

Clinton, NATO generals discuss expansion of Yugoslavia war

Martin McLaughlin
6 May 1999

US President Bill Clinton flew to Belgium Wednesday for talks with top NATO officials, including General Wesley Clark, the commander of the air war against Yugoslavia, amid press reports that the US and NATO are planning intervention with ground troops in Kosovo no later than July.

Few details were made public about the substance of the talks at NATO headquarters in Brussels, but the clear purpose of the trip is to reaffirm and expand the US-NATO war in the Balkans. Clinton followed up the Brussels meeting with a speech to US soldiers at Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany, where he reiterated the goal of expelling all Serbian and Yugoslav military forces from the province of Kosovo and declared, "We will continue to pursue this campaign in which we are now engaged. We will intensify it in an unrelenting way until these objectives are met."

General Clark said that NATO warplanes had stepped up their air strikes in the 48 hours since the release of three American soldiers captured by the Yugoslav Army. The heaviest bombing was in Kosovo province, but the city of Novi Sad, the country's third largest and the capital of Vojvodina province, was also hard hit. Bombs and missiles hit the city's television station, power plants, oil refinery and factories.

American media coverage of the war is so one-sided that it fails to convey the vast scale of the destruction inflicted by the air war on the people of Yugoslavia. According to General Klaus Naumann, military adviser to NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana, US and NATO warplanes have dropped 15,000 bombs and missiles in the 42 days since the attacks began, on a country with the size and population of the state of Ohio.

With the size of a bomb or missile warhead ranging from 500 to 2,000 pounds, this means that between 4,000 and 15,000 tons of explosive have already been expended--an amount equivalent to the atomic bomb which the United States dropped on Hiroshima.

The catastrophic impact of the bombing campaign has fueled a growing hostility towards the United States in

Europe. The widespread opposition to the war, especially in Germany, is virtually unknown to the American public. Two significant events took place during the demonstrations and ceremonies over May Day.

Oscar Lafontaine, the former chairman of the ruling Social Democratic Party, spoke out publicly against the war in front of a working class audience, and was widely supported. Lafontaine resigned his post as Finance Minister of Germany only a week before the launching of the war, virtually without explanation.

At another workers' rally, Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping, another leading Social Democrat, was shouted down and called a murderer. Scharping has been the most strident defender of the bombing campaign, in which German warplanes are participating, in their first military action since World War II.

Clinton's trip was motivated in large part by the need to counter the deep disquiet, nervousness and even outright opposition to the war which is emerging in Europe, where it is widely believed that the decision by NATO to go to war in the Balkans is a mistake of catastrophic proportions.

Or worse, so disastrous has been the outcome of the air war and so crude the supposed "miscalculations"--i.e., about the consequences of bombing for the Kosovar Albanians--that in some circles the conviction is growing that the United States deliberately engineered the collapse of the Rambouillet talks and the showdown with Yugoslavia in order to draw the European countries into a war which they had long resisted, and which serves the long term interests of America, not Europe.

One German newspaper commentator observed that the broader American design appeared to be to transform NATO into a "deputy for the American sheriff," so that the alliance would become active in any part of the world where its interests--as defined by the United States--were at stake.

The response of the United States and Britain to such concerns has been to escalate both the rhetorical onslaught against the government of President Slobodan Milosevic and the scale of military operations. Ominously, three separate

press reports Wednesday suggested that the US was now moving towards the launching of a ground war against Yugoslavia.

Wednesday's issue of the *Wall Street Journal* carried an article describing in some detail the methods by which 60,000 NATO troops, 20,000 of them American, would enter Kosovo once bombing was deemed to have sufficiently worn down the resistance of the Yugoslav Army, creating what was described as a "semi-permissive" environment--i.e., without any negotiated agreement with the government of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

The "concept of operations," a general outline of the plan, was said to be the subject of discussion in the Clark-Clinton talks in Brussels. Combat troops would be flown into Kosovo by helicopter to bypass roads and bridges either destroyed by bombing or mined by the Yugoslav military. Bases in both Albania and Macedonia would be utilized for the forced entry, while other NATO troops would be positioned in Hungary, Bulgaria and aboard ships in the Adriatic Sea, to keep Belgrade guessing about the direction of the coming attack.

Occupation of Kosovo would be followed by weeks of military operations against the Yugoslav Army and any Serb civilians who resisted the NATO force. The *Journal* said that the invasion would have to begin by late July so that the province could be completely "pacified" before weather conditions became too difficult.

CNN carried a similar report on its broadcasts and website Wednesday, describing the 60,000 troops as double the size of the 28,000 soldiers proposed as a NATO occupation force under the Rambouillet accords signed by NATO and the KLA but rejected by Yugoslavia. This report attributed the much greater number of troops, not to expected resistance by Yugoslavia, but to the requirements for engineering and road and bridge repair to make troop movements in the province possible.

The third report came in the annual review of the London-based Institute for International Strategic Studies, a hawkish study group which was highly critical of the Clinton administration for ruling out ground troops in the initial stages of the war. The IISS said that at least 60,000 troops would be required in the initial stages of an invasion of Kosovo, a military operation which would have to get underway by late July in order to be completed before the onset of winter weather.

These accounts are strikingly similar, both in the number of troops anticipated and in the late July deadline given as the last possible time to begin the ground war. There is no doubt that, while perhaps containing a considerable amount of disinformation about specific details, especially the timing, these reports suggest the direction which US and

NATO policy is now heading.

A ground war could begin much earlier than these reports suggest--as early as the second week of June, according to *Jane's Defence Weekly*. The British publication quoted retired US military officers who said that it would require only 30 days to move additional troops, vehicles and helicopters to the region from bases in Germany and the United States. There are already nearly 30,000 US and European troops in Albania and Macedonia, and another 15,000 deployed as a peacekeeping force in Bosnia, on Yugoslavia's western border.

The number of troops could also be much higher than 60,000. Earlier US scenarios for a ground war in the Balkans called for 100,000 troops to seize Kosovo--against the anticipated opposition of 40,000 Yugoslav soldiers in the province--and 200,000 or more to go all the way to Belgrade.

The US-NATO bombing raids triggered the unprecedented exodus of refugees from Kosovo and spread political instability and crisis throughout the Balkans--precisely the outcome which Clinton claimed the bombing would prevent. There is no reason to believe that the war planners in Washington and Brussels can foresee the outcome of a ground war with any greater foresight than they exhibited in launching the air war.

The reckless escalation of military violence by American imperialism, backed by its European allies, presages a conflagration on a far wider scale than that which is already underway, threatening even a confrontation between the US and Russia, the two principal nuclear powers. A ground war in the Balkans would have incalculable but surely devastating consequences, for the people of Yugoslavia, of the Balkans, of Europe and the world.



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