

Unanswered questions in NATO-Russia agreement

Martin McLaughlin
8 May 1999

Officials of the Group of Eight--United States, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan and Russia--announced Thursday that they had reached agreement on the framework of a settlement of the war in the Balkans, after weeks of diplomatic maneuvers between the NATO powers and Russia. But the agreement leaves a myriad of unanswered questions about the future of Kosovo.

Most importantly, the agreement makes no reference whatsoever to the bombing, and therefore gives no hint under what circumstances the aerial destruction of Yugoslavia will come to an end. Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic warned Friday that his government will not participate in any diplomatic efforts until there is a halt in the bombing.

While the G-8 ministers agreed on an international force in Kosovo, its make-up (NATO, non-NATO, Russian etc.) and level of armaments were left vague, as well as the issue of whether Belgrade must approve the agreement and give its permission to the entry of this force into what is, under international law, Yugoslav territory.

Other unresolved issues included whether Yugoslav forces would have to be entirely withdrawn from Kosovo, what the "demilitarization" of the Kosovo Liberation Army would mean and how that would be enforced, and what kind of interim administration would be established in Kosovo under terms of a future UN Security Council resolution.

Of the greatest political significance is the fact that G-8 agreement contains no proviso for either the Serbs or the Kosovar Albanians to have any say in determining any of the conditions under which the war would be ended or the province of Kosovo politically reorganized. It will be entirely up the UN Security Council--i.e., to the five big powers with veto

power--and to NATO.

This underscores the entirely undemocratic character of the great power diplomacy in the Balkans. For all the American pretense of sympathy for the fate of the Kosovars, for all the demagogy from Moscow about standing by their Serb brothers, the peoples of the former Yugoslavia are nothing more than pawns on the chessboard as far as Clinton, Yeltsin, and the European imperialists are concerned.

The role of the Yeltsin regime in the Balkan crisis has enormous significance. For the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia is intervening as a bourgeois power in a major international crisis. Its actions reflect the interests of an emerging bourgeois class in Russia, symbolized by the personage appointed by Yeltsin as his chief representative in the Balkans, former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

The former head of Gazprom, the Soviet-era gas monopoly and now one of the biggest corporations in capitalist Russia, Chernomyrdin is representative of the most corrupt layer of former Stalinist bureaucrats turned capitalist millionaires. He has close relations with German capitalists, who have extensive investments in Gazprom and in the Russian oil and gas industries as a whole.

Chernomyrdin's appointment therefore signaled a decision by the Russian regime to side with Germany and against the United States in Balkan policy. This is a fact well-known in US ruling circles but not commented on in public--with the exception of a vitriolic editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* Friday which denounced the G-8 agreement as a sellout to Milosevic and suggested that Germany and Russia were making common cause against the United States.

Both the Russian and German bourgeoisie are concerned about the long-term implications of a

substantial American military presence in the Balkans, particularly in light of the aggressive push by American oil and gas companies into the Caspian basin.

The G-8 talks demonstrated not only significant differences between the United States and Russia, but growing differences between the European powers and the US, and among the Europeans themselves. While the US continues to demand a total withdrawal of all Yugoslav soldiers and police from Kosovo, several of the European NATO powers, together with Russia, have pointed out that this is incompatible with the continuation of Yugoslav sovereignty in the province.

American officials were visibly dismayed by the reemerged of Ibrahim Rugova, who headed the unofficial Albanian government in Kosovo for the last decade. The State Department has shifted to the KLA as its principal instrument in Kosovo, and last month circulated reports that Rugova had been killed by the Serbs.

Rugova's arrival in Rome for talks with Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema and Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini therefore came as a distinct shock to Washington. American officials suggested that his release was a ploy by Milosevic to weaken Italian and German support for the NATO bombing, an indication of where the Clinton administration sees dangers to its policies in the Balkans.

The Clinton administration's public display of enthusiasm over the G-8 agreement is not because a diplomatic solution to the Balkan crisis is imminent. On the contrary, the talks in Bonn give the State Department and Pentagon the opportunity to talk peace while intensifying the war.

By embracing diplomacy, the United States appeases the growing antiwar sentiment in Europe, while pushing ahead with an even more ruthless and unrestrained campaign of bombing, and stepping up preparations for ground warfare. All this, without making any significant concessions either to Yugoslavia or Russia, or the European rivals of American capitalism.

The indications by Russia that it will not challenge NATO's bid for hegemony in the Balkans, by encouraging American aggression and recklessness, in fact makes a wider war more likely.

The diplomatic maneuvers of the past week have only one beneficial consequence. They begin to strip away

the rhetoric of humanitarianism and to reveal the real political-economic interests which have impelled the US-NATO intervention in the Balkans.

As the conflict escalates, the events in Kosovo will be overshadowed by the broader issues that divide the major capitalist powers. Then those who have allowed themselves to be manipulated by the media will have reason to be somewhat abashed by their own gullibility.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact