

In Kosovo as in Ukraine, the same Western ‘invisible hand’ foments conflict

In both cases, the West put no pressure on the side it supports to adhere to signed international deals

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US NATO soldiers patrol next to Kosovo police near the border between Kosovo and Serbia on October 2, 2021 © ARMEND NIMANI / AFP

In addition to the conflict in Ukraine, Europe is now faced with the prospect of renewed conflict in Kosovo, Serbia’s breakaway province (officially named Kosovo and Metohija according to the Serbian constitution). Kosovo’s unilateral secession was recognized by the main Western powers in 2008. This came nine years after NATO’s attack on Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, after which NATO forces occupied the province and helped install an ethnic Albanian-led government dominated by former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army terrorist organization.

The current crisis was triggered by Kosovo’s ethnic Albanian Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, who initially wanted to force the majority Serb population in the north of the region to accept Kosovan license plates and ID papers starting from August 1, and to ban entry to the province or issue temporary papers to travelers with Serbian-issued plates and documents.



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Kurti attempted a similar stunt in September 2021, triggering a crisis where local Serbs in northern Kosovo organized roadblocks and Kosovo police reportedly beat up and intimidated Serb civilians, while the authorities in Belgrade put the Serbian military on high alert and ordered overflights by fighter planes over the administrative border between Serbia proper and Kosovo. The EU eventually brokered a temporary agreement, pending a final deal that was supposed to have been reached by April 2022, under EU auspices. However, nothing has come of that.

From Kosovo to Ukraine, it seems there’s a pattern regarding agreements in which Western powers have a hand. Since the start of this year’s special military operation in Ukraine, Russian officials have repeated time and again that the West had never pressed Kiev to fulfill its part of the 2015 Minsk 2 peace agreement, intended to end Kiev’s standoff with the Donbass republics. Recently, former Ukrainian president Pyotr Poroshenko openly admitted that Ukraine never intended to fulfill the agreement but was merely buying time until it could build up an army capable of overrunning Donbass.

The situation with Kosovo is not much different. The EU brokered an agreement between Pristina and Belgrade in April 2013, the so-called Brussels Agreement, by which Serbia was supposed to dismantle its “parallel” police and judicial structures in Kosovo and convince the Kosovo Serbs to

accept integration into the Kosovo police and legal system, without recognizing the territory's independence. And the Belgrade authorities did this, despite a large public outcry over the move.

However, there was a second part to the agreement, by which Pristina was obligated to form an Association of Serb Municipalities, with substantial local powers and ties to Serbia proper. The Albanian part of the Brussels Agreement has not been fulfilled to the present day. Or, as Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic noted on July 31, that 3,390 days have passed since the Brussels Agreement was signed, and still no sign of the Association.

As in the case of Ukraine, the collective West has put absolutely zero pressure on the side it supports to fulfill its part of a signed international agreement. And again, as in the case of Ukraine, this has encouraged Pristina to take an increasingly belligerent stance, which may very well lead to a more serious conflict.



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There's an additional ingredient to the Kosovo mix, thanks to the Ukraine conflict. Namely, the Serbs – both in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina – stand practically alone among European peoples in refusing to join Western sanctions against Russia, and in consistently demonstrating open support for Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. As a result, the government in Belgrade has been under constant, increasing pressure by the main Western capitals, as well as the EU and NATO, to change its policy and join the West's collective economic suicide.

Since Belgrade has proven to be a tough nut for the West to diplomatically crack when it comes to opposing Russia, it's not at all far-fetched to imagine that the Kosovo Albanians just might be seen by the West as a useful tool by which to additionally turn the screws on Belgrade. In the same cynical way in which the unfortunate Ukrainians are being used to pressure and weaken Russia.

The coming days and weeks will certainly tell us a great deal. The temporary reprieve brought on by the Kosovo authorities' one-month postponement of their ban on Serbian license plates and identification documents until September 1 may seem encouraging. However, it should always be borne in mind that the West has all the tools necessary to pressure Pristina to fulfill the Brussels Agreement and generally, to just behave. Kosovo is totally dependent on a steady flow of Western financial infusions and NATO's security support.

The Serbian president has publicly stated that Serbia is not interested in a renewed conflict but won't allow its people to be harmed and abused by Kosovo's security apparatus. If the main Western powers don't rein in Kurti and, instead of pressing him to fulfill previously signed agreements, allow him to use force and make his announced unilateral moves come September, or even earlier, it can mean at least a couple of things: 1) that the threat of new violence in Kosovo was used by the West to extract some more concessions from Belgrade, perhaps behind the scenes, having to do with the formation of a new Serbian government, or 2) that the West's beleaguered political elites want and, perhaps, desperately need the breakout of another conflict in Europe. Or perhaps even both of these.

The only thing that is, unfortunately, difficult to imagine, is the US and the EU actually doing something to fundamentally contribute to a peaceful resolution to this crisis.

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