

Slobo's Surrender

Author: [IWPR](#)

The Kosovo peace deal amounts to Serb capitulation to all of NATO's demands.

The Kosovo peace agreement ratified today by the Serbian parliament amounts to capitulation to every demand which NATO has presented for an end to its bombing campaign. Its terms are therefore far harsher than those of the Rambouillet Agreement which the same parliament rejected two and a half months earlier.

The new agreement, nevertheless, remains only a framework document for a political settlement and fails to address the issue of war crimes. And the crucial question of the implementation of the agreement can only be answered over the coming weeks.

The agreement calls for an "immediate and verifiable" end to violence and repression in Kosovo and the verifiable withdrawal of military, police and paramilitary forces from the province according to a rapid timetable. NATO will continue its bombing campaign until it is satisfied that the troop withdrawal has begun.

According to a footnote to the agreement, Serbia will have 48 hours to remove all its air defences from Kosovo and seven days to get all its forces out. Troops leaving the province will have to withdraw beyond an as yet unspecified line leaving a buffer zone between them and Kosovo. Further details and a precise timetable for a phased withdrawal are left for a more specific military agreement.

The existing agreement envisages an international civil and military presence in Kosovo under UN auspices to be deployed in accordance with chapter 7 of the UN charter. It specifies that there will be "essential NATO participation" in the military presence--that is that the force will be NATO-led, and that troops will operate under a "unified control and command" structure. It seems, therefore, that Belgrade and Moscow have backed down on the issue of a special Russian zone of influence.

International troops will be authorised to secure a safe environment for all of Kosovo's residents and ensure the safe return of all displaced persons and refugees to their homes--a far more explicit and stronger mandate than that contained in the Dayton Peace Agreement ending the war in Bosnia.

The UN Security Council should set up an interim administration for Kosovo granting the province "substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia". That interim administration will aim to build democratic and self-governing institutions and establish conditions for peaceful and normal life of all Kosovo's citizens.

Once Serb forces have withdrawn, several hundred troops will be allowed to return--under international supervision--to carry out the following four duties: liaison with the international civil and military missions; marking mine fields; guarding sites of Serb heritage; and maintaining a presence at key border crossings.

The key agency assigned with overseeing the return of refugees is, as in Bosnia, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Meanwhile, humanitarian agencies are to have undisturbed access to the province.

Political dialogue aimed at an interim agreement on autonomy should begin immediately, but should not delay formation of democratic self-governing institutions. Moreover, they should be based on the

Rambouillet Agreement, principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity and the demilitarisation of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Drawing on a concept which has been discussed in general terms in various European capitals in recent weeks, the agreement also refers to a stability pact for south-eastern Europe. It calls for international support to promote "democracy, economic prosperity, stability and regional co-operation". It does not, however, contain any specific promises.

The agreement makes no mention of war crimes. However, given the indictment last week of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and four of his inner circle, Serbia is unlikely to benefit from international reconstruction aid as long as they remain in power.

Christopher Bennett, an IWPR senior editor, is former director of the International Crisis Group in the Balkans and author of Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse (Hurst, 1995).

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