

**Remarks As Prepared  
Under Secretary for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Hearing on “Kosovo: A Way Forward?”**

**November 8, 2005**

**Introduction**

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Senators, it is a great pleasure for me to appear before you once again today to speak about our hope for a final peace in Kosovo and our broader American policy in the Balkans region. I addressed the House of Representatives on these issues in May of this year, and I am pleased to have another opportunity to discuss this important subject with Congress.

President Bush and Secretary Rice have directed a renewed and energetic U.S. effort to bring peace and security to this troubled region. After a decade of conflicts which had a devastating impact on every part of the former Yugoslavia, after hundreds of thousands killed and left homeless, we are at last seeing real progress on undoing the evils of the 1990s. United States policy is designed to point the countries of Southeast Europe toward a democratic future as part of NATO and the European Union.

Since the end of the Cold War, three American Presidents have had one overarching strategic ambition in Europe – to seek a democratic peace by unifying the Continent in freedom. The Balkans are the finishing piece to this puzzle. That is why we must use 2006 to attain a final status for the long-suffering people of Kosovo, and to help Bosnia-Herzegovina modernize the Dayton Accords by building a more integrated state with a stronger central government. It is why we must send the despicable war criminals – Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and Ante Gotovina – to the Hague, as they are responsible for Europe’s worst human rights abuses since the Nazis. It is why what happens in the Balkans matters to our country and why we must use our diplomatic power and ingenuity to help the people of the region chart a new future.

As the history of the last 15 years has demonstrated, the U.S. has an abiding interest in the Balkans. Thousands of our finest diplomats and soldiers have spent years trying to build a peaceful future there. America and Europe have

worked well together – in the 1990s, we ended the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, and our troops have since kept the peace in both places. In 2004, NATO successfully concluded its historic peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. We have also worked intensively with all the countries of the former Yugoslavia to prepare them for eventual NATO and EU membership. Without stability in the Balkans, we will never see a united, peaceful Europe that can be a true partner for the U.S. in promoting democracy throughout the world. It is now time to finish the job.

The Balkans region will not be stable, however, as long as Kosovo remains in a state of political suspended animation. The history of the past decade tells us that the United States is indispensable to stability in the Balkans. We must continue to play this key role as we look to support the process that will determine Kosovo's future status. We also look forward to continued coordination with Members of Congress, noting the valuable support Senators and Representatives, including most notably members of this committee, have given to our efforts.

2006 will be a crucial year of decision for Kosovo and the Balkans. The UN-sponsored Final Status Talks will begin in a few weeks time, and after more than six years of UN rule, it is time for the people of Kosovo -- Albanian and Serb alike -- to be given a chance to define their future. Our partners in the Contact Group -- the EU, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United Kingdom -- agree with us that the status quo in Kosovo is neither sustainable nor desirable. Earlier this year, the U.S. led the way to convince the UN to initiate a review of its Standards, conducted this summer by Norway's able Ambassador to NATO, Kai Eide. The report concluded that further progress on these issues is unlikely until there is greater clarity about Kosovo's future status. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommended beginning negotiations to determine Kosovo's future status, a recommendation the Security Council endorsed on October 24. Secretary-General Annan has announced his intention to nominate former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari as the UN Special Envoy to lead the process. He is, in our view, a superb choice: an experienced and resourceful diplomat who commands broad respect in the international community.

The Secretary-General's actions have begun the process that will lead to an internationally recognized future status for Kosovo. I hosted a meeting of the Contact Group with President Ahtisaari in Washington last week to kick off these efforts. We expect President Ahtisaari will begin his work as soon

as the Security Council endorses his nomination this week. The U.S. will very soon name a senior American envoy to assist in the negotiations and be ready to bring U.S. credibility and influence to bear when and where it can help to promote a settlement.

We understand that diplomatically, this will be tough going. The parties to the talks – the Kosovar Albanians, Kosovar Serbs and the government of Serbia-Montenegro – will see their vital interests at stake. We expect them to participate constructively and to restrain more extreme groups from using violence to gain political ends. Although we will be working for a peaceful settlement, NATO troops will have to be ready to defuse potentially violent situations.

### **Elements of a Settlement**

After NATO fought and won the three-month Kosovo war in 1999, we then passed UN Security Council Resolution 1244 which called for “facilitating a political process designed to determine Kosovo’s future status.” That resolution left open the question of what that status would be. Nearly seven years later, it is time to answer that question: will Kosovo in the future be independent or will it continue under Serb rule with a greater measure of autonomy?

The United States will not support a specific outcome at this stage. It is important that we and our allies remain neutral, because the future of the province is the sole responsibility of the Albanian and Serb people of Kosovo and the Government of Serbia and Montenegro. But the final result should respect the basic facts of Kosovo today – 90 percent of the people are ethnic Albanians who were treated cruelly, even viciously, by the government of Slobodan Milosevic. They deserve to live in security and peace. The Kosovo Serb population also needs to be assured that they have a future there and that their churches and patrimonial sites will be respected.

The negotiations will be difficult. Serb and Albanian positions are likely to be mutually exclusive, held with deep conviction and infused with nearly 1,000 years of history. Kosovo Albanians insist that they can only be secure if they are independent of Serbia. Serbs have promoted a future of “more than autonomy, but less than independence” as the most they could support.

There is, however, potential for common ground. The aspirations of Serbs, Albanians and Kosovo's other ethnic groups are alike in that they all want a future in which they can live secure lives, participate in democratic government and enjoy economic opportunity. There is already agreement that Kosovo will be self-governing in some form, that it will also remain multi-ethnic and will protect the cultural heritage of all its inhabitants. The U.S. will continue to work to ensure these concepts are incorporated into Kosovo's future status, because to make a political determination without these principles would leave the door open to future conflict and put at risk the war we fought to prevent ethnic cleansing and the strenuous efforts our diplomats and soldiers have made to keep the peace.

As with any process of negotiation, neither side will get everything it wants. To reach a lasting result, both will sometimes be required to make compromises that may seem to violate important interests in the cause of peace. In Kosovo, we face an unprecedented challenge of trying to build stability after a NATO intervention led to the end of government structures that had served to repress, rather than protect, the majority of the population. For six years, the UN has exercised the functions of a government, but, as foreseen by UN Resolution 1244 in 1999, the time has come to enable Kosovo's people to govern themselves consistent with the outcome of the status process to come.

Mr. Chairman, the U.S. and its European allies have decided on several guiding principles that must shape the process of determining a future status for Kosovo and guide the work of the Special Envoy. We have made clear that a return to the situation before 1999 is unacceptable and that there should be no change in existing boundaries of Kosovo, and no partition. Other principles for a settlement include full respect of human rights, the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes, the protection of cultural and religious heritage and the promotion of effective means to fight organized crime and terrorism. The Contact Group agreed to exclude those who advocate violence and that, once begun, the status process must continue without interruption.

We will ensure that the result of the process meets three key criteria:

- First, it must promote stability not only in Kosovo, but throughout Southeast Europe.

- It must also provide full democratic rights for all people, especially minorities.
- Finally, it must further the integration of the region with the Euro-Atlantic mainstream.

The U.S. must remain committed to continued involvement in Kosovo as a status agreement is negotiated, because we have too much invested in Kosovo and the Balkans to risk failure by withdrawing prematurely. This is where the U.S., through its participation in the NATO forces in Kosovo, has made a great contribution. U.S. forces, including National Guard contingents from several states, have been essential in deterring conflict, and they have made extraordinary contributions to the communities in which they serve. Our troops have maintained security in a tense and sometimes violent environment. They have volunteered to help build schools, establish clinics and have cemented strong ties between the people of Kosovo and America. Even after a determination of Kosovo's future status is made, we will remain committed to peace and stability there. As long as a NATO force is required, the U.S. plans to be part of it.

The U.S. currently has 1700 troops in KFOR down from a high of nearly 6,000 in 1999. During the past few years, we have been able to decrease gradually the level of NATO forces and we hope to make further reductions in 2006 as NATO shifts to a Task Force organization championed by Supreme Allied Commander General Jones.

### **Our Message to Kosovo Albanians**

The U.S. has high expectations for both Serbs and Albanians as we begin the status process. I want to use this opportunity to repeat our messages to them.

In October I met with the Kosovo Albanian Team of Unity, established by President Rugova to lead talks. The challenge for the Kosovo Albanian community is for this team to live up to its name. As late as last week, there were troubling signs that Kosovo Albanian leaders are anything but unified. In my two trips to the region since June, my strong and repeated advice to them has been to put aside their political and personal differences. If Kosovo Albanians aspire to independence, this is their greatest opportunity to make the case to the world that, should they become independent, they

will be able to govern effectively and in a way that promotes stability in the region.

I made clear to them that independence must be earned. First, Kosovo must continue to develop a functional, democratic government that can safeguard the rule of law. Second, there must be generous provisions for the security of minorities, including decentralized authority. Finally, Kosovo must be able to assure its neighbors that it will not export instability. The UN standards define the goals Kosovo should achieve in preparing for self government. Kosovo's progress in implementing these standards will be the ultimate measure of how well it makes its case.

I also urged the Kosovo Albanian leaders to be ready to compromise. Finding the right balance between majority rule and minority rights is never easy, but it must be done. To the south, Kosovo's Macedonian neighbors have made important progress in addressing the concerns of their Albanian minority -- progress that could provide some useful examples as Kosovo deals with the similar concerns of Serbs and other minorities.

Kosovo leaders should act now to create a positive environment for the status talks and make a convincing case that there would be a secure future for minorities should Kosovo become independent. They should announce that decentralization of government will be pursued throughout Kosovo, and that ethnic interests will be given consideration in drawing municipal boundaries. NATO acted in 1999 to prevent the ethnic cleansing of more than one million Kosovo Albanians and it would be a tragic irony if Albanians themselves now tried to inflict a policy of retribution and intimidation against their Serb minority. The U.S. and its allies will simply not tolerate such an outcome. They should also apprehend and punish those responsible for hate crimes committed against minorities in March 2004. They should state publicly that the independence they seek is only for Kosovo, without any changes to its present boundaries. No country, including the U.S. is prepared to support an irredentist "Greater Albania" or an independent Kosovo that aspires to exceed its present borders.

If Kosovo leaders want to present themselves as worthy of independence, they must stop all acts of violence and intimidation against minorities. Those responsible for such acts must understand that they are actually undermining the goals which they profess to support.

I warned them that an attempt by either side to use violence as a political tactic during the negotiation will be put down swiftly and firmly by NATO. Whatever the settlement of Kosovo's political status, it must remain multi-ethnic, and Serbs and Albanians need to work to create conditions under which they will be able to live together peacefully.

In June, I visited a Kosovo Serb family near Pristina. They had recently returned after being forced to flee and having their home destroyed in the March 2004 violence. This brave Serb family continues to have concerns for security and their future prosperity in Kosovo. Though their home had been rebuilt, their situation was still difficult. The Kosovar Albanians must make Serb families like this feel welcome and secure as a result of the settlement.

### **Our Messages to the Serbs**

The Kosovo Serb community, and indeed the government of Serbia and Montenegro, must also assume a heavy share of responsibility for successful negotiations. When I met with Kosovar Serb leaders in October, I urged them to become more involved politically in Kosovo itself. Serbs have told me they would prefer local autonomy for themselves in Kosovo. If this is so, it is in their own interest to participate in the institutions of local government that will be responsible for a future Kosovo. By refusing to participate in elections and in the Kosovo Assembly, Kosovo Serbs are missing a chance to have a say in Kosovo's future.

Belgrade must also help Kosovo's Serbs ensure that they will have a place in whatever political structure emerges. I told Prime Minister Kostunica that his government's policy of having Serbs boycott elections and participation in the Kosovo Assembly has been a major miscalculation. The Serb community is losing political influence in Kosovo and there is now a net outflow of Serbs. As Kosovo will remain multi-ethnic, it will retain important connections with Serbia regardless of its political status. Many Kosovo Serbs will remain citizens of Serbia in any case and will need access to Serbian government services. Many important Serbian cultural sites, including some of the most historic Serbian Orthodox churches, are located in Kosovo. The Serb government will have to look for means to cooperate with a future Kosovo to preserve these cultural treasures. Belgrade will also want to engage in a discussion of security issues to ensure that settlement of Kosovo's status does not undermine the fragile stability of the region.

Whatever Kosovo's future will be, Belgrade can best protect the interests of Serbs by encouraging them to participate in politics and begin to integrate themselves with their Kosovo Albanian neighbors.

### **Overall American Engagement in the Balkans**

Mr. Chairman, while Kosovo's future status is the most serious issue to be resolved in Southeast Europe in 2006, there are three other issues that will also be important to building the stability and peace we seek for the region:

First, there will be no real peace in the Balkans until the countries of the region bring the most notorious war criminals to justice. Ten years after the massacre at Srebrenica, the two Serb leaders directly responsible remain at large. In Belgrade, I emphasized that those of us who are friends of Serbia want to see it shake off the remaining burden of the Milosevic era and take its rightful place as a European country, and keystone of stability and prosperity in the Balkans. The U.S. has been clear that Belgrade must comply with its obligations to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Until the government turns over indicted mass murderer Ratko Mladic to the Hague, the U.S. will not agree to Serbia and Montenegro's participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace. The Serbs are making efforts to hold those accountable for crimes, but they must do more. Of course, the United States also remains determined to see Radovan Karadzic and Ante Gotovina brought to justice in the Hague, and we will continue pressing all concerned parties to see justice done.

Beyond a settlement in Kosovo and the arrest of the remaining war criminals, there is another diplomatic hurdle to a peaceful stable Balkans region in the future: a more unified Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten years ago this month in Dayton, Ohio, the United States negotiated an end to the brutal war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was a remarkable diplomatic achievement by President Clinton, Secretary of State Christopher and its principal architect and negotiator, Richard Holbrooke. The Dayton Peace Accords have provided the foundation upon which the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have rebuilt their country and their lives. The Accords have allowed over a million people to return to their pre-war homes. On November 21-22, Secretary Rice and the Bosnia-Herzegovina leadership will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Accords in Washington, D.C. Secretary Rice will note the extraordinary progress that

has been made but also focus on the efforts that still need to be made for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a fully democratic country.

The Dayton Accords were never meant to be set in stone. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have already recognized the need for reform if they are to join NATO and the EU. Just before my visit to Sarajevo in October, the Bosnian parliament voted overwhelmingly to create a single, unified army and defense ministry -- for the 10 years since Dayton, there have been two of each. They also agreed on the need to reform their police institutions consistent with EU standards, which has enabled the European Union to recommend launching negotiations on a Stabilization and Association Agreement with Bosnia-Herzegovina this year.

When the Bosnian leadership comes to Washington in two weeks, we will be asking them to embrace an even more ambitious vision -- erasing major political divisions by agreeing to a single Presidency, a stronger Prime Ministership and a reformed Parliament. When the Bosnian war stopped in November 1995, the ethnic divisions in the country were frozen in place. It is now time to remove the Berlin wall of separation between Bosnians and strengthen the institutions that will make Bosnia a true unified state in the future.

There is another issue that demands our attention in the Balkans, the status of Montenegro. The United States supports the Belgrade Agreement and the Serbia and Montenegro Constitutional Charter: documents that present the opportunity for either republic to hold a referendum on leaving the state union. The United States will support whatever solution the two republics agree on through democratic means, whether that is union or independence. Montenegrin officials have indicated their desire to hold a referendum in 2006 on independence. I told President Djukanovic last month that any referendum must be held peacefully, and as the result of a process that all sides accept as legitimate. The overarching U.S. goal is reform and progress toward Europe for both Serbia and Montenegro, in or outside the state union.

## **Conclusion**

The people of the former Yugoslavia suffered through a decade of conflicts brought on by corrupt and cynical leaders who put their own power, greed and ethnic hatreds ahead of the interests of the people. From the ashes of the wars of the 1990s there is now new hope emerging. In my October visit to Sarajevo,

Pristina and Belgrade, I made a point of meeting with students in each city who will soon be the leaders of their countries and I found these meetings to be extraordinarily encouraging. In Sarajevo, we met with young Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks who are working together to break down remaining ethnic differences. In Kosovo, I met with extraordinarily courageous high school students from Mitrovica. These Serbs and Albanians, separated by the physical bridge dividing their communities, are trying to create a virtual bridge of computer networks to unite them. I met with young Serbs at the Faculty of Economics in Belgrade who did not hesitate to express their commitment to justice, peace and democracy for Serbia and the region. I was struck by the fact that in each of these three meetings, in three different places, these students, of all the people we met, were the most courageous in putting forward the proposition that people of different faiths and nationalities should be able to live together in the Balkans of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I didn't hear this message from the political leaders, but I heard it loud and clear from the younger people. I hope that their voice and their vision of a more just and peaceful region will come to represent the future for Kosovo, for Bosnia-Herzegovina and for Serbia and Montenegro.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to taking your questions.

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