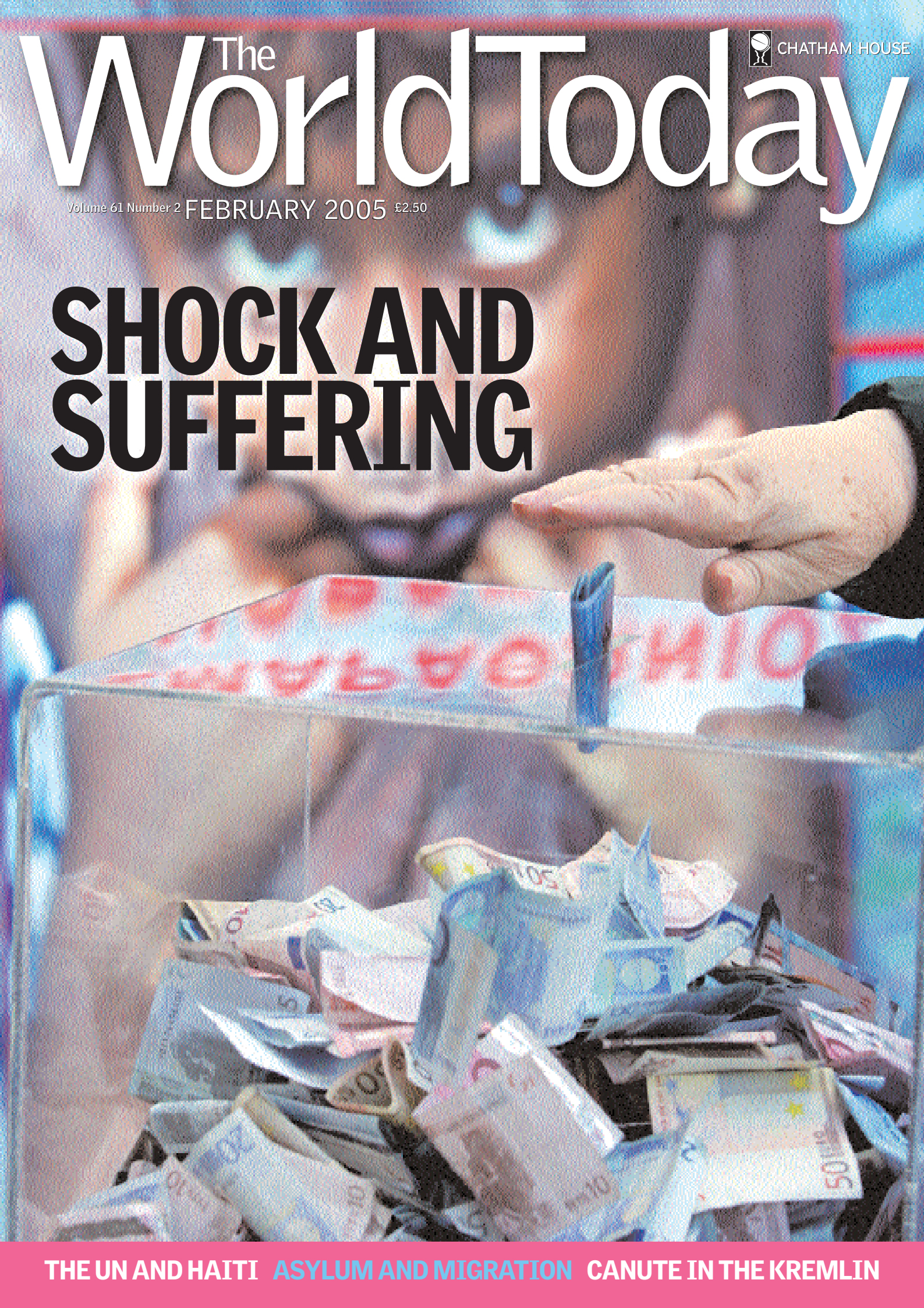


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SHOCK AND SUFFERING



THE UN AND HAITI ASYLUM AND MIGRATION CANUTE IN THE KREMLIN

KOSOVO James Pettifer

Nation in Waiting

The future of Kosovo is likely to be decided this year. Washington sees the area as a key factor in its strategic plans for oil and Middle East security. So independence is suddenly back on the agenda.

SIX YEARS AGO, DIPLOMATS WERE PUTTING the finishing touches on what was to be the Rambouillet conference that led to NATO bombing. Refugees huddled under plastic sheeting in the rain and snow of the Drenice forests. Slobodan Milosevic did, or did not, bother to see American envoy Richard Holbrooke. It seems a world as distant now as that of the Middle Ages.

The refugees eventually went home, NATO sent in a protection force and, until the riots last March, the world more or less forgot about Kosovo. The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) administration set about spending the reconstruction money, non-government organisations rebuilt homes, and the European Union (EU) repaired and widened roads. Elections were held, peacefully and successfully, but few of the diminishing number of Serbs in Kosovo bothering to vote in a society ninety-seven percent dominated by ethnic Albanians.

It was very much a holding operation, with serious international opposition to Albanian rule intensifying after the overthrow of Milosevic, and the assumption that the Serb view of the world would undergo major changes. It did not.

On the ground, the mood has swung towards a break with Serbia. New links are developing with neighbours, ending the near-total monopoly on trade held by Belgrade in the communist era, and border crossings with Albania are opening.

The Kosovo parliament and President Ibrahim Rugova are pushing the line that Kosovo is already de facto independent, and is only waiting for the world to recognise it. The arrests of a number of ex-Kosova Liberation Army figures and their departure to the International Tribunal in the Hague has had no effect on Kosovo Albanian public opinion about the validity of the war and the desire for nationhood.

PROTECTING POWER

According to the United Nations, this is the year to make the decision on political status, if its 'Standards before Status' criteria are fulfilled. These say Kosovo must achieve civil society standards and in particular allow Serb refugees to return. The standards are much higher than were applied to Croatian or

Bosnian recognition, or that of numerous other newly independent states in the last sixty years of decolonisation. They are unlikely to be fulfilled in full. It is debatable, though, whether this will be decisive in the political process.

Although Washington has publicly supported the UN policy, there is every sign that the US has a medium and long term political agenda that seeks a political decision on Kosovo quite soon. Kosovo is to be a central building block in a new regional architecture. This involves boosting Turkey as a power within the EU, and diminishing the significance of Greece.

South east Europe is very important in geostrategic US military planning. It is intended to be the firm ground from which US power can be projected into the Muslim world and the Middle East. Some of the most crucial new oil and gas pipeline routes from the Caspian and elsewhere run through the west Black Sea region, and another is projected across Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania, cutting out Greece.

US military power is increasingly projected from the sea, and the coastal regions north of Egypt and

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Israel in Turkey, Greece, Albania, Croatia and the Black Sea coasts of Romania and Bulgaria have a central importance. The massive US base at Camp Bondsteel in south east Kosovo is not there by coincidence.

As a result of the 1999 campaign, Kosovo joins Albania as one of the most pro-American countries in the world, on all measures of public opinion. It has a favoured position in Washington as a result, compared to Greece and Serbia where US diplomats spend much of their time under intense security protection and battling against entrenched anti-Americanism in the media and political elite.

Washington is prepared to embrace unilateralism in the Balkans as elsewhere, as the recent decision to recognise Macedonia under its preferred name shows. This was a major blow to Greek and EU positions. There are now three main options for Kosovo, the status quo, partition, and independence.

STATUS QUO

The status quo is not seen as viable by most observers. UNMIK head Soren Jessen-Petersen commented recently that

the riots in March last year showed 'you cannot keep Kosovo as a holding operation forever.' Even those attacks on Serb property did not slow the transfer of authority to local Kosovo institutions.

Four years after the war ended, the UN administration has been widely criticised for inefficiency, incompetence and most of all for practical failures such as the lack of a reliable electricity supply. Its headquarters has moved out of central Prishtina and more and more power is in the hands of local organisations.

On the crucial issue of security, the largely ex-Kosovo Liberation Army, Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) is evolving from a national-guard type civil protection force towards a proper army. There is increasing local control over border security and customs.

Although the NATO's KFOR is strong and well organised in comparison to the UN, it is not ultimately capable of controlling the streets against the overwhelming Albanian majority, as the events of last March demonstrated. Some KFOR component forces were shown to have only a notional strength, and to be incapable of mobilising quickly against trouble.

There are significant command and control problems within KFOR as a result of the system where commanders refer back to their national capitals for views on operational decisions. On the economic front, privatisation will bring new forces, based on free markets and the ending of UN trusteeship of Kosovo's productive capacity.

PARTITION

As a result of population movement caused by the riots, influential voices have been arguing for partition, with a new border line roughly along the Ibar river, in Mitrovica. The population in the northern Leposavic and Mitrovica areas is overwhelmingly Serb, and some leaders there have been supporting a form of devolution that would allow a canton to be formed.

There are several strong arguments against partition. The first is that about forty thousand Serbs are scattered in other parts of Kosovo, south of the Ibar. In a partition crisis they would undoubtedly be targeted by the Albanian majority and subject to pogroms and physical attack. They are in places where KFOR security protection is far from comprehensive. Large scale population movement often accompanies the partition of nations, as in India after 1947.

Secondly, KFOR would have to establish a new southern Serbian border with no clear legal mandate and massive obstacles. Virtually all the Albanian majority would oppose such a development, and a significant number of Kosovo Serbs would not agree with partition either.

On the Albanian side, in military terms it would probably result in the formation of an Irish Republican Army-type movement to reunite Kosovo, along Ulster lines. This would create a security nightmare for KFOR and NATO. The security advantage of a decision based on existing borders is that there would be a clear legal operational mandate and troops that could easily be reinforced if necessary.

The Albanian majority would support KFOR

and avoid creating instability. An unstable partition decision could lead to widespread interethnic violence that also carries the danger of intervention by Serbian military or paramilitary forces to 'protect' Serbs – effectively to enforce a new southern border for Serbia.

There are also strong economic arguments against partition. The Trepca mine complex straddling the Ibar is the jewel in the otherwise depleted Kosovo economic crown. Although the mines need substantial investment, they and the other mineral resources could ensure economic viability for a poor state.

Without Trepca, Kosovo would probably have to increase its links with Albania, even to the point of economic or political union. This would create more regional instability, particularly in Macedonia. Recent steep rises in base metal prices have underscored the value of the mines, including the largely unknown uranium deposit near Camp Bondsteel.

Independence is seen as the most attractive option by many in the US and in some EU states like Germany. Berlin has been making a greater commitment to the paramilitary KPC, and

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Britain has also been a strong, if largely unseen, supporter of its development.

NEW REALITIES

An independence decision would disentangle long running regional political problems. It would undermine Albanian nationalist extremism, which would lose its sense of historic grievance and loss that has such a hold over the political imagination. It would also make clear to Serbia that it has no special role as a dominant regional state, but only as a small developing transition country alongside several others.

This is a major point of US-European disagreement. After the end of the Milosevic regime, it became an orthodoxy in the British Foreign Office and elsewhere in Europe that Serbia could become the regional economic motor. There has been so sign whatsoever of this happening.

It is arguable that independence would encourage the Kosovo Albanian political class to behave more responsibly on issues such as organised crime – the loans and aid required to develop the nation could be made conditional on cooperation with international authorities.

The disadvantages of independence are that in Serbia it will be seen as yet another US-sponsored attack on their country. It may also be regarded as an affront to Orthodoxy as a whole and could encourage conservatives to look towards Russia. Serbia's international credit rating could suffer somewhat, as the base metals in Kosovo appear to have been included in its national assets in presentations to international economic organisations in the post Milosevic era.

"Kosovo is going to reemerge as a big international issue because the southern Balkans have a key role in US regional planning for geostrategic oil route security and the Middle East"

ORTHODOX ANSWER

There is no real possibility of getting an independence decision through the UN Security Council, since Russia and probably China would block it. Russia was critical of Washington's decision to recognise the name Macedonia, and will be tempted to focus on Greece as an alternative. Although Russia has withdrawn its peacekeeping troops from Kosovo, Moscow's approach is like that of Washington, viewing the Balkan region as increasingly integrated with Black Sea and oil policy.

Thus the small, southern Balkan countries are central in geopolitical

rivalry to a much greater extent than their northern neighbours with greater degree of EU recognition – Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary. The administration of President Vladimir Putin in Moscow has appeared to cut its losses, privately recognising that Kosovo will become independent. As a result it has intensified diplomatic and intelligence efforts elsewhere, primarily in fellow Orthodox nations.

Greece has been a central focus, with major Russian emigration and economic activity – both legal and dubious, a tourist boom, and efforts to revive the so-called 'Orthodox oil' transport route through Bulgaria to the Mediterranean. Greek and Macedonian banks are used for laundering Russian funds. These and other factors do not recommend Greece to policy planners in Washington, often preoccupied with the need to assist, stabilise and develop Turkey.

SUBTLE POWERPLAY

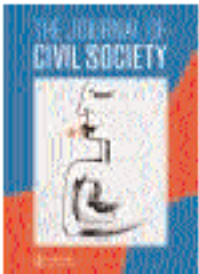
Many of the growing tensions are likely to converge on Macedonia rather than Kosovo. The twenty-five percent minority of Albanians living in Macedonia are among the most militant nationalists, and have the capacity to destabilise the state by resuming paramilitary activity. If there seems to be political progress on Kosovo, the increasingly linked Albanian leaderships will have every incentive to force their rank and file to behave in a moderate way, and go along with international community plans for a multi-ethnic state on the basis of the agreement that ended the 2001 conflict.

Unilateralist US foreign policy is often seen as relying on coercion, military force and crude economic sanctions. But in the southern Balkans, it is a subtle and often unseen process. It depends on the unique American relationship with the Albanians, the power, influence and money of the large Albanian diaspora in the US that has consciously modeled itself on the Jewish lobby, and the sense that Serbia will always have an equally special link with Russia.

Kosovo is going to re-emerge as a big international issue because the southern Balkans have a key role in US regional planning for geostrategic oil route security and the Middle East. It is going to be an interesting and difficult issue for Tony Blair's British government – since the humanitarian triumph of refugee return in 1999, it has received little attention. But key Blairites such as the new EU Trade Commissioner, Peter Mandelson, are known to have taken an interest in the subject, and so far Britain has not followed Washington's lead over Macedonian name recognition.

A challenging period lies ahead for those in Whitehall struggling to come to terms with the realities of US unilateralism, not only in the Middle East, but throughout the world.





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