

Kosovo, in Israeli eyes

By Adar Primor

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On the eve of his extradition to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, as the noose tightened around his neck, Slobodan Milosevic decided to grant his last journalistic interview to, of all papers, Haaretz. In that interview in March 2001, the deposed leader of Yugoslavia called for the suppression by force of the Kosovar Albanians' "terrorist separatism," lest the separatist snowball roll through all of the Balkans.

Milosevic also expressed his esteem for Ariel Sharon, who was one of the few leaders to come out against the Albanian separatists and against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's bombing of the Serbian forces.

Eight years after the war in Kosovo, it appears as though the province's disengagement from Serbia is a fait accompli and that its independence will be declared soon. In Israel, it seems that there are those – in diplomatic and academic circles – who are adopting Sharon's political philosophy and are warning of the implications of this development. Their arguments are many and varied.

Today Serbia – tomorrow Israel: Israel must oppose the perception whereby a political and territorial conflict can be ended by means of an external, imposed solution and without the support of both sides to the conflict. If not, who will guarantee that in the future Israel will not have a solution with the Palestinians imposed upon it?

Moreover, who will guarantee Israel that an attempt by the Arabs of Israel to disengage from it – in Galilee, for example – will not also win active international support?

Damage to the international order: Israel must declare that it will not recognize the independence of any entity that has not been granted recognition by the United Nations Security Council. Bypassing the Security Council, which would negate the Russian's

(who are opposed to independence for Kosovo) veto, will boomerang against Israel, which itself needs the American veto.

The "Serbian Jerusalem": Kosovo is not just a part of Serbia but also "the cradle of its nationalism and culture." If the "Serbian Jerusalem" is taken away from it, why should "Al Quds" not be taken from us in the future and become the capital of the independent Palestine?

The danger of Islam: The establishment of Kosovo will award a prize to a violent ethnic-religious minority, whose leaders have ties to the Mafia and to the global jihad. Recognizing them will increase Islamic influence and will strengthen anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli opinions in Europe.

Snowball, domino effect, Pandora's box: All of these are terms aimed at deterring a decline into irredentist struggles and bloody wars in the Balkans, and beyond. These arguments – some of which seem to have been taken from the Serbian propaganda machine, others of which spring from internal Israeli fears – are all baseless.

The Kosovar analogy does not resemble the Israeli-Palestinian situation: A declaration of Kosovar independence will not be unilateral, but rather with the agreement of the United States and (most of) Europe, and in accordance with conditions that will be established in advance.

The demographic/geographic reality in Kosovo, where the Albanians constitute a majority of 90 percent of the population, also does not resemble that of Galilee, where the population is mixed. No significant international body will recognize a separatist demand by the Arabs of Israel.

The need to bypass the UN derives from the recognition of its inability to resolve ethnic disputes. "The international order" does not, after all, enable intervention in the genocide in Darfur or the use of force in Iran.

Since the 19th century there has been a Jewish majority in Jerusalem, whereas in the "Serbian Jerusalem" there has not been a Serbian-Orthodox population for more than 200 years now; nevertheless, the Jews (or at least some of them) are willing to

compromise in Jerusalem whereas the Serbs are refusing to relinquish "their heart and soul."

Kosovar society is mainly secular, the Islam there is moderate and will remain so since the new state will have no existence outside of the European area.

The desire – in the entire Balkans – to be annexed to that area is also what will render the bloodbath hypothesis unlikely.

In the end, Israel must be part of the democratic and enlightened world that recognizes both the self-determination of an oppressed people that has recently experienced slaughter, rape and ethnic cleansing, and its national aspirations.