

NATO threatens force in Kosovo

Justus Leicht, Peter Schwarz
4 February 1999

Last weekend the six-nation Contact Group (United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia) posed an ultimatum to the conflicting parties in Kosovo. They are demanding that discussions begin in Rambouillet, Paris by February 6. Agreement on a transitional solution to the crisis must be reached by February 20.

NATO is threatening to use force if the parties do not submit to this timetable. NATO Secretary General Solana has been empowered to order air attacks on targets in Yugoslavia on short notice. Some 200 planes are already standing ready in Italy and the Adriatic. According to a high-ranking diplomat in Brussels, no state can veto such actions: "Solana alone will take the decision".

This brings the danger of military intervention in the Balkans closer. The ultimatum has put NATO itself into a tight corner. If the negotiations do not take place, or if they fail, there is little room for retreat without NATO seriously losing face.

To date, only the moderate Albanian leader Rugova has expressly agreed to participate in talks. The underground Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is sending contradictory signals. While their political representative Adem Demaci has spoken against participation, another spokesman, Jakup Krasniqi, announced Tuesday that they would participate. Belgrade's participation will be decided in the Serbian parliament on Thursday.

Speculation is circulating in the press that as far as Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic is concerned, a military intervention by NATO would not pose an inconvenience. According to sources in Belgrade quoted in the Swiss newspaper *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, he could present it "to the nationalistically inflamed Serbian public as the machinations of foreign powers and domestic traitors".

The *Frankfurter Rundschau* comments that "Yugoslavia's President Slobodan Milosevic cannot abandon Kosovo 'without reason'. He 'needs' a NATO intervention in order to be able to 'sell' to his own people any unavoidable concessions to the Albanians. The NATO threat is actually quite welcome for Milosevic. It helps him to further strengthen his authoritarian regime. The people may be starving, but if danger from 'abroad' threatens, then nobody will dare to protest."

The outlines of the solution to the Kosovo crisis which the Contact Group wishes to impose can already be seen. They are based on the proposals of American diplomat Christopher Hill, worked out in September last year, and on which the now failed Holbrooke-Milosevic Accord of October 12 rested.

Accordingly, Kosovo is to be granted far-reaching autonomy within the existing political borders. To this end, the necessary political structures are to be created, including a parliament, government, legal jurisdiction and police force. The powers of the local authorities would also be vastly increased. After a three-year transitional period, a final decision regarding the status of Kosovo would be taken. However, independence for Kosovo is excluded from the start.

The Contact Group has explicitly excluded any negotiation of this

outline solution. The conflicting parties--if they do indeed appear in Rambouillet--will only be able to decide in what form they implement this enforced solution.

The members of the Contact Group have already decided that even if an agreement is reached by the conflicting parties, it most likely can only be realised by stationing troops in the region for years to come, if not decades. The talk is of 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers.

Preparations for the dispatch of such a force are already under way. In addition to Britain and France, Germany is determined to participate. It remains unclear whether the US will also send a contingent. Vice President Al Gore denied that 5,000 American troops would be sent.

In practice, the proposals of the Contact Group mean establishing a protectorate in Kosovo. Formally, the region would remain part of the Serbian state, but real power would be in the hands of NATO. The planned autonomous bodies serve merely to provide a "democratic" facade. All the most important decisions would be taken by the occupying troops, who would have a power of veto.

That such a solution does not provide any foundation for peace is demonstrated by the long and tragic history of the Balkans. As protectorates of different great powers, the Balkan states repeatedly became areas of conflict between the various nationalities, and the spark for bloody wars.

The Dayton Accord for Bosnia is clearly regarded as the model for any planned "solution" in Kosovo. Dayton established the division of Bosnia into three distinct ethnic enclaves, which was cemented by the despatch of 30,000 NATO troops. Inside this devastated country nothing has remained apart from bitterness, poverty and subordination to the Western "peacemakers".

While most people have neither work nor an income, black marketeers, war-profiteers and other criminal elements are making a killing and setting the political tone. As the elections in Bosnia last year showed, the Dayton "peace" has not diminished nationalist tensions in the slightest. The victors in all three enclaves were the hard-line nationalists.

The planned accord for Kosovo, often dubbed Dayton II, is in many respects even worse. First, NATO's bombing threat is directed against the territory of a country, Serbia, which has so far largely avoided civil war. Those who would suffer most from such an action--as in Iraq--are the civilian population, who have already had to bear most of the burden of the economic sanctions aimed at Serbia.

Second, it aims to keep two opponents in Kosovo in check, whose views are clearly irreconcilable. While the Serbian government is not prepared to give up control over Kosovo for domestic political reasons, the KLA clings to its aim of establishing an independent state. They judge every transitional measure according to how it helps them advance this aim.

The Contact Group has so far found no answer to the question: what

would happen if the KLA opposed any accord? As a guerrilla organisation practised in terrorist attacks, they are much harder to keep in check than a regular army. This could not be achieved simply through air attacks, and the deployment of ground troops would be a high-risk venture. In addition, any NATO attack on Serbian positions would inevitably strengthen the KLA guerrillas, which is not the desired result. Previously, the KLA has used every partial withdrawal by Serbian troops to occupy a large part of the countryside of Kosovo, which they now control.

Third, the Hill plan includes many regulations that will increase nationalist tensions in Kosovo, where Serbs make up some 10 percent of the population. Part of the parliament would be formed according to ethnicity, giving the Serbs a virtual right of veto over lawmaking.

This would prove a continuous source of nationalist conflicts. The police would be completely decentralised and constituted according to the "ethnic composition of the local population". In areas with an Albanian majority, the majority of the police would be Albanian, and vice versa. This is a virtual invitation to establish an ethnic fait accompli by means of harassment, terror and expulsions.

The NATO ultimatum is not a step towards peace, but rather sets in motion a further escalation that could easily lead to the military use of ground troops. It is remarkable that this course is being pushed by political parties that until recently had reservations about the use of military force, or even openly rejected it. In all four of the western European states in the Contact Group, social democrats now head the government.

Just a few years ago, in Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, now in government for 100 days, categorically rejected the use of the *Bundeswehr* (armed forces) outside of NATO territory. The official stance of the Greens is still that such action is only possible with the severest reservations and only with the agreement of the UN.

But this has not prevented the Green Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, from strongly supporting the NATO ultimatum--even though it is not supported by the UN and Russia has expressly rejected it. The proposals of the Contact Group, Fischer has continually stressed, can only function if they are supported by "a credible military threat by NATO". A military threat is only "credible" if there is a readiness to employ it.

The breathtaking change of course of the Greens, and, to a lesser extent, the SPD is closely bound up with the events in the Balkans. Both parties supported the division of Yugoslavia in the early 90s in the name of "the right of national self-determination". They supported the conservative Kohl government, whose swift recognition of Croatia and Slovenia created accomplished facts, even though many warned that it could lead to a nationalist bloodbath.

When the civil war in Croatia and Bosnia made the consequences very clear, the SPD and the Greens in turn abandoned their opposition to the deployment of the *Bundeswehr*. From party conference to party conference, they debated the various formulas--purely logistical support, but no German troops in conflict zones; peace-securing actions, but no peace-enforcing actions; only with a UN mandate--until the course was changed.

It is an irony of history that it falls to Joschka Fischer--a Green, in whose evolution pacifism played as important a role as environmentalism--to order the first military actions of the *Bundeswehr* since the Second World War.

In the meantime, there is no longer any talk of fundamental considerations such as the "right to self-determination," even if this is

completely inappropriate to the case at hand. Instead, it is all about establishing "peace", over the heads of those affected, by means of military might. It is in the nature of such a dictated peace that it tramples on the existing social relations to the detriment of democratic rights.

The transformation of the SPD and Greens from pacifists into militarists must be seen within its wider context. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and German reunification, high-ranking military figures and politicians have worked intensively to restructure the *Bundeswehr*. It has been transformed from a largely conscript force dedicated to the defence of Germany into a highly specialised professional army capable of world-wide deployment. Publicly this change is hardly discussed, for fear of political resistance. Instead, the public is presented with accomplished facts, based on the events in Bosnia and in Kosovo.

The future functions of the *Bundeswehr* are to be mainly within the framework of Europe. Following the introduction of the euro, Europe's economic challenge to America, the calls will grow louder for a similar military response. In this context, the utterances of SPD politician Karsten Voigt, recently appointed government co-ordinator of German-American collaboration, are significant. He warned against American "illusions" that "they can pursue their interests on their own". Washington must recognise that a "self-assured Germany" remains "bedded in Europe". He continued: "The USA cannot automatically reckon with our agreement, if they unilaterally start actions without consultation."

Kosovo serves as a test case for an independent European foreign policy. In contrast to Dayton, which only came into force after an American initiative, following long and fruitless efforts by the Europeans, in Kosovo it is the Europeans who have taken the initiative. In Rambouillet it will be the French and British foreign ministers who hold the reins, while Germany remains in the background for "pragmatic" reasons. As German Minister of Defence Rudolf Scharping said in an interview, one does not want to "provide Serbian propaganda with any cheap excuses". The memories of German atrocities in Serbia during the Second World War are still too fresh.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact