

NATO plans attacks in Kosovo

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After months of hectic political and diplomatic activity, on August 12 the council of NATO officially concluded its military discussions over a possible intervention in Kosovo. The speaker for the council declared that the preparations are now being made which most likely will be concluded at the end of August. The palette of alternatives ranges from 'threatening gestures' and manoeuvres, to air attacks, to the intervention of ground troops.

Should such an intervention follow, its purpose would by no means be 'to finally put an end to the violence,' as many lead articles and commentaries in the German press proclaim. Quite the opposite. Having themselves set in motion the spiral of violence in the Balkans, the great powers resemble Goethe's magician apprentices calling forth the spirit of nationalism, which they now cannot dispel.

In 1991 Germany played a leading role in splitting Yugoslavia in the name of 'national self determination' and 'independence'. The previous internal borders of the various Yugoslavian republics were declared to be international borders without any consideration for the national minorities living in the existing republics. The consequence was the civil war in Bosnia, with its numerous acts of 'ethnic cleansing', massacres, acts of brutality and forced evacuations.

When NATO intervened, first of all it supported the driving out of hundred of thousands of Serbs from Kraina and West Bosnia, separated Bosnia into three artificial enclaves under the control of Croatian, Serbian and Moslem nationalists and cemented this division with tens of thousands of NATO soldiers.

Slobodan Milosevic from Serbia, who together with Franjo Tudjman in Croatia and Alija Izetbegovic in Bosnia was one of the principal warmongers in the former Yugoslavia, was declared by the West to be a 'butcher' and 'the Hitler of the Balkans', only in 1995 to be given a new role at the Dayton talks: 'guardian of stability'.

The question of Kosovo, which helped to trigger the break-up of Yugoslavia and the resulting war, was deliberately excluded from the Dayton treaty by the US and the EU. The reason? This region, four-fifths of which is occupied by Albanians and only one-tenth by Serbs, plays a central role in the ideology of the Serbian nationalists. A humiliation for Milosevic on the Kosovo question could result in the replacement of the 'guardian of stability' by the far more unpredictable nationalists Vojislav Seselj and Vuk Draskovic.

In addition, Kosovo has a joint border with Albania and the west of Macedonia, which is also inhabited by a majority of Albanians. Every change in the unstable balance of power in the region has incalculable consequences. It threatens to ignite the nationalism of

two NATO countries and traditional antagonists Greece and Turkey, which never miss a chance to rattle the sword.

The Western countries therefore favour a solution that would guarantee Kosovo a form of autonomy within the framework of the Serb state. At the end of the 80s, however, Milosevic emerged and came to power precisely on the basis of a massive chauvinist campaign and the abolition of such autonomy for Kosovo. The Albanian nationalists for their part persisted with their line of the 'national right of self determination', i.e., independence from Serbia.

The Liberation Army of Kosovo (LAK) first of all emerged officially with a proclamation in April 1996. At this time it was clear that, after the Dayton agreement, only Albania was prepared to recognise the independence of Kosovo. Very little is known still about LAK. Apparently its command centre comprises remnants of the Albanian military and police units of Kosovo who were beaten in 1993 by the Serb police. Fighters of the LAK are alleged to have taken the side of the troops of Izetbegovic during the Bosnian war.

In 1997 the LAK led a guerrilla war in Kosovo. Its tactic was to provoke the Serb state to further repression through terrorist attacks on police and soldiers. Through such measures they hoped to animate the masses to resistance and to join the guerrillas until the war totally escalated and the NATO countries were forced to intervene on behalf of the Albanian side. Their ultimate aim is the unification of all Albanians in a single state.

The cynical calculations of the LAK at first appeared to work. At the end of February this year the Serb state powers began a police action in Kosovo, in the course of which dozens of Albanian civilians were murdered. The West sat up and took notice as, within the space of a few months, the separatist organisation grew from at the most a few hundred, to thousands and eventually tens of thousands of fighters. However, the policies of the US and the EU are not based on achieving 'human rights', 'freedom' or 'self-determination', but rather on solid strategic interests.

The American envoy to the Balkans, Gelbhard, described the LAK as a 'terrorist organisation', and thereby in practice gave the Serb security forces a green light for their 'police action'. From the very beginning the Balkan contact group--which was called into life during the war in Bosnia and consists of the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France and Russia--categorically rejected the independence of Kosovo and called for autonomy discussions between Belgrade and the Democratic Union of Kosovo (DUK) of Ibrahim Rugova. In addition they decided in March and April on a few, barely detectable, sanctions against Serbia. In May such talks actually took place--which then quickly

broke up without success.

The DUK is the biggest political organisation in Kosovo. It has dominated the region since the beginning of the 90s and has established there a sort of shadow state with its own parliament, president (Rugova) and a rudimentary tax, education and health system. Despite its nationalist rhetoric the DUK leadership has adapted in practice to the system of 'cold apartheid' in Kosovo and has rejected any conflict with the Serb state. Up until May of this year they described the LAK as a 'creation of the Serbs'. A large part of the population, in particular the youth, live in the meantime without work and hope and exposed to the arbitrary acts of the Serb state power--a fruitful basis for the activities of the LAK.

As the LAK began to grow, the great powers reacted with some concern. The reason was not its reactionary character--the guerrillas soon began to kidnap Serb civilians, to drive them out of ethnically mixed villages and carry out murders--but rather the fear that, unlike Rugova, they wouldn't be able to control them. In addition they feared a growing radicalisation of the Albanians in West Macedonia and in Albania itself.

Condemnations of the 'violence of both sides' alternated with demands on the Serbs to 'immediately' pull their security forces out of the crisis region, and with threats of military action against Belgrade. At an early stage the German foreign minister Kinkel openly revealed the aims of the military plans: the securing of borders in order to cut off further support for the LAK and a demonstration of power by NATO in order to force Milosevic to make concessions to Rugova.

In the first place, however, the 'Liberation Army' was able to register a number of military successes. At the end of June they eventually controlled between 30 and 40 percent of the territory of Kosovo and openly opposed Rugova. The situation changed: the US established contact with the LAK, which they had just branded as terrorists', and to Adem Demaci. Demaci is a popular opponent of Rugova and a long-time supporter of the LAK. He was also described by German foreign minister Kinkel as 'an important man one could not afford to ignore'.

Also for the DUK the LAK was no longer regarded merely as an organisation 'of a few fanatics' or the 'Serb intelligence forces'. On the contrary they made efforts to embrace the guerrillas and bring them under their control; corresponding to the interests--and the demands behind the scenes--of the great powers. These retreated from their demand on Belgrade for the pullout of security forces from Kosovo. First of all it was necessary to establish a cease-fire, then the autonomy discussions could begin.

From this point there began an unparalleled offensive by the Serb police. One 'LAK centre' after the other began to fall--towns, major roads, small villages. Often they were burnt to the ground afterwards and many inhabitants murdered. Finally at the end of August the majority of Kosovo was once again under the control of the security forces.

The DUK-dominated underground parliament now officially recognised the weakened LAK. Rugova formed a 'coalition government' in which Mehmet Hajrizi, general secretary of the Albanian Democratic Movement (pro-LAK and critical of Rugova) was planned as the new minister president. Two ministries were reserved for the LAK: the interior minister and

defence. This meant in reality that should the 'republic of Kosova' actually come into existence, then the guerrillas would be charged with the task of suppressing the Albanian population. Role models for such a policy can be found everywhere--from Chechnya to Palestine and the fighters of Al Fatah.

But such a state of affairs is still in the balance. When Rugova drew up a negotiating team, the LAK, which is still capable of waging a long, debilitating war, refused to take part and declared Rugova's opponent Adem Demaci--who up until now has refused to deal with Belgrade--as its political representative. They declared in addition that they would regard a possible stationing of NATO troops on the Albanian-Yugoslavian border as an 'act of war'.

The consequences of a direct military intervention by NATO are patently unclear. The military themselves have often warned that the political prerequisites and a clear overall conception for a successful military operation are lacking. But up until now it is clear neither how much influence Rugova actually retains, nor how powerful the LAK really is, nor who is capable of controlling the movement. It is quite possible that in many cases the fighters of the LAK are simply students and peasants who have acquired a kalashnikov and have simply sewn an Albanian eagle onto their jackets together with the initials of the LAK. At the same time there are already 200,000 refugees in Kosovo, and several ten thousands in Albania and Macedonia, where elections are scheduled to take place in September.

The longer the crisis lasts in Kosovo, the more intensive becomes the nationalist hysteria in the neighbouring countries. The policies of the US and the EU have merely landed them in a dead end. Whatever they do will only serve to intensify the crisis.

See Also:

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