

German troops to join NATO force in Macedonia

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13 July 2001

On July 8, German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping (SPD—Social Democratic Party) told the press that up to 500 German soldiers would participate in a planned NATO intervention in Macedonia. The German troops would be part of a unit including French and Spanish soldiers.

Unlike German participation in the NATO war against Serbia two years ago, this time the troops will be heavily armed for ground fighting. Scharping told the press that the plans for the intervention “were not yet finalised”. But the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* reported that two tank regiments with Marder-type tanks were being made available for Macedonia.

A week before, the 19 NATO member countries had agreed to intervene in the conflict between the Macedonian government and ethnic Albanian rebels of the so-called “National Liberation Army” (NLA).

NATO member countries agreed to send a brigade of 3,000 soldiers, which, in accordance with a political agreement with Albanian representatives in the Macedonian all-party coalition government, would collect the weapons of the separatist NLA and oversee a truce between the warring parties within 30 days.

The intervention scenario envisaged by NATO is, in fact, highly questionable. In the first place, it is doubtful that Macedonian government representatives will be able to reach a political settlement with representatives of the Albanian minority under conditions where the latter are demanding, under increasing pressure from NLA guerrillas, complete independence from the multiethnic state of Macedonia.

Following conciliatory moves by Macedonian government officials, who indicated they were prepared to change the constitution to grant equal rights to the various ethnic groups and recruit more Albanians into official posts, the Albanian spokesmen upped the ante with new demands, eventually bringing talks to a standstill.

But even if it is possible to establish a peace deal and NATO troops are sent to the region for the avowed purpose of “securing peace” and disarming the rebels, there is no guarantee against further outbreaks of fighting, whereby NATO could find itself in the middle of an all-out war.

The Albanian parties in Macedonia are demanding the “most rapid possible” intervention by NATO, which they claim is the only way to stop the region from descending into civil war. At the same time, it is the Albanian NLA rebels who ignited and continue to provoke the conflict.

NLA rebels had threatened to march on the Macedonian capital of Skopja prior to the July 5 onset of a cease-fire worked out by NATO mediators. Now, as a condition for upholding the cease-fire, the NLA is demanding an equal place in talks over changes to the constitution.

It was Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski who invited NATO to disarm the NLA, but the NLA, for its part, regards NATO intervention as decisive in strengthening its own position. In light of recent experiences in Kosovo, the Albanian separatists hope for broad autonomy protected by a long-term stationing of NATO troops.

Even though European Union Foreign Minister Javier Solana described the NLA rebels as “terrorists with whom it is impossible to strike a deal”, and American special envoy James Pardew excluded any possibility of talks with the NLA, the history of the Kosovo conflict demonstrates that, in accordance with the needs of the major powers, yesterday’s terrorists can quickly become today’s respected partners. It is, moreover, evident that Albanian separatism has been actively supported and sponsored by NATO.

Kosovo is the source and point of reference for Albanian separatism in Macedonia. The intervention by NATO in the Kosovo conflict of 1999, during which NATO carried out a bombing campaign against the Serb population, serves as a model for Albanian separatists in Macedonia. Even the weapons of the Macedonian NLA come from Kosovo, where currently 40,000 NATO soldiers are stationed and the borders are secured by NATO troops.

Despite claims to the contrary, NATO has never made a serious effort to disarm the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in Kosovo, or put an end to the organisation’s terror activities against Serbs, Roma and anyone who dares to criticise its politics. In Macedonia the KLA’s offshoot, the NLA, has been armed for its struggle against the Macedonian government under the very eyes of NATO.

Only recently, on June 25, hundreds of NLA rebels with their weapons were evacuated from the village of Aracinovo near Skopja, where they were facing defeat at the hands of Macedonian government troops. The separatists were driven in NATO buses to their mountain retreat in Nikustak and handed back their weapons on arrival.

The *Hamburger Abendblatt* reported on the event as follows: “Among the retreating rebels were 17 ‘instructors’, former US army officers, who had been providing military training for the

rebels.” The newspaper added that “70 percent of the weaponry carried by the guerrillas” was of American origin.

The NLA is demanding independence for those areas of Macedonia mainly occupied by Albanians. At present around 440,000 Albanians live in Macedonia—approximately 23 percent of the total population. An estimated 1.7 million Albanians live in neighbouring Kosovo, and an additional 700,000 in the north of Greece. According to the perspective of the NLA, these various regions are to be “liberated”, ethnically cleansed of non-Albanians and ultimately brought into a Greater Albanian Republic.

NLA insistence that it be included in talks on changes to the Macedonian constitution is aimed above all at securing international recognition for the organisation as the legitimate representative of the Albanians. Once admitted to the talks, it is unlikely the NLA would agree to any measure aimed at its own disarmament.

Should the NLA not be accepted as a partner in the talks, the organisation is determined to escalate the conflict in order to provoke an intervention by NATO, which it hopes would lead to autonomy under NATO protection similar to the situation in Kosovo.

Under such conditions, NATO representatives and governments have conceded that the concept of a 30-day intervention aimed at disarmament, but avoiding direct involvement in the conflict, is unrealistic. The magazine *Die Zeit* reported last week that NATO is also considering the possibility “that it will be necessary for the alliance to take sides before the amnesty comes into effect”.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) was quoted as saying NATO had to be prepared to carry out its planned intervention with a “robust mandate”. The *Frankfurter Rundschau* reported that Berlin did not exclude the possibility of a “massive international military intervention” in the event of “a total breakdown in Macedonia, resulting in chaos”.

Agreement between the partners in the federal coalition government, the SPD and the Green Party, on the participation of German troops in a NATO mission is virtually assured—without a debate in parliament, let alone any broad public discussion of the aims of a NATO intervention in Macedonia.

The government secured German participation in the Kosovo war with an unprecedented campaign of lies about supposed massacres and atrocities in Serbian concentration camps. Now the government regards it as self-evident that a further military intervention in the Balkans can be carried out without any sort of public discussion.

Up to now opposition to the government’s plans has come mainly from the right—from representatives of the conservative opposition and from the German military, which is demanding an intensified and more rapid retooling of the army. Even as spending is being slashed for social programs, they are demanding that the government make billions available for the transformation of the German army into an internationally effective and powerful rapid intervention force.

In a newspaper interview, the general inspector of the German army, Harald Kujat, refuted Schröder’s announcement that German soldiers would definitely participate in a NATO force in Macedonia: “What is decisive is the fact that the Bundeswehr, in

terms of both personnel and materials, is not in a position to carry out a further intervention on this scale for any length of time. On the one hand, we have not proceeded very far with structural reform, on the other, there are problems with materials and the current effectiveness of our equipment”.

The opposition CDU (Christian Democratic Union) is campaigning along similar lines, seeking to act as a spokesman for the military. Leading members of the Union want to make parliamentary agreement to an intervention in Macedonia dependent on the release of funds for the Bundeswehr. It is, however, very unlikely that the CDU would go so far as to reject such an intervention, especially in light of the fact that Schröder has already announced an increase in the budget for the military. He would likely brand CDU opposition to German participation in a NATO military mission to Macedonia as proof of the CDU’s unreliability as a partner in the European Union and NATO.

As one would expect, the position of the former “pacifist party”, the Greens, is characterised by shameless opportunism. German Foreign Minister and Green Party leader Joschka Fischer is determined to stifle any debate on the aims of an intervention out of concern for “German influence in a growing Europe”.

Green deputy Christian Ströbele, however, has spoken out against sending troops—as he did at the beginning of the Kosovo war. He has drawn attention to the fact that since agreeing to the Kosovo war, the Greens have suffered a dramatic decline in votes in a number of state elections. In view of upcoming elections in Berlin, Ströbele fears that Green support for a new intervention by the Bundeswehr would be a gift to the rival PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism—formerly the Stalinist ruling party, SED, in the former East Germany).

Although Ströbele limited his criticism to purely tactical, electoral considerations, his statement was immediately attacked by the chairman of the party’s fraction in parliament as an “impertinence”.



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