

Kosovo and the crisis in the Atlantic Alliance

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In the aftermath of the Kosovo War new evidence is continually emerging in the public record making it clear that explosive tensions existed inside the NATO alliance while the war was in progress.

In a British BBC television programme on August 20, US Deputy Foreign Minister Strobe Talbott declared the differences of opinion had become so pronounced “there would have been increasing difficulty preserving the solidarity and resolve of the alliance” if Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic had not given up on June 3. “I think it was a good thing the conflict ended when it did,” he said.

The NATO Supreme Commander, US General Wesley Clark, said in the same programme that he had partially ignored objections raised by the German, Greek, French and Italian governments to the bombing of civilian targets such as TV stations and government buildings: “I didn’t always defer to those who wanted targets withheld,” he admitted.

During the war foreign policy experts already came to the conclusion that the unity of NATO hung in the balance and its preservation was one of the most important reasons for the continuation of the war.

Peter W. Rodman, a former leading White House and US State Department official, declared in *Foreign Affairs*: “NATO’s unity of purpose in entering the war will not preclude transatlantic finger-pointing and recriminations if the outcome does not live up to the high standard that was set. The strategic stake for the alliance has become enormous.”

According to Rodman, should the results of the war not measure up to expectations, the differences between America and Europe would inevitably deepen: “Before the crisis, the EU was already moving toward a Common Foreign and Security Policy to assert its autonomy from the United States. Disillusionment in Kosovo will lead them to step up these efforts with vengeance.” He continued: “A success in Kosovo would guarantee the primacy of NATO in Europe’s future. There would be no doubt that NATO was the pre-eminent and indispensable security institution on the continent.”

The military journal *Jane’s Defence Weekly* came to similar conclusions immediately after the end of the war: “In the event that NATO had not achieved its objectives, it is not hard to imagine the tenor of recriminations.... The political debris of the failed campaign would have matched the physical debris of a battered Serbia and destroyed Kosovo.... It would have been hard to avoid the conclusion that NATO was a busted flush led by a lone superpower which refused to take risks. Future threats would have been unimaginable. Western influence over the conduct of international affairs would accordingly have been diminished.”

According to these sources Belgrade’s surrender, which was primarily in response to Russian pressure, saved NATO from a profound crisis and rescued the Atlantic Alliance from a possible break-up.

Milosevic’s climbdown was greeted with relief on both sides of the Atlantic. In the US as in Europe the ruling circles are in general committed to maintaining NATO. For the US the Alliance remains the single “institutional link” to Europe, which, according to Peter W. Rodman in the above-mentioned article, “remains a vital interest for the United States”. For Europe, conflict or even an open breach with America raises enormous risks at the present time. For the realisation of their political and economic interests on the world arena, the European

governments are still dependent on military collaboration with the US. A break-up of NATO would sooner or later bring with it the risk of an armed confrontation with the United States.

The question remains, however: Has success in the Kosovo War resolved the tensions within NATO for the long term? Has the victory over Belgrade genuinely strengthened the Atlantic Alliance?

Three months after the end of the war it is possible to answer these questions with an unequivocal “no”. The friction, conflicts and mutual recriminations inside NATO have re-ignited in full. The call for Europe to “free itself from the thrall of NATO” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 August) resounds ever more loudly.

The tensions within NATO are most clearly evident in Kosovo. The notion that military occupation would bring peace to the region has proved to be a short-sighted illusion. The victory is, in fact, a Pyrrhic victory. Following the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops, Kosovo is an explosive knot of contradictions.

The systematic expulsion of the Serbs and gypsies—of 200,000 non-Albanian inhabitants prior to the war, no more than 30,000 remain in Kosovo—is the least of the problems for NATO. Their flight was predictable. It would be naive to think that those responsible in NATO would have acted any differently.

Nevertheless, the mass expulsion contradicts the official propaganda, which claimed the war was about human rights and the prevention of ethnic cleansing. That is why the latest expulsions have been condemned.

But in practice NATO has done little to prevent the expulsions from taking place. Some commentaries even indicate relief on the part of the authorities that at least this problem has been resolved.

A much bigger problem than the expulsion of non-Albanian elements in the population is the issue of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the KLA, with which NATO has repeatedly come into conflict in recent weeks.

Since the withdrawal of the Serbian administration and military forces, the KLA has systematically moved to fill the vacuum left behind. It occupies administrative posts, has assumed policing and other functions, and has taken over factories, real estate and other property formerly in the possession of the Serbian state.

It has only partially accepted the authority of the administration established by NATO and has frequently organised demonstrations against the KFOR troops, as in Kosovoska Mitrovica, where French troops prevented Albanian demonstrators from storming a Serbian-occupied neighbourhood, and again in German-controlled Orahovac, where demonstrators attempted to prevent the stationing of Russian KFOR troops.

NATO finds itself in a dilemma. If it gives way to the KLA and allows the organisation free rein in Kosovo it risks a further expansion of the Balkan crisis. The aim of the KLA is an independent Kosovo and a Greater Albania, including parts of Macedonia, Greece and Albania. The realisation of this aim will inevitably lead to bloody conflicts in these as well as neighbouring countries.

If, on the other hand, NATO proceeds against the KLA, the result will be bloody confrontations within Kosovo itself. NATO could land itself in a debacle similar to Somalia, where international troops withdrew in the

heat of a bitter civil war.

A number of additional factors complicate the situation. First, the KLA is everything but a unified movement and is therefore difficult to control. Fifteen different parties are represented in the "Provisional Government" of KLA leader Hashim Thaci. Agreements made by the leadership are frequently ignored at a local level.

Second, there is a close connection between the KLA and the Albanian mafia, which is notorious for its lack of scruples and predilection for violence.

Third, the KLA works closely with the government of Pandeli Majko in neighbouring Albania, while the Kosovo opposition—the KDM (Kosovo Democratic Movement) of Ibrahim Rugova—collaborates with the Albanian opposition of Sali Berisha. Units of the KDM are alleged to have participated in an attempted putsch led by Berisha in the Albanian capital of Tirana last September. A conflict in Kosovo could easily spill over into Albania, and vice versa.

In light of the tense situation, the mutual recriminations within NATO have intensified. The European powers, which set the tone for the UN-imposed civilian authority, are not prepared to share power with the KLA. The position of the US, on the other hand, is at best ambiguous.

The KLA bases itself openly on support from the US, which was responsible for the organisation's rise to political prominence. Pro-American slogans were raised at the demonstrations against French and Russian KFOR units. For its part, America has done little to dispel the impression that it backs the KLA.

At the Rambouillet talks which preceded the war the US State Department selected the KLA to be its favoured negotiating partner, because it was thereby able to pose an ultimatum to Belgrade to which the latter could not possibly submit.

Previously the Kosovo Liberation Army had conducted its affairs in the shadows. In Germany a ban was in the course of being implemented against the core of the party, the Enver Hoxha-oriented KPM (Kosovo Peoples Movement). Since Rambouillet, KLA leader Thaci has maintained close connections with James Rubin, the press attaché of the US State Department, with whom he struck up a friendship during the course of the discussions. In his conflicts with the UN administration, Thaci has regularly appealed to Rubin, and the latter is said to have given Thaci a guarantee that the KLA would assume a leading role in the future policing of Kosovo.

The European powers are pinning their hopes on Thaci's rival Ibrahim Rugova of the KDM. At the beginning of August the French head of the UN authority, Bernard Kouchner, personally convinced Rugova to work within the transitional council which, because of his antipathy to Thaci, Rugova had boycotted up until then. This council advises the UN authority. According to *Le Monde*, Kouchner requires the services of Rugova as a counterweight to the KLA.

In Germany on August 15 Rugova was awarded the "Tolerance Prize" by the town of Münster. The origins of the prize go back to 1648 and the peace settlement of the German "Thirty Years War". Among the jurors who awarded the prize were the president of the German parliament Wolfgang Thierse (Social Democratic Party) and his predecessor, Rita Süßmuth (Christian Democratic Union), two leading representatives of the German state. The Laudatio was given by Thierse's deputy Antje Vollmar (Bündnis 90/the Greens). She praised Rugova as a Kosovar Gandhi/Mandela and strongly attacked the US for its support for the KLA.

It is "completely inexplicable," she said, that "a group should be introduced into the diplomatic discussions which, since 1997, has come to prominence above all through the assassination of representatives of the Serbian state: the KLA, a left-wing movement, which operates exclusively through violence." The abandonment of the pacifist movement in Kosovo (i.e., Rugova's KDM) is one of the "dirty secrets" in the run-up to the Kosovo War.

Rugova himself is anything but the man of peace that is celebrated in Europe. This is clear from the relations between Rugova's KDM and Sali Berisha in Albania. During his period in office in Tirana, the latter did not exactly distinguish himself as a democrat, and since then he has established his own independent fiefdom in the north of Albania, regarded as a focal point for the smuggling of drugs and human beings.

Rugova's KDM represents the old, established, propertied and influential upper layers of Kosovars, and was therefore always interested in doing a deal with Belgrade. The KLA, on the other hand, embodies newly rich social climbers and those socially ostracised elements who regard a radical break with Belgrade as the best option for enriching themselves quickly.

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Like the KLA, the KDM is breaking up into rival factions. Bujar Bukoshi, once named by Rugova as prime minister of his underground government, has broken with his former chief. Bukoshi controls the money collected by the underground government from exile Albanians—reports put the sum at anything between one and several hundred million deutsche marks—and up until now has refused to hand over the money to Rugova or the provisional government headed by Thaci.

In any event, the differences between the rival parties and fractions have less to do with political or ideological questions than with influence, property and money. That such differences can lead to considerable conflicts between the NATO partners demonstrates how tense relations have become.

As was the case during the war, the issue of the United Nations' role lies at the heart of the conflicts. NATO commenced the war without the permission of the United Nations, a clear breach of existing international law. In the course of the war Germany, in particular, pressed for the United Nations to play a bigger role. The aim was to prevent a total break with Russia, whose right of veto in the UN had been bypassed by NATO, and to prevent the UN from being completely discredited. From the European point of view, the world organisation is an important counterweight to the power of the US in NATO.

Under conditions in which Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin's special envoy, played a major role in obtaining Belgrade's capitulation, NATO was unable to resist Moscow's insistence that the United Nations take responsibility for the transitional administration to be set up in Kosovo. Since then, however, the slow build-up of the UN authority has been blamed, particularly by the United States, for the problems in Kosovo.

Leading representatives of the American government have even warned that the success or failure of the mission in Kosovo will decide the fate of the UN. Under the heading "Holbrooke's Ultimatum: Perform or Perish", the magazine *Newsweek* quoted Richard Holbrooke, a Balkans specialist recently appointed American ambassador to the UN, as saying, "The UN's future in international crises is going to be determined in very large part by what it achieves in Kosovo." Another senior US official declared, according to *Newsweek*, "If they fail here, no one's ever going to give the UN an important job again."

Holbrooke is regarded as no friend of the UN. According to statements by the Swede, Carl Bildt, one of the leading UN representatives in the Balkans, the UN was not mentioned on a single occasion during the 1995 Bosnian talks in Dayton, which were led by Holbrooke. Bildt was quoted by the *Washington Post* as saying: "I remember during the days of Dayton, the UN was a word that could not be uttered. The things that we were forced to do in terms of avoiding any association with the United Nations were really extraordinary."

The German government has reacted to the threat to the UN by sending one of the closest collaborators of German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer to work alongside the French head of the UN administration in

Kosovo. Tom Koenigs has taken over responsibility for building up the police and the civilian authority. Koenigs' political friendship with Fischer goes back to the days of house squatting, street fighting and the big Vietnam demonstrations in Germany. He headed Fischer's office in Hessen when the latter was environmental minister there. Koenigs then went on to become treasurer for the city of Frankfurt, where he introduced drastic spending cuts, thereby becoming a spokesman for the lurch to the right by the Green party. In order to overcome American misgivings about his appointment, he will be called upon to act as the hard-line enforcer of law and order in Kosovo.

Tensions within NATO were ignited by the Kosovo crisis, but the differences lie deeper. To the extent that the Alliance acted in a purely defensive capacity it was possible to overcome political differences with relative ease. With the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, NATO's role has changed fundamentally. From a territorial defensive alliance it has been transformed into an organisation for intervention on a global scale, representing the interests of its members outside of the sphere of the member countries.

In this respect the Kosovo War was a milestone. For the first time, in order to impose its will, NATO attacked a sovereign country not belonging to the Alliance. The war was at the same time a test for similar interventions in other areas of the world, not least in the mineral-rich and conflicted region of the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea.

While the NATO partners have agreement over the efforts to establish their presence in this region, in the long term they will be unable to harmonise their economic and strategic differences. It is unthinkable that the enormous territory opened up for international capital by the collapse of the Soviet Union can be divided up peaceably between the Great Powers. Without even taking into account the region's strategic significance as a crossing point for Asia and Europe, billions of dollars are involved in the construction of infrastructure and transport and the exploitation of the enormous reserves of oil and gas existing in the Caspian region.

An additional factor is the fundamental change which has taken place in power relations within NATO over the past 10 years. Since reunification, Germany has shifted from its previously limited geopolitical position and once again emerged as the dominant power in Europe. With the introduction of the euro as a unified currency, and the efforts to establish its own independent defence capacity, Europe increasingly emerges as a challenger and rival to the US.

As a result NATO has inexorably been drifting apart. This is clearly expressed in the tensions arising in Kosovo. The behaviour of individual politicians can accelerate or delay this process. It cannot stop it.

Herein lies the real meaning of the Kosovo War. Contrary to the claims of the war propagandists, it had nothing to do with the military defence of human rights, or even a step towards establishing a cosmopolitan international community. The gruesome reality in occupied Kosovo should be sufficient to deliver the death blow to this sort of propaganda.

What distinguishes the Kosovo War is its role in inaugurating new wars, in which tensions between the Great Powers will inevitably escalate. The war and its aftermath call to mind the beginning of the century. At that time the Great Powers came together in a joint intervention for the "defence of civilisation"—the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in China. Fourteen years later they were at one another's throats and initiated the greatest slaughter in world history.

A counterweight to the collapse of the Atlantic alliance can only come from below—not from the governments, but from the people themselves—through the unification of European and American workers in a joint struggle for a genuinely human, socialist society.





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