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Washington should not give foreign-policy priority to Kosovo. Merry responds to Abramowitz and Hooper's prescriptions.

Messrs. Abramowitz and Hooper have very well [reviewed](#) the state of play on Kosovo for readers who might be forgiven for not having thought about the place in years. The upcoming advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice will insert the "Kosovo question" into Western newspapers for a day or two, but few Americans are likely to consider it of even tertiary importance. As Washington turns its back on the Balkans, we might consider some lessons for our pursuits in southern Asia and for understanding developments in the Caucasus.

In all these conflict areas, fragmentation is the essential threat to any type of effective governance (whether pluralist and representative or not). U.S. policy has tended to shatter what political and social cohesion existed and then bemoan the ensuing fragmentation. The United States waged war against Serbia and sponsored an independent Kosovo largely to punish Belgrade for its real and perceived sins, not because Kosovo warranted statehood. The Clinton administration demonized Slobodan Milosevic (as we later did his Iraqi counterpart) and sought to weaken him by fragmenting the state he ruled. Kosovo was bad enough (certainly Serb rule of the Kosovar Albanians had lost any legitimacy), but what about our short-sighted sponsorship of an independent Montenegro? How is the European state system better for partitioning Serbia, not once but twice?

Now, we are told, any partition of Kosovo to benefit the largely Serb population of the north must meet the maximum demands of the government in Pristina, acknowledged to be a sinkhole of corruption. In the past decade it is the Serbs who have shown a capacity to reform, despite the views of Washington Serbophobes, and are now the regional state best qualified to bring something of value to Europe's common table.

The United States is walking away from the Balkans, and rightly so. Sadly, the manifest love for this country among Kosovar Albanians is misplaced, because Washington will find very little attention and fewer resources for Kosovo or Bosnia or Macedonia with wars in Iraq and

Walk Away from the Balkans

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Afghanistan on its plate. Give priority to Kosovo? Don't make me laugh.

So, the headache is Europe's, as it always should have been. Are EU institutions up to the job? Perhaps not, but nobody else will step up. The tasks are many, but all come down to reversing the fragmentation of the 1990s. So far, Brussels has not even been able to allow Macedonia its proper nomenclature. This issue brought down one Greek government, so don't expect Athens to bend much.

Might partition of Kosovo incite similar ethnic divisions within Macedonia? No doubt, but the question remains why Europe is better off with two Albanian states on its map rather than one. Redrawing the political borders of the former Yugoslavia is probably not finished, but the policy objective should be to make those borders of less and less importance.

Finally, the U.S. official pretense that our sponsorship of an independent Kosovo was not a precedent for separatism elsewhere is just bunk. Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the August 2008 conflict was a blunder, but Abkhaz and Ossets are no more likely to return to Georgian rule than Kosovar Albanians are to Belgrade's. The Abkhaz, at least, have as much justification for an independent state as does Montenegro or Kosovo. In the Caucasus and in the Balkans, wars have consequences, and peace is usually provisional. These games never end.

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