

German interests in the war against Yugoslavia

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Churchill once said that in war the truth is so precious it has to be surrounded with a bodyguard of lies. In Germany over the last two months one clearly saw the fabrication of such a bodyguard.

Even as air attacks proceeded against civilian targets—destroying factories, electricity works, refineries, bridges, streets, railway lines and apartment blocks—German government representatives spoke of a “humanitarian action”. Despite the fact that the NATO attacks unleashed the massive wave of refugees and reduced towns and villages in Kosovo to ruins, it has been maintained to the very end that the aim of the war was the defence of the refugees and their repatriation.

When, however, one explores the real interests and aims pursued by German business and politicians, it becomes evident that the propaganda about humanitarian aims serves to bury the truth. Behind closed doors an entirely different discussion is taking place.

It is focused on the changed world situation arising from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The dissolution of the USSR left a power vacuum which all of the great powers are seeking to fill. A race has begun amongst the transnational corporations to secure control over raw materials, labour and markets. These conflicts are assuming increasingly aggressive forms.

Part of the conflict revolves around the huge energy resources in the Caspian region. It is believed that the world's largest reservoir of untapped oil and gas is to be found in the southern republics (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan) of the former Soviet Union. Even though the reports over possible and confirmed reserves of mineral deposits differ wildly, the interest in the region is enormous.

The energy question is of great significance for Germany. Because of the concentration of industry in Germany, the demand for such minerals is enormous and must be met almost totally from imports. Already during the Wilhelminian empire there was enormous interest in the raw materials of the Caucasus. However German hopes of being able to cash in on the holdings of the declining Ottoman empire were shattered on the battlefields of the First World War. Hitler's own attempt to secure the oil wells in Baku collapsed in the face of the resistance of the Red Army.

The urgency on the part of Germany and Europe to acquire access to these energy resources is made clear in a study which was put before the Social Democratic Party (SPD) parliamentary fraction last June. It bears the title “The Region of the Future: The Caspian Sea—German Interests and European Politics in the Trans-Caucasian and Central Asian Republics.” [<http://www.gernot-erler.de/html/ot/ot1e.html>] The paper emphasises that if energy demands remain constant, supplies of North Sea oil will hold out for between 10 (Great Britain) and 14 years (Norway). “Using current rates, in 2010 10 percent of Europe's total demand for natural gas will remain unmet. In 2020 that rate is expected to reach 30 percent.”

The bombing of Serbia and the military occupation of Kosovo by NATO must be seen in this light. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, American interests as the leading NATO power are colliding

with the interests of Russia and China. The first intervention of the alliance “out of area”—in Bosnia Herzegovina—was carried out with Russian agreement. Moscow was included in NATO activities and participated in the planning and carrying out of the operation. It was quite different in Kosovo. In order to head off an anticipated veto on the part of Russia and China, NATO simply ignored the United Nations.

As a result, German politics is now in a state of high tension. On the one hand, since the foundation of NATO, Germany has been closely tied to the Alliance and its economic and political development have been heavily dependent on the United States for the past 50 years. Based on this tradition Chancellor Schroeder stated on a number of occasions in the course of the war: “For reasons of state it is necessary to be loyal to the Alliance”.

On the other hand, Germany's traditional orientation towards the East has increased in significance. Even under the conditions of the Cold War, Germany's economic and political collaboration with Moscow was never completely severed. Since the end of the 60s the same Deutsche Bank which financed Hitler's campaign for “Lebensraum” in the East has been pushing ahead with the new Eastern policy introduced by the government of Willy Brandt.

In his book *Paths to Russia*, Wilhelm Cristians, chairman of the executive committee of Deutsche Bank until 1988, describes how as a young Wehrmacht lieutenant he was wounded on the Eastern front. Two decades later he was personally responsible for setting up an office in Moscow for Germany's biggest bank and initiated large-scale economic projects such as the delivery of pipes from the Mannesmann concern for Soviet pipelines.

Immediately after German reunification in 1990 the government made unmistakably clear that it looked upon Eastern Europe as its own backyard for economic and political influence. The recognition of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 in the face of many warnings made clear Germany's claim to leadership in this region. Since then the German government has followed the intensified interventions of the American government in this area with mixed feelings. Above all, the German government is seeking to prevent or limit a confrontation with Russia.

In the course of the war Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping (SPD) resorted to theatrics to describe the “unimaginable cruelty of the Serbs”, so as to boost the war propaganda. Meanwhile in the Defence Ministry itself, intense discussions took place over a period of months on how to rebuff the aggressiveness of the Americans and prevent an escalation of the confrontation with Russia.

A study by a German military political advisor is revealing in this respect. Nearly a year before the NATO attack on Serbia, August Pradetto, professor at the German Military Academy in Hamburg, published a lengthy contribution on the theme “Management of Conflict through Military Intervention? The Dilemma of Western Policy”.

In the paper he criticises the Kosovo policy of NATO and warns against a military intervention. Under the title “Aspects of the Political Power

Struggle in the Kosovo Conflict between Russia and the USA” he emphasises that the intervention by NATO in the Balkans has not simply “humanitarian, political, international legal and military aspects”, but is based above all on “strategic, power-political” considerations.

“The issue at stake is the conflict over the competence and extent of political decision-making, as well as the military sway, of the Western Alliance. Following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union diverse power resources in Europe and beyond have been newly re-divided.”

The various conflicts bound up with this turn of events are patently visible. Together with the issue of the extension of NATO towards the East, Pradetto expressly identifies “influence over the oil reserves in the region around the Caspian Sea, which is at the moment under the immediate control of Moscow”.

He shows that Russia's own fears are fully justified. NATO has established intensive collaboration with Albania and Macedonia and set up “communication offices” in both countries. The Alliance also uses their military installations and carries out joint manoeuvres in both countries. At the same time Russian anxieties have grown that NATO, under the guise of restraining the conflict in Kosovo, is increasing its influence in South East Europe and thereby establishing new options and strategic positions against Russia.

“The intervention of NATO military forces in Kosovo, without the sanction of the UN Security Council and founded on a mandate which NATO awarded itself on the basis of its own definition of an insecure situation requiring military measures, is regarded as a precedent for possible future interventions in the immediate vicinity of Russia, such as the Caucasus, using ethnic conflicts and disputes between countries. This under conditions where a vigorous struggle has emerged between Western and Russian oil concerns and between the strategic interests of Washington and Moscow over the exploitation of oil resources in the Caspian region.”

As already noted, Pradetto wrote this article nearly a year before the NATO air attacks began, providing an exposure, prior to the fact, of the official war propaganda. Since then substantial conflicts have taken place behind the scenes. While the US government drove ahead with preparations for the war, a number of European governments, including the Germans, were keen to find a diplomatic solution.

Following the American success in forcing through its position, the German government participated in the bombing of Serbia and is now taking part in the occupation of Kosovo with its own troops. Alongside “loyalty to the alliance” the conviction is growing that the economic interests of a unified Germany can only be advanced through the vigorous creation of its own military force.

A new phase of German militarism has begun. Up until German unification 10 years ago the task of the German army was exclusively limited to the defence of its own territory. All political parties agreed that the constitution excluded any intervention for aggressive purposes and interventions outside NATO territory. With the end of the Cold War a new strategic orientation has begun.

At the beginning of 1992 leading military officers and Defence Ministry officials presented a strategy paper which completely redefined the tasks of the German army. In future its task was to consist of the following: “The prevention, limitation, and ending of any conflict which could hamper the unity and stability of Germany”, “the promotion and securing of worldwide political, economic, military and ecological stability” and “the retention of free international trade and access to strategic raw materials”.

The significance of this change is made clear by another paper from the German army. In September last year an information brochure for officers was circulated with the title “Oil Poker in the Caucasus—Security and Political Aspects of Oil and Gas Reserves in the Caspian Sea”.

Lieutenant Colonel Helmut Udo Napiontek, who served previously in Georgia as a member of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), reviews over 15 pages the conflicts bound up with the exploitation of oil and gas in the region, as well as problems arising from transport routes. He writes: “For potential oil and gas producers the geographical situation is problematic enough: the Great Power China shares an eastern border with the producer Kazakhstan. To the north of the Caspian basin is neighbouring Russia, which controls all of the export routes at the moment. To the south lies war-torn Afghanistan and the Islamic fundamentalist Republic of Iran. To the west of the Caspian basin lie the Transcaucasus—rent by ethnic divisions—and Turkey, which is striving for hegemony in the region. The situation is further complicated by the most varied economic, religious and political situations.”

There then follows a long list of existing and potential points of conflict. “In the meantime it is a fight of one against all with regard to the question of the pipeline.” Although the author takes a generally benevolent position towards the US, and on a number of occasions emphasises that the US is seeking to prevent Russian domination of the area, critical tones are also to be found: “The ‘timing’ of Washington, as it seeks to intensify its links in the region, indicates on the whole that democratic and market economy reforms are little more than a pretext. More important are the enormous oil and gas reserves. With the exception of Georgia, the states in the region have predominantly authoritarian governments and Washington is doing little to change the situation, as long as the interests of the American oil concerns, which have invested half of the capital in the region, are not affected.”

In order to make clear the extent of the conflicts of interest, it is informative to look once more at the above-mentioned strategy paper of the SPD parliamentary fraction: “The Region of the Future—the Caspian Sea”. An initial comment warns that the paper is not designed for a broad public or for purposes of propaganda: “This publication by the SPD parliamentary fraction is purely for informational use. It should not be employed in election campaigns.”

The introduction was written by the chairman of the SPD fraction and current Defence Minister Rudolph Scharping. He emphasises: “The SPD parliamentary fraction pays a great deal of attention to the developments in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea. In this ‘region of the future’ a number of conflicts and problems exist which can intensify because of the worldwide interest in oil and gas reserves.”

Then he draws attention to the fact that the SPD fraction had raised these themes previously in the German parliament. In addition, the SPD Frederick Ebert Institute has held international conferences on the issue in Berlin and Washington.

The paper complains about the aggressive intervention of American companies “which have between 40 percent and 50 percent shares of the most important concerns in Kazakstan and Azerbaijan”. The Federal Republic of Germany has no representation among the 100 most important oil companies, the paper notes regrettably. It concentrates therefore on being “oriented heavily towards infrastructure contracts, especially in road creation, the building of transportation systems and communal infrastructure, telecommunications, radio and television, and the production and distribution of electricity,” but still the situation with regard to treaties “has been modest”.

“For example, German investors have gathered that transnational corporations of the mineral oil sector often use their investments for the creation of favourable conditions for other bidders coming from their own home countries. The business done with raw energy materials paves the way for further contracts in infrastructure. German policy must in this case make great efforts to demand fair trade conditions, and a balancing out of the present competitive distortions.”

As has often been the case in the history of colonialism, those who come onto the scene late raise a warning finger and caution about the social and

ecological consequences arising from the ruthless exploitation of raw materials. The SPD study emphasises that the hasty deals made over the past few years has favoured a “completely one-sided appropriation of this wealth to families, clans or oligarchies”. As a result, the crisis in the region has intensified. “Such presently comfortable and profitable agreements will prove in the future extremely costly, when the price is the abetting through silence of those regional rulers who would delay or even refuse to institute reforms.”

The study warns of the danger of emerging power blocks, whereby an American-led alliance confronts a Russian bloc. The current development is proceeding in a “disastrous direction”.

“Under the influence of powers from outside the region, there are two camps emerging. These opposing groups, the line of division of which runs straight through the middle of the Caspian Sea, refer to themselves as ‘strategic alliances’. The one group aligns Azerbaijan and Georgia with foreign powers Turkey and the United States. The other includes Iran, Armenia, the Russian Federation, and (with reservations) Turkmenistan. The antagonism between these ‘alliances’ reminds one of the ill-fated geopolitical developments of the last century, which ended in a high death toll for Europe.”

A joint European policy must counteract this development and support “regional co-operation”. In this respect two things are important from the European standpoint: first, a strengthening of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Although the Russian federation “maintains garrisons in the entire region apart from Azerbaijan”, a vacuum of power has emerged since the end of the Soviet Union which has to be filled by the OSCE. The OSCE has won trust and recognition in the region “with its missions in Tadjikistan, Georgia, Chechnia and Nagorno-Karabach”.

Secondly, the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), which came into effect on April 16, 1998 and has been ratified by 32 states—including all eight of the republics to the south of Russia—must become the general basis for business. “The ECT creates dependable and equal conditions for investments in exploration, upstream projects and pipeline network projects. It includes instruments to guarantee the fulfilment of contracts, secures the free flow of oil and gas, and offers an effective arbitration procedure for disagreements. It can act as a bulwark against the threatened politicisation of the exploitation and promotion of raw materials and transport of energy sources in the region. In addition, it can prepare the way for an economical and rational decision about the variants in question.”

There are a few hitches: up until now the US government has refused to participate in ECT and regards the whole thing first and foremost as an attempt to create obstacles for American concerns.

The war in Kosovo has reshuffled the cards in this new “Great Game”. The role of the UN and OSCE has been minimised. The aggressive approach of the United States against a sovereign state, with the participation of the rest of the NATO countries, has not only made clear the brutality with which the Great Powers are prepared to secure their economic and political interests, it also heralds new, even greater conflicts. The dishonest propaganda of Foreign Minister Fischer and Defence Minister Scharping, who are both thoroughly informed of the discussions taking place in their respective ministries, is the incidental music to the re-emergence of the German war machine, which carried out the greatest crimes of the twentieth century.



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