

# Kosovo's independence will impact on Japan

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Kosovo became the latest state in February to emerge from the wars of the former Yugoslavia's succession. Opponents of its sovereignty fear that it could spark a chain reaction, especially in the former communist world, where Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia might formally break away from Moldova and Georgia, respectively.

This argument forgets that there was no alternative to Kosovar self-determination. Under the dictatorship of Slobodan Milosevic, Serbian police and soldiers persecuted Albanian Kosovars, driving hundreds of thousands of people from their homes. After these events, it was obvious that no Kosovar would accept anything less than full separation from Serbia.

Moreover, in the case of Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, it may be that independence is the best solution. Moldova and Georgia have failed to develop strong institutions. It will be easier—or at least less difficult—for them to develop successfully if they are freed from the burden of these troublesome provinces.

Another line of reasoning pertains to Russia, "Serbia's historic ally." In fact, anybody familiar with the bloody history of the Balkans knows that despite their shared Orthodox faith and Slavic roots, Russians, Serbians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Bulgarians

have been at each others' throats as frequently as they have been allies. Moscow, led by nostalgics of the glorious days of Soviet power, is engaged in an anti-EU and anti-American campaign. Kosovo and Serbia are not the issue, but rather Russia's refusal to live with the outcome of the Cold War.

Finally, there is Serbia itself. The end of its dominion over Kosovo may fuel nationalism and extremism. But the problem is not primarily Kosovo, but rather the difficulty its society faces in emerging from communism and several lost wars. Kosovo independence has the advantage of making clear to all Serbs what has been obvious to the rest of the world for a decade: Serbia has lost the "mandate of heaven" to rule the Kosovar nation.

Now that Kosovo is Europe's newest country, the world confronts two challenges. The first one is Kosovo's development. It lacks an effective government apparatus—reliable police forces, courts, tax collectors and so on. The West provides much of the needed state infrastructure, but much remains to be done to help Kosovars transition to independence. At the same time, Albania and Macedonia (which has a large Albanian minority) also need support since they are an integral part of the Kosovo equation.

Second, Serbia cannot be abandoned. Many Serbs, even as they

mourn the loss of Kosovo, know that their country faces an easy choice. It can reject the West, be ruled by war criminals and thieves, tie itself to the KGB veterans of Russia, and condemn itself to impoverished pariah status. Or it can accept reality,

that is reject its Milosevic past, extradite war criminals to The Hague, live with its new borders, and gradually integrate itself into the EU—and NATO—to become a free and prosperous European country.

Many Serbs have traveled or worked in Western Europe. They know full well that this is the best path for their homeland. Unfortunately, nationalism is often more potent than rationalism. Consequently, the international community has to provide overt and covert support to Serb liberals while offering the people of Serbia a clear path to EU membership. It needs to include sufficient economic and political incentives to make it possible for Serbia to follow the road to rehabilitation.

In the years since Junichiro Koizumi took office as prime minister, Japan has proclaimed loudly its ambition to play a role on the world stage. During his visit to NATO last



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year, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared that Japan is ready to carry out what is required of it on the international level while implicitly calling for Europe to pay attention to North Korea and China. Therefore, one would expect Japan to be ready to assist NATO in Kosovo, especially as America played the key role in the birth of Kosovo. Japanese support would be consistent with strengthening the Japan-US Alliance beyond East Asia. Japan could obviously contribute economically to Kosovo. It could dispatch personnel to help the local authorities. It could also engage Serbia, providing economic and trade incentives while showing that not only Europe but also Asia stands by Kosovo while trying to help the Serbs.

But, the Japanese government chose a different path. Though it will probably follow Washington's lead, it has yet to even recognize the country. Recognition is symbolic, but it is an important step in showing the Kosovars that the world supports them and demonstrating to Serbia that the international community has turned the page on Serbian control of Kosovo. Tokyo's slow response will strengthen the arguments of skeptics who doubt that Japan can contribute to global security.

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