

Kosovo Final Status Issues

Ambassador Frank Wisner, Secretary of State's Special Envoy for Kosovo Final Status Talks

Foreign Press Center Briefing

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MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Foreign Press Center. Today we're delighted to have Ambassador Frank Wisner, the U.S. Special Envoy for Kosovo final status talks to speak to you on Kosovo issues. He'll have remarks for a few minutes and then be happy to take your questions. So again, welcome Ambassador, the floor is yours.

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Thank you. Well, first of all, let me thank all of you for coming so early on a rainy, blustery morning. I am delighted, however, to have a chance to meet and talk. Let me first make certain for those who have microphones turned on whether my voice is carrying to you or whether I need to speak up or whether we need to turn this mike up. Can you hear me all right?



QUESTION: We can run a test if you want.

AMBASSADOR WISNER: It's up to you. It's up to you. We'll test the value of your technology. Are you all right? Good, good, sounds like you can hear me. Good, thanks.

Well, again, a word of thanks. I am particularly pleased to have an opportunity to meet with all of you for the negotiation to which I have been associated is now reaching its crucial and final stage. Yesterday, the third of April, the UN chief negotiator, former Finnish President Ahtisaari, presented his conclusions to the Security Council. The Prime Minister of Serbia spoke his piece. Mr. Rücker, the United Nations representative on the ground in Kosovo, read the statement from the Provisional Institutions from President Sejdiu and the debate is now fully underway.

The United States' view for which I have come before you this morning to speak is very clear and very straightforward: We support the work of President Ahtisaari. We believe he has done a skillful job under the most difficult circumstances. We support his conclusions, his conclusion that Kosovo needs now to move towards independence, albeit supervised, and that that independence provide for a multi-ethnic state, a state in which the communities of Kosovo be fully protected.

Now, from the American vantage point let me give you some of our thinking as to why this outcome is both logical and necessary. To all of you of the international press, I don't have to remind you of the long, long history of the Kosovo matter. All through the 1990s we saw, we witnessed the gradual deterioration of the situation in Kosovo beginning with the repeal of the area's autonomy arrangements under those that pertained in the former Yugoslavia with increasing repression, the disestablishment of local institutions, the denial of linguistic and cultural rights to the majority population. The matter exploded violently in the late '90s, 1999, forcing an intervention of NATO forces in which the United States was a lead participant at a time of the greatest tragedy -- nearly a million refugees forced onto the roads, tens of -- nearly ten thousand lives were lost, homes were destroyed, property destroyed. Kosovo was a center of conflict and tragedy.

The international community entered and under 1244 it made a statement, under the Security Council's decisions, under 1244, the issue of the interim rule which was assigned in trust to the United Nations was established, and 1244 called for the international community to reach a conclusion about the future status of Kosovo later on. That period of time -- eight years -- have gone by, eight years and now frankly, after eight years, one needs to move on and get a settlement. The United Nations Secretary General called on President Ahtisaari with the support of the Security Council backed up by a Contact Group of nations directly interested in the future of the region -- the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy Russia. And for the past nearly 15 months, President Ahtisaari has tried to find a way forward. He has reached a conclusion. He has reached a conclusion after listening carefully to all the parties, finding it extremely difficult on occasions, particularly to get a coherent view out of Belgrade. He found it a bit easier on the Kosovo side. For equally good reasons, they hoping for their eventual freedom and independence, participated more actively.

But we have before us today, ladies and gentlemen -- and the United States has certainly drawn the conclusion -- an opportunity to settle this longstanding and unhappy matter. It is within our power as the international community voiced through the Security Council mandated under 1244 to reach such a settlement. The settlement that is called for under 1244 clearly assigns a responsibility to the international community to come to a conclusion. It is also safe to say that after however many -- whatever time you wish to ascribe to the development of the Kosovo situation, 12, 14, 15 years, 8 years, whatever you wish or the 15 months of negotiation, this is a matter that has reached a culminating point. Moreover, it would equally be fair to say that with the delay there is a huge anticipation that a conclusion be reached and in that anticipation is a situation of instability for an outcome that has long been promised and delayed on frequent occasions.

I would equally argue -- and important for all of us citizens of this world -- that we have a chance now as an international community speaking through the Security Council to bring to a conclusion the last of the territorial quarrels that erupted in the wake of the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the last of the areas of uncertainty in Southeastern Europe a chance to put a stable environment with clarity so that people in the region know what their choices are and where they're headed. And I'd like to believe finally that we have a chance as an international community to do the right thing and that is: a people that have long suffered and have aspired now to their own independence, the 90 percent of the population in Kosovo, to give them a chance to prove what they are capable of doing and to establish a multiethnic state.

I think probably no less was called for by the framers of the Helsinki Final Act when they turned to governments inside of Europe, parties to that act, and called on them to treat their minorities, indeed all their citizens, with decency.

Now, the choices before us today are -- or choices before the negotiator and, therefore, before all of us, were limited. There were really only two choices on the table. One was the ardent desire of the majority population for independence. The second was an offer on the part of Serbia for autonomy, a reversion to the autonomous arrangements, perhaps enhanced, that Kosovo had enjoyed while it was part of Serbia and part of the former Yugoslavia. I would argue those were the two real choices. The third choice, continuing the present uncertain and unresolved situation, continuing the status quo, continuing the United Nations mandate was not an option for neither the situation on the ground, nor the capacities of the United Nations present in Kosovo permitted a continuation of the status quo. Moreover, when the events,

tragic as they were, of March 2004, occurred, the United Nations concluded that a fresh study was needed. Kai Eide, a distinguished Norwegian diplomat, reached the conclusion that status had to be resolved before the standards, the conditions within Kosovo could be properly and fully addressed. So the status quo to my way of thinking and my government's is simply not an option.

Now the other two options: is autonomy a real option? I think if we reflect on the situation, the possibility of asking a population that had experienced the historical circumstances that the majority population in Kosovo experienced, asking that population to revert to the status quo ante was most unlikely and was actively and heartily opposed by the leadership of the political parties representing the majority community. There was no way, in short, that the Albanian-speaking majority of Kosovo would ever accept to go back under the rule of Serbia. And that left therefore the choice of status: independence. And as I have argued, we reached our conclusion. As Americans, we believe it is the right thing. We believe it opens the way to a more stable Europe. We believe that it is the only sensible choice the international community can make.

Now, having reached that conclusion, I would observe furthermore that the proposals that President Ahtisaari has worked through painstakingly over the course of his negotiations are fair and sensible. At heart, they aim for the creation of a multi-ethnic state. That is more than something of a departure in the modern history of the Balkans. It is a state in which communities will live side by side with freedom and protection. It is a state that will be sovereign, but supervised. In short, the international community expressed, through the Contact Group, will remain observant of the implementation of any Security Council resolution that is passed for a number of years; initially, two years. We'll see how it develops. That international presence will have the capacity to override any decisions taken in Kosovo that act contrary to the United Nations Security Council resolution. It will be a protected entity in the sense that NATO will continue to be present with forces on the ground able to ensure the viability and security terms of the Kosovo territory.

And finally, and most importantly, the Kosovo of the future under the Security Council resolution would have the fullest possible protection for all communities, and notably the Serbian community. That community would be protected in three ways: It would have municipalities. Those municipalities would enjoy substantial rights of self-government, be able to access funding from abroad; would be able to have substantial say over their police judiciary systems; would be able to exercise their say in education and in health; would, in short, be able to permit the continuation of the Serbian language and protect that continuation, provide for dual citizenship. In short, an ethnic protection that is truly, to my way of thinking, unparalleled in the modern experience of Europe.

The church, so central to Serbia's culture and history, present in Kosovo, has additional protections, territorial, the delineation of monasteries and churches, their properties, their rights and obligation of the international community as well to protect those properties and make sure that they have free access, ability to cross borders to receive communicants, to be able to exercise full religious rights. The third protection will lay in the central institutions of a new Kosovo and in its constitution in which anything that would approach an abridgement of minority, of community rights, would require particular constitutional measures to be overridden.

In short, faced with a situation in which independence makes the most sense, this multiethnic establishment is a true, true departure and a fair one, skillfully negotiated and put together by President Ahtisaari. Now, the negotiation that lies before us in the United Nations will be intense. We recognize, as the United States, that Serbia has the strongest possible views about the maintenance of its sovereignty over Kosovo. The United States has a longstanding and very deep relationship with the Republic of Serbia and it goes back well over a century. We want to build on that relationship. We believe we can do it better when the problems of the area are settled, they have been much settled with the outcomes in Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, et cetera. It is now Kosovo that needs to be settled.

There will be robust arguments in the Security Council from others, including from our Russian friends. The United States will not rush to a conclusion on this matter, but allow time for ample, thorough exploration and discussion. That's what started yesterday. But it is time in our judgment to reach a conclusion and we are headed in that direction. This is the moment to get it done. The United States is determined to do all in its power to make sure that this time we get it done and we get it done right.

With those remarks, ladies and gentlemen, I'd be happy to take any questions that you might have.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Jean-Louis Turlin, Le Figaro. I know that Ambassador Churkin from Russia has requested more time for more talks. How do you feel about that?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: I believe that after 14, now going on 15 months, the possibility of reaching any different conclusion has been exhausted. That is Mr. Ahtisaari's conclusion. It is definitely my own and that of my government. Another month or two or six or ten is not going to change the fundamentally different perspectives the two key parties bring to the table. It is not possible to bridge the gap. Neither a new negotiator, nor more negotiations will achieve that purpose. Over these 15 months, every conceivable or reasonable avenue has been explored. So we've come to the conclusion that it makes no sense to start the negotiation again because the endpoint would be no better than the one we're at and perhaps even worse, given the fact that there are such expectations for a conclusion.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Martin Rajec, Slovak Radio. Yesterday in front of the (inaudible) journalists, the Serbian Prime Minister said that Ahtisaari plan wasn't accepted by the UN Security Council. What is your comment on that?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, the debate just opened yesterday. The Security Council now has to consider the proposal. It has to begin the difficult process of drafting a resolution. It has to consider that resolution. It may want to take other steps to examine the Kosovo matter. That's all within the purview of the Security Council, so one can hardly say that that which has just started less than 24 hours ago is already over. Obviously, we believe the Security Council, after it considers carefully what lies before it, will reach the same conclusions that we have; that we have both an obligation and a responsibility borne by doing the right thing to come to a conclusion, come to it now, to preserve the peace and stability of Southeastern Europe is an obligation that falls on the Security Council, notably in addition to the responsibilities assigned under 1244.

MODERATOR: Ambassador, we have a question from Washington.

QUESTION: Hi, this is Stephanie Ho from Voice of America, Ambassador Wisner. I just wanted to ask about Russia. I mean, you mentioned that there were differences of opinion with Russia and I was just curious to know whether there was room for compromise or so -- just to get Russia's acquiescence in the UN Security Council. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR WISNER: The -- our Russian friends and we have been associated on the issue of Kosovo for many years. When the negotiation began 15 months ago, Russia joined the Contact Group. It has been party to the Contact Group's deliberations from day one. We would like, as Americans, to end this association over Kosovo in the same spirit of collaboration and cooperation that we began it.

The President has already called and spoken to President Putin. The discussions with members of the Russian Government have been underway. Last Friday, Under Secretary Burns met with Deputy Foreign Minister Titov here in New York. We've made it clear to the Russians, as I told you just several instances ago, that the -- we believe that it is right to talk, think this through very carefully, work closely together. Our objective is that which we began together, let us end together; but, there is ample opportunity to discuss, to look at, to consider and then to act.

And our view, the basis on which the action should be concluded, is -- follows the Ahtisaari recommendation. We believe in the independence of Kosovo and we, the United States, believe the Ahtisaari proposals provide the best framework for effectuating that independence.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Yes, my name is Sandro Pozzi, I work for El Pais Spanish daily. I want to know your opinion about the European position. It seems that there are little divergences between the members, for example, Spain and Greece are presenting some doubts with the proposal of Mr. Ahtisaari. And one of the objectives is to have an agreement -- the Security Council during the German presidency. They are talking about take more time, maybe, in the discussions. Are you -- do you think if there is outbreak inside the European Union, it's impossible to arrive to that goal at the end of June or to have an agreement in the Security Council? Or do you think if there is not agreement after German presidency, there is a risk of collapsing in the European position?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, there are a lot of assumptions and hypotheses built into your question and that's all perfectly fair. First of all, while the United States supports the view that there ought to be a good and substantial discussion, we don't see it as interminable. We're not setting a deadline, but we're certainly not expecting this to go on for months and months through the German presidency or whatever you had in mind in spelling out matters beyond that. We'd like to see it brought to a conclusion. Nothing gets any better, the proposal doesn't change, the situation on the ground doesn't improve. I explained very carefully to a previous questioner why we do not believe additional negotiations will lead to any other conclusion.

Now let me, though, go to the heart of your question, the most important part from my perspective, and that is, what is the European attitude? Obviously, this is a tough issue. None of us have reached the stage we're at right now because it's simple; eight years have passed since the end of the war. It hasn't been immediately obvious that we can come up with a solution that made anybody fully happy.

But what has been important is the terrific degree of solidarity between the core European group that has worked on this issue with the United States throughout. I've been party to that. I've been party to those discussions with the British, with the French, with the Germans, with our friends in Rome. And from them through many others in Europe I've personally met, other American representatives, I believe there is the strongest possible Euro-American view that the Kosovo matter has got to get settled and this is the right time to do it.

We and the European members of the contact group are of one mind and we've expressed that mind throughout the course of the negotiations in the statements that have flowed from national capitals and from collective contact group statements. So yes, I am optimistic about Atlantic solidarity on this issue. I believe we are well in tune with our European friends with whom we have been negotiating this matter and I believe that solidarity will be continued throughout and reflected in the final vote that occurs in the Security Council.

MODERATOR: Ambassador, I believe we have a question there in the back.

AMBASSADOR WISNER: There is -- I did -- I saw the gentleman.

QUESTION: Ambassador, Kahraman Haliscelik, from Kanalturk TV. The only problem that we can see from what you say is the Russian opposition at the UN -- I mean, the Security Council. How do you plan to overcome that and how fair do you think is the Russian opposition?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, I believe it can only be overcome through the active exercise of diplomacy and that is to lay out the choices, talk them through, think about what's the road ahead, allow both sides to reflect on their basic and core interests. This issue, one must remember, is of vital significance to Europe.

Europe's Southeastern stability depends on a settlement in Kosovo. Europe provides a substantial portion of the troops that are deployed under NATO command in Kosovo today. Europe is a major contributor to the economic environment, the support of the present mission.

Equally, the United States has vital interests. We went to war over this issue. We have 1700 American soldiers on the ground. We are major contributors to the peacekeeping and UN maintenance costs in Kosovo. We've made our statement. This is important to us.

Is it important to the same degree for Russia or are we talking about core interests and more peripheral ones? I'll argue that for us and for Europe, these are core interests. We need to get this matter settled and I hope through a careful examination of the equities involved, we will reach common ground.

Yes, sir, you were, I think, next.

QUESTION: Joe Geni, Japanese daily. On that note, the Russians have continually raised the issue of other separatist regions, including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and said -- you know, "If Kosovo becomes its own country, what about these other regions and what sort of precedent does this set?" Can you comment on that concern and is it valid?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: I think it is a valid concern for all of us in the international community when a nation previously defined and accepted by the international community heads towards a breakup. Are we setting a precedent for the future that could affect the stability of other nations; that's a perfectly fair question, one I think that has to puzzle all of us.

However, I would argue that Kosovo is unique and in its own case, does not set a precedent. After all, let's look around and please tell me where circumstances similar to Kosovo have occurred: a war with this degree of disruption; violation of basic rights; refugee floods; destruction of life and property; and international intervention; a Security Council resolution; a mandate of trust and rule by the UN for eight years; the designation of an international representative to sort out a future, a final status. I don't know another case in the world that is anything like it or is likely in any reasonable set of circumstances ever to be replicated.

Therefore, I believe that Kosovo is not a precedent; it stands on its own. And to jumble the world's many quarrels all together is to leave oneself without the capacity to make distinctions, and we have a responsibility to make distinctions.

But I would add one other point, and I tried to make it in my closing remarks when I mentioned to you the Helsinki Final Act. Will there be other occasions in history in which a minority population feels disobliged and seeks to strike out on its own? We'll all have the power of judgment to determine whether that case merits international attention. But it also falls under the Helsinki Act, particularly for Europe, that governments keep their pledge, their pledge to treat their people decently and their minorities decently, and to maintain a degree of amity, consensus, respect for institutions. So I believe that it lies in all our powers to make sure that there aren't going to be any more Kosovos by the way we organize and govern ourselves internally.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Nevena Mandadjieva, Bulgarian News Agency. What do you think are the options of the United States Government in case the Security Council doesn't reach a conclusion or a resolution? What possible steps?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, I think it's really premature to start talking about failure when we've just started yesterday, and to the contrary, I think the case for Kosovo from our perspective is so overwhelmingly clear and so urgently needed that the odds of the right conclusion being reached by the Security Council are quite clear. Though everyone would like this matter to be settled within the parameters of international legitimacy, that will be the objective of the United States in the days and weeks ahead, and we're not headed towards some other conclusion.

But let me emphasize we, the United States, believes the time is at hand. Kosovo needs to be settled. It can't be left dangling. And we are determined to do everything in our power to make sure the issue is settled.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Tomas Schmidt, ARD German radio. You just said the facts are on the table with the findings of President Ahtisaari, but now there is -- the Russian side put forward a proposal for sort of a fact-finding mission of the Security Council members to the Kosovo to, well, give them their personal view of the situation down there. Do you think that's really necessary or is it just a means of slowing the whole process down by the Russian side?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, first of all, there isn't a decision yet on this mission.

QUESTION: No, it's a proposal.

AMBASSADOR WISNER: It's a proposal. And second --

QUESTION: But it seems to me -- if I may interrupt you. But it seems to be attractive to a number of members of the Security Council.

AMBASSADOR WISNER: At first blush it seems perfectly logical. But it all depends what is the purpose of the mission. If the purpose of the mission is to observe, inform, acquire the kind of information a responsible government would want to have on hand to make a decision, that's one thing. If it is to in some manner reopen the negotiation, then we don't see much point in it because the negotiation from our perspective has gone on, lo, these 15 months. Mr. Ahtisaari has exhausted about every imaginable path to a conclusion that is possible, so reopening it isn't going to advance the case.

So I'm not prepared to say whether we support or don't support the mission. It depends what the mission is. And that hasn't been decided. It will be discussed in the Security Council and we'll take a position in terms of the facts on the table.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Gunilla Kinn from Swedish national news agency. (Inaudible) about the strategy (inaudible) is to go to (inaudible) Security Council (inaudible). Is that an argument that you recognize?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: I would find that difficult -- a difficult case to defend, as you put it. I believe that Security Council members are elected with a view to expressing the international community's views as a whole, not simply following along one regional bloc or another. Obviously, in making a decision, any member of the Security Council will look to those whose interests are most directly involved and take particular cognizance of that fact, but to go beyond it I think is to overstate the case.

I would expect each member of the Security Council to reflect on the choices and make his own, his/her own sovereign decision based on those facts. So I look forward to an ample airing in the Security Council without any assumption at the end of the day that -- of how countries will vote or vote by blocs or by regions. I believe we've got a good case here. I believe it's well understood. It will be even better understood in the days ahead and I'm optimistic about the outcome.

QUESTION: Hi. Adrian Novac, Romanian television Antenna One. I have two questions for you. One is a follow-up. The Romanian Government is officially backing Ahtisaari's plan, but behind the scenes there are a lot of criticism regarding Kosovo independence and the Romanian position is not -- this dual position is not singular within the European Union. And how do you respond to these concerns?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, I have been aware for some time of concerns, reservations expressed by our friends in Bucharest. I would argue that we're all taking a bit of a chance when a new nation stands ready to establish itself on the international scene. Obviously, the very fact that it's new means that it's to some degree untested, but I would argue that Kosovo is as ready as any nation that is newly emerged in this turbulent era that we've all lived in.

Think for a moment. At least until the late '80s, Kosovo had substantial autonomy and its institutions were responsible for ordinary governance.

Second, during the last eight years, the United Nations has set about to revive those institutions, build on them, expand them, and today has reached its own conclusion that further progress in the full development of national institutions will not take place if the issue of the outcome, of status, is not settled.

Third, we're not going to leave. We, the international community, are not being asked to leave everything to chance. There will be an international body of oversight made up of the existing Contact Group representatives who will watch very carefully. And if there is any straying away from the established views of the Security Council, a right to intervene, of override.

Finally, I would argue with my friends in Bucharest who are worried about the future that they and we need to look at the future in a dynamic sense. And that is the future for Serbia, the future for Kosovo as the future for the rest of the region, lies inside of Europe, not as some island off the shore with no association with Europe; and that the European dynamic, the importance any rational citizen of Kosovo or Serbia or anywhere else in the Balkans would have is to be part of Europe, part of a growing economy. Kosovo is today a poor nation. Fifty percent of its people have no jobs. It can't move ahead unless it has sovereignty, but it will not move ahead to its fullest without being part of Europe.

Now, in that sense, there is a dynamic afoot that Kosovo to merit consideration for further support from Europe, and maybe one day entry into the European family, has got to prove itself responsible. I think that is a powerful discipline, and one that should encourage Bucharest, those who worry about this matter, to look to the future as one of the great guideposts of what's going to happen in the present and be less concerned for, while I don't believe anything is ever a sure bet, this one is a calculated and sensible bet.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that in case a resolution doesn't come sooner, the Albanian politicians in Kosovo might declare independence unilaterally?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: I know that it is the desire and intention of the Albanian political leaders as represented in their Unity Team that had been the negotiators throughout to operate within the context of international legitimacy. After all, they reached an agreement with Mr. Ahtisaari and have supported his proposal, painful as that is in many instances for them -- the session of terrific authorities to minority communities, painful as it is -- nonetheless, they have made their statement. They want to be internationally acceptable. And so I think that's where they're headed. They're not aiming at breaking out of international legality, but to try to stay with, inside it. But they need a settlement as well. They need a conclusion. We recognize that. That's precisely why I said the United States knows this is the time to settle the Kosovo matter because it cannot now any longer remain unsettled. The status quo is not an option.

Let's see, I just want to make sure those who haven't had a chance to ask a question -- sir.

QUESTION: I'm a member of Russian opposition to this Kosovo plan. Ambassador, the arguments you used in your case for the independence of Kosovo could be used by separatists in many parts of the world, most of all in the former territory -- the territory of the former Soviet Union. I mean, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Karabakh. Does it mean that when the Kosovo problem is settled, there will be a turn for the Security Council to start dealing with these issues?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, I don't think -- I think we're making a mistake here and we are going back to the error that I tried to point to before. If we group all regional differences in the same pot, we can't make distinctions. There is a distinction between the way the international community has dealt with those conflicts. There is an entirely separate process that deals with the question of Georgia that has been on the table in the United Nations. I'm not going to pretend I'm a great expert in that process and how it works. But it is distinctly different than what has happened in Kosovo. And it should follow its own course. And it should be defined on its own terms as

it has been in the past. So I'm only arguing today one case -- Kosovo is not a precedent. Kosovo stands unique on the world's stage today with its particular defining features, its degree of UN responsibility, its degree of Security Council responsibility and it ought to be settled on its own terms. Other issues will be settled on their terms by the international community, the powers involved and that's as true for all the quarrels you mentioned and many beyond Europe's borders.

QUESTION: But aren't you concerned that separatists could take it as an inspiration?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Separatists can take matters and claim that there is some parallel between their circumstance and someone else's. They'll have to stretch quite hard to make the case that there is connectivity between Kosovo and their circumstances. But then I come back to the second of the three points I made to you. We of the international community have a judgment to make ourselves. Is the claim that is asserted legitimate? Does it make sense? We have a brain and we'll make those distinctions. I also suggested and it was my third point that nations themselves have a responsibility; the way they treat their people will affect the way their minorities react. So let's maintain the power of choice and decision. Kosovo is separate. If the world has to face other -- has faced and will face other crises, they ought to be dealt with on their own merits.

I am about to -- let's see, you have not asked a question.

QUESTION: No, sir. (inaudible) from RTV 21. You did visit the region many times and you just said the unemployment, poverty and everything - we've seen the game that is being played from -- is being led from Russians and from Serbia, just to delay? If the violence comes, which is -- it might if it continues like this, who would be responsible for this? And Russians as - as the serious country that they are, would they allow that -- to be blamed for this?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Well, first of all, I do not predict, anticipate, and most definitely, I would discourage any thought of violence. It is important for Kosovo at this stage of its decision, its population to stand behind its leaders and make it clear that this is a law-abiding people ready to have their future sorted out in an internationally acceptable manner. I also believe that a responsibility falls on the political leaders of Kosovo themselves to maintain their leadership, that attitude, that respect for law and order legitimacy.

I don't mince my words in this regard. I believe it deeply. But I also recognize that there are certain inherent instabilities in this situation. One does not go through the historic experience of the '90s and the war in Kosovo without there being real consequences. Emotions are raw, on edge. One doesn't wait for eight years with a promise of a settlement and 15 months of a negotiation, the outcome of which was delayed to accommodate matters like the Serbian election. And now, to stand right at the final line, that creates a lot of tension. We must, as members of the international community, not forget that that tension is a real problem. We need to deal with it.

That's why I'm arguing today with all of you, we need a settlement. We need to get it behind us so that we are able to resolve the Kosovo problem in a responsible, orderly, internationally approved, UN-negotiated framework that we all understand and will guide the play and not have a more chaotic outcome. The choice is up to us as internationals to make the decision to preserve stability or to see chaos -- to run the risk of a more chaotic outcome.

I think I've probably exhausted everyone's patience, including my hosts from the Foreign Press Center.

MODERATOR: Not at all, but if there are not any more questions --

AMBASSADOR WISNER: Oh, sorry, one more.

QUESTION: I'm just curious. I know there has been ads and (inaudible) from (inaudible). For example, last year it was an ad in (inaudible) depicting (inaudible) for terrorism and (inaudible). Do you think that (inaudible)?

AMBASSADOR WISNER: I can assure you, when I told you what the United States position was, I did not mince my words. From the President, throughout his entire Administration, we've reflected carefully on the Kosovo matter and we've reached the conclusion of our support for Kosovo's independence and for Ahtisaari's proposals.

The Administration's position is strongly supported on bipartisan lines. You may have seen late last week a resolution sponsored by Senator Lieberman in the Senate. There have been similar resolutions in the House. Also, along the same -- taking the same direction, there is strong bipartisan American support for this outcome. It's a privilege for me as a negotiator to know with confidence that I speak for all Americans.

Now will different elements, groups, communities in the United States voice their views, run ads? Of course, they're free to do so. That's just fine. We -- nobody has any objection to it. We obviously -- I would prefer to see those views expressed responsibly. Views that somehow Kosovo is a haven of terror and fundamentalism are grossly overdrawn, grossly. Grossly overdrawn and not accurate. I have been to Kosovo sufficiently. We have a large mission in Kosovo. We follow events there closely. I can assure you that the depiction you describe bears no relationship to the reality.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate it. Good, thanks so much.



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