
*Peace at Any Price* provides a powerful postmortem of the failure of the United Nations to build a just and lasting peace in Kosovo. We should care about Kosovo, authors Iain King and Whit Mason contend, out of concern not only for the two million people who live there and for their European neighbors, but also for people in deeply divided societies everywhere who rightly view Kosovo as an important precedent. “If Kosovo gains independence without having embraced ethnic diversity or the rule of law,” King and Mason warn, “it will be a thundering confirmation of the axiom that might makes right” (p. 21).

When *Peace at Any Price* went to press, the forecast for Kosovo was dire: “Ethnic division, endemic crime, noninclusive politics” (p. 23). Seasoned political analysts with deep knowledge of the Balkans, King and Mason are not so naïve to suggest a quick fix. However, they are interested in shedding light on how the grand failure of the international community in Kosovo came to pass.

As former United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) employees, King and Mason also have a vested interest in disproving the commonly held belief that UNMIK’s failures can be attributed to the incompetence of its staff. If this were true, King and Mason observe, future international efforts at conflict transformation could be made more successful simply by hiring better staff. Yet, “the failure of international efforts to transform Kosovo is tragic, because it occurred despite massive investment and serious efforts by thousands of imperfect, yet well-meaning, committed and generally competent people” (p. 22).

Through their careful research, King and Mason seek to demonstrate that the blame lies not with the dedication or technocratic competencies of individual staffers, but with deeper failures of understanding that doomed the international mission at its outset. When international forces intervened in Kosovo to stop massive human rights abuses, they “assumed that this could be achieved by forcing out Serb security forces” (p. 243). However, the Serb security forces were only a part of the problem in a much more complex “long-running competition between two peoples for control of territory” (Id.). Because the international community fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the conflict, they took the wrong approach to remedying it. While Kosovo Force (NATO-led) troops patrolled Kosovo’s borders against Serb aggression, they were unprepared for the intense state of insecurity within Kosovo as political groups jockeyed
for power and the “thugocracy” struggled for control over Kosovo’s tiny economy (p. 244).

The table of contents to *Peace at Any Price* promises to tell the tragedy of Kosovo in two main parts: Part I: The Four Phases of International Administration in Kosovo, and Part II: Why the World Failed to Transform Kosovo. Yet Part I occupies nearly the entire book, both in terms of page numbers and depth of discussion. Part II reads like a policy memo tagged on as an afterthought. To be sure, the sixteen pages devoted to “Explaining Failure” and the seven pages allotted to “Doing Better” contain many pearls of wisdom, and the authors’ distillation of the sources of failure into five categories—failures of understanding, ideology, unity, structure, and time—is particularly strong. Nonetheless, the book’s contribution to the field of peace studies would have been stronger had the authors developed these analytical sections, referencing other authoritative studies supporting or challenging their findings.

King and Mason criticize other analyses of international administrations for taking the same approach they adopt throughout most of their text: a chronological and sector-by-sector inquiry. (The categories include: Security and the rule of law; inter-ethnic relations; political development; hearts and minds; and the economy.) “While this approach can yield useful lessons,” King and Mason note, “it inevitably focuses on symptoms rather than the sources of under-performance” (p. 241). Yet the description of “symptoms” is precisely the strength of *Peace at Any Price*. Having lived through their own Kosovo experiences and having developed relationships with UNMIK insiders, King and Mason are in a good position to conduct a sector-by-sector inquiry and to identify the symptoms of ill-informed peace building efforts.

Among the many well-told narratives in *Peace at Any Price* is the story of the various leaders of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. The first person to serve a full term as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bernard Koucher is portrayed as a “humanitarian icon” whose many public “pronouncements were always infused with the language of rights, ethics and justice,” but who was less interested in the logistics necessary to carry out his grand ideas (See pp. 51, 52). In contrast, Kouchner’s replacement, Hans Haekkerup, is a “taciturn Dane” who achieved landmark political developments through “quiet determination (and determined quietness)” (p. 93). The next Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Michael Steiner, an “exhaustively energetic” man (p. 140) who engaged in a “continuous flurry of activity” (p. 141), is described as a “circus performer
spinning plates on poles to keep the audience from panicking as the tent burnt down around them” (p. 139).

King and Mason write with a sense of deep familiarity with Kosovo society. One important element they catch—which rarely receives mention—is the role of the small cultural elite, “a well educated, international group in which women are disproportionately represented” (p. 223). King and Mason aptly observe that “[a]mong the most important factors shaping Kosovo’s future will be whether this group can find an idiom through which to capture the imaginations of less cosmopolitan Kosovans and how much increasing opportunities for education and travel may transform the intelligentsia from an elite into a broader middle class” (Id.).

Other highlights of Peace at Any Price include the careful tracking of political developments. The discussion of the Standards, the set of eight broad goals for Kosovo, adds important insight, including its well-documented observation that while “the good news was that the Standards enjoyed broad acceptance among the informed public, ... the bad news was that most people devoted more time to describing obstacles than to devising solutions” (p. 179).

While the verdict on Kosovo will be debated for years to come, the verdict on King and Mason’s work is clear. Highly readable and well-informed, Peace at Any Price will be of great interest to students, scholars, and practitioners of conflict transformation and postwar democratization as well as to general interest readers in the field of international affairs.

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Herbert Aptheker on Race and Democracy is a collection of the late Herbert Aptheker’s scholarship, as well as a tribute to his path-breaking work on race, class, and African-American history. Aptheker’s central ideas—that slaves actively resisted their oppression, that slavery was a fundamental cause of the Civil War, that African-Americans played a central role in the abolitionist movement, and that Reconstruction was a struggle for interracial democracy—are now commonly accepted, yet they were dismissed by his contemporaries in the historical profession and Aptheker was blacklisted from academia for his membership in the