down so-called "parallel structures" in Serbian enclaves — in reality the legitimate institutions of our state — including the Mitrovica office of the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija. Such actions, with expected attacks on Serbian citizens, would constitute a direct assault on the Serbian state and the Serbian nation. While it would be inappropriate to disclose Serbia's specific response, we will defend our territory and our people as would any other democratic country. Russia and other friendly countries are prepared to assist us.

Should Washington and its followers make good on their current threats to recognize Kosovo, Serbia would never accept it. Not only Russia but many other countries, especially those outside of Europe, would reject recognition. Kosovo would never become a member of

the United Nations. We would regard the international presence in Kosovo, including the mission now being considered by the EU, as an occupation force. We Serbs have suffered many occupations in the past and triumphed over them. If necessary we would survive this one as well. Despite any intensification of the terror to which we Christians have been subjected since 1999, my flock in Kosovo has no intention of leaving their homes.

I do not welcome having to direct these critical words at the United States. Serbs have always regarded America as a friend and continue to do so. Americans and Serbs were allies in both World Wars. We are not the ones who are pursuing a confrontation today. But it is impossible for America to profess friendship with Serbia while demanding the amputation of the most precious part of our homeland.

Despite the mistakes made so far, I am convinced that there is still a chance reason will prevail and the disastrous path laid before us will be averted. Today three highly respected former U.S. officials published a thoughtful and constructive analysis of the looming injury to American national interests:

“We believe that an imposed settlement of the Kosovo question and seeking to partition Serbia’s sovereign territory without its consent is not in the interest of the United States. The blithe assumption of American policy — that the mere passage of nine years of relative quiet would be enough to lull Serbia and Russia into reversing their positions on a conflict that goes back centuries — has proven to be naive in the extreme. We believe that American policy on Kosovo must be reexamined without delay, and we urge the Bush Administration to make it clear that pending the results of such reexamination it would withhold recognition of a Kosovo independence declaration and discourage Kosovo’s Albanians from taking that step.”

Secretary Lawrence Eagleburger, Ambassador John Bolton, and Assistant Secretary Peter Rodman conclude: “As with thorny questions elsewhere, viable and enduring settlements should result from negotiation and compromise. Such an outcome has been undermined by an American promise to the Kosovo Albanians that their demands will be satisfied if they remain adamant and no agreement is reached with Belgrade.”

I believe that negotiations must continue until a mutually acceptable solution can be found to allow us and our Albanian neighbors to live together in peace. Honest talks, without ultimatums or guaranteed results for either side, with no outcome barred from discussion, can still bear fruit. I ask all Americans of good will to ask their leaders in Washington to choose this path.

For more information, please visit the American Council for Kosovo’s Web site at

<http://www.savekosovo.org>

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