

Germany's role in the secession of Kosovo

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26 February 2008

On February 20, the German government officially recognized the independence of Kosovo. It did so despite the foreseeable political dangers: an impending conflict with Russia, the eruption of new conflicts in the Balkans, and the incitement of separatist tendencies in other crisis regions across the globe.

It was not as if the government in Berlin had not been warned. In January, the influential Institute for Science and Politics, which has close ties to the government, urgently warned against a unilateral declaration of independence for the Serbian province. In its report, the institute warned that the secession of Kosovo would endanger the entities of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia and threaten "US and European Union relations with Russia."

In the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung*, a legal expert who is an advisor to the German Foreign Office warned that independence for Kosovo creates a precedent which can be directed "in other cases against the Western states." Warnings also came from inside the ranks of Germany's governing coalition consisting of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), with the speaker for the SPD parliamentary group on foreign policy, Gert Weisskirchen, even describing Kosovo as a "mafia state."

The German government, however, swept aside such objections and was one of the first to recognize Kosovo as an independent state. The government led by Angela Merkel (CDU) was making clear that it was prepared to follow behind the US and risk increased tensions with Russia. In so doing, the present government was departing from the close cooperation with the Putin regime in Moscow inaugurated by the former government, led by Gerhard Schröder of the SPD.

Leading political and business circles in Germany and the European Union are increasingly worried about the dependence of Europe on oil and gas imports from Russia. The Balkans serve as an important transit region for pipeline projects, whereby oil and gas from the Caspian Sea are to be pumped to Western Europe, circumventing Russia.

Control of the Balkans and the lessening of Russian influence in the region are therefore of crucial importance and have become a major element in German and European foreign policy. This was made clear in an extensive report drawn up by Franz Lothar Altmann for the Institute for Science and Politics published in January 2007.

German foreign policy has been increasingly directed toward weakening the position of Serbia, a traditional ally and client state of Russia, since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s.

In 1991, the German government promoted the break-up of Yugoslavia by rushing to recognise the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. In 1995, it used the Bosnian war as a pretext for international deployments by the German army, under the cover of supposed humanitarian assistance, and high-ranking diplomats from Germany have ever since been instrumental in determining the fate of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, Kosovo has increasingly become a central focus of German policy in southeastern Europe. In 1989, then-Serbian president (and subsequently Yugoslav president) Slobodan Milosevic disallowed the autonomy of the province of Kosovo, and

shortly afterwards dissolved the Kosovan parliament.

In response, an anti-Serb, unofficial government was founded—the Kosovo Democratic League (LDK)—under the leadership of an ethnic Albanian president, Ibrahim Rugova, who appointed as prime minister his close ally, Bujar Bukoshi. This government went into exile in Germany, where it received political support from German backers.

At the start of the 1990s, Albania received the backing of the German government, then led by Helmut Kohl (CDU). This support took the form of a German-Albanian agreement signed by German President Roman Herzog in Tirana in 1995. The pact called for the "right of self-determination for all peoples," but was clearly aimed at Kosovo, a majority of whose population was ethnic Albanian. At the same time, an office of the German Information Service (BND) was set up in Tirana with the task of providing logistical assistance to an underground Kosovar (Albanian Kosovan) militia in Kosovo.

The money for this project was raised by Bukoshi, who maintained close contact with the German foreign minister at the time, Klaus Kinkel of the Free Democratic Party (FDP). In 1995, Bukoshi distanced himself from the non-violent path favoured by Rugova and began assembling recruits for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (FARK), which in 1998 was integrated into the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

The conflict in Kosovo intensified following bombing attacks by the KLA on five Serbian refugee camps in 1996. With assistance from both the US and Germany, the KLA was able to expand and supply its fighters with weapons and equipment acquired across the border in Albania.

In 1998, following increasing international pressure for an embargo on weapons, the Albanian prime minister, Fatos Nano, appealed to NATO for assistance regarding control of his country's border region with Kosovo in an attempt to rein in the KLA.

Any dispatch of NATO combat troops to Albania at this point would have meant a direct confrontation with the KLA and would have dealt a severe blow to Germany's designs in the Balkans. German Foreign Minister Kinkel vetoed such an intervention, declaring: "Naturally, one must consider whether morally and ethically one should prevent the Kosovo Albanians from purchasing weapons for self-defence."

The German defence minister at the time, Volker Rühe (CDU), put forward the position, which was later to become the official position of the German government, that Milosevic was carrying out ethnic cleansing on a large scale. He said, "The problem of Kosovo cannot be solved by my sending troops to Albania, closing the border with Kosovo and thereby encouraging the operations of Mr. Milosevic." His comments amounted to a blank cheque for the activities of the KLA.

In 1999, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* revealed that the KLA was being encouraged by Germany and other countries to cause a humanitarian crisis, which would be used as the justification for NATO to intervene.

The newspaper quoted from the general report of the parliamentary meeting of NATO on the Kosovo crisis: "The Serbian repressions diminished during the period of October to December 1998. On the other hand, there were insufficient measures to contain the KLA, which was able to collect donations in the US and Western Europe—in particular,

from Germany and Switzerland—as well as to win recruits and smuggle weapons over the Albanian border. On this basis, the KLA was able to sharply intensify its attacks on Serbian security forces and civilians from the start of December 1998.”

At the February 1999 conference at Rambouillet in France, the Yugoslav government, then headed by President Milosevic, was confronted with an ultimatum whose terms were clearly unacceptable. The document had been drafted mainly by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party).

Fischer had previously ensured that the Austrian, Wolfgang Petritsch, represent the European Union in the negotiations at Rambouillet. Petritsch was not only a hard-line opponent of Serbia, which dominated the Yugoslav federation, he also had close contacts with the KLA and organised the participation of the Western-backed guerrilla movement, which was represented at the negotiating table by Hashim Thaci.

This move signalled *de facto* international diplomatic recognition for Thaci, who at the time was being investigated for terrorist attacks against the Serbian security force and the liquidation of oppositional elements amongst his own KLA fighters. The German government thereby played a key role in ensuring that the KLA became the determining political factor in Kosovo.

As expected, the Serbian side rejected the ultimatum laid down at Rambouillet and NATO commenced, in March of 1999, its air war against Serbia. This opened the way for the first military intervention by the German army on foreign soil since the end of the Second World War. Then German chancellor Schröder (SPD) spoke of “removing the taboo on the military,” thereby articulating Germany’s reawakened great-power ambitions.

At the end of the 11-week NATO bombardment, Kosovo was placed under United Nations administration, with political and military control in the hands of those leading NATO powers which had conducted the war. The civilian administration was in the hands of the UN mission, UNMIK, while military control was maintained by the NATO-led KFOR force.

The UN Security Council resolution that established UNMIK, while removing Kosovo from the practical control of the Yugoslav state, not only did not speak of Kosovan independence, it guaranteed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Yugoslav federation, i.e., it continued to deem Kosovo to be an integral part of Yugoslavia. This was, among other things, a concession to Russia, which would not have acceded to language that established a legal basis for Kosovan secession.

Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence last week, and its recognition by the US and major EU members states, occurred without the benefit of a new UN Security Council resolution. Passage of any such resolution had been blocked by Russia, which declared it would utilize its veto power in the Security Council. Thus the unilateral secession of the province was in breach of international law.

From the very start of the joint UN-NATO administration of Kosovo, the German government was able to ensure that important posts in both UNMIK and KFOR were held by German diplomats and generals.

A German general, Klaus Reinhardt, took over as head of KFOR in 1999. Reinhardt was followed by Holger Kammerhof, who led KFOR from September 2003 to August 2004. Another German officer, Roland Kather, led KFOR from September 2006 to August 2007.

The biggest anti-Serbian pogrom carried out by Albanian ultra-nationalists took place under Kammerhof. In March 2004, dozens of Serbs, Roma and Ashkali were murdered and thousands driven out by Albanian Kosovar forces, while KFOR troops stood by and watched.

Two prominent German diplomats have been active in the leadership of the UN civilian mission in Kosovo, UNMIK. Michael Steiner led the UN administration from 2002 to 2003. Steiner had been coordinator for Balkans policy under Schröder. Since September 2006, the same post in UNMIK has been occupied by Joachim Rucker, who, like Steiner, is close

to the SPD. Rucker had previously worked for the UN and the German Foreign Office in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Also prominent in the region have been Tom Koenigs (Green Party); the deputy to the first UN supervisor Bernard Kouchner (the current French foreign minister), with responsibility for creating a civil administration in Kosovo; and Bodo Hombach (SPD), formerly head of Schröder’s chancellery. In 1999, Hombach was appointed coordinator of the European Union stability pact for southeastern Europe.

Leading German politicians were also involved in UNMIK’s plans for the reconstruction of Kosovo’s infrastructure and the development of its economy. The “revival” of the Kosovan economy was to take place under strict “free-market” principles and meant, in practice, that the NATO powers—with Germany in the forefront—could appropriate the province’s natural resources. “Revival” meant the privatisation of Kosovo’s industrial and agricultural enterprises, which had previously been largely state-owned.

Such privatisations were top priority for the Kosovo Trust Agency (KTAS), which was created in 2003 under the auspices of former German foreign minister Nikolaus Graf Lambsdorff (FDP). He was succeeded in 2004 by Joachim Rucker.

Rucker oversaw a process of ruthless privatisations. Workers employed in state industries were either sacked or offered minimal compensation payments to quit their jobs. Most of the some 200 state enterprises were sold off in obscure dealings to foreign investors, leading to accusations of corruption against KTAS.

In addition to other minerals, Kosovo has the second largest reserves of brown coal in Europe, although the province itself is wracked by energy shortages and many households receive only a few hours of electrical power per day. Official unemployment stands at 45 percent, but is reckoned to be nearer to 70 percent—a testament to the fact that the priority for the UNMIK administration is satisfying foreign investors rather than the needs of the local population.

Individuals and business interests involved in KTAS read like a “who’s who” of the German business world, and include such prominent financial enterprises as the Deutsche Bank, the HypoVereinsbank, and major companies such as Siemens. Their spokesman in Kosovo is Michael Schäfer, formerly a political director with the German Foreign Office. Schäfer is alleged to have used his post and influence on behalf of the former prime minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, who was accused of crimes against humanity by the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

Haradinaj, who was a leader of the KLA, is described in a 2005 report drawn up by the German Information Service as one of the most powerful and dangerous clan leaders in Kosovo. The report states: “The organisation around Ramush Haradinaj, which is centred in the area of Decani and based on clan relations, is involved in the entire spectrum of criminal, political and military activities, with substantial repercussions for security throughout Kosovo. The group totals around 100 members and is involved in the smuggling of arms and drugs and illegal trade in goods. In addition, it controls local government organs.”

Nevertheless, the German government continues its close partnership and cooperation with criminal and ultra-nationalist forces in Kosovo. In their leadership role in UNMIK and KFOR, German officials shut their eyes to the crimes carried out by extreme nationalists in the province, who have led a campaign of murders and expulsions to ensure an “ethnically pure” Albanian Kosovo.

By 1998, the proportion of Serbs living in Kosovo had declined to less than 10 percent. Around half of the province’s 120,000 remaining Serbs live in ethnic enclaves.

At a very early date, leading German politicians pushed for independence for Kosovo. In 2001, Gernot Erler (SPD), the minister of state in the foreign office, told German radio (*Deutschlandfunk*) that

borders should not be regarded as inviolable in the case of Kosovo. In fact, as early as April of 1999, while the NATO air war was ongoing, the then-speaker on foreign policy for the CDU, Karl Lamers, raised the demand for Kosovan independence in the German parliament.

Since 2005, the Western powers have intensified their efforts to push ahead with the secession of Kosovo. This project was accelerated with the appointment of former Finnish prime minister Martti Ahtisaari as UN mediator.

Ahtisaari developed a plan that involved “conditional independence” for the province—in practice, the creation of a European protectorate. The plan met with bitter opposition from Serbia and Russia.

In the subsequent negotiations between Serbia and the so-called troika (the US, Russia and the European Union), it was once again a German, Wolfgang Ischinger, the German ambassador in London, who led the negotiations on behalf of the European Union. Ischinger vehemently promoted the Ahtisaari plan in the face of opposition from Serbia, and was instrumental in forcing through the secession of Kosovo from Serbia.

Ahtisaari has his own allies. Between 2000 and 2004, Ahtisaari was chairman of the International Crisis Group (ICG), a US-financed think tank, whose executive committee is filled with high-ranking diplomats and military figures from North America and Europe.

On the board of the ICG are the American billionaire George Soros, retired US Gen. Wesley Clark, who was the chief commander of NATO forces in the 1999 war against Serbia, Joschka Fischer, Friedbert Pflüger (CDU) and Uta Zapf (SPD). From early on the International Crisis Group lobbied in support of the secession of Kosovo and played a key role in the privatisation of the Kosovan industrial complex at Trepca.

German foreign policy has been actively working to separate Kosovo from Serbia for over a decade. Germany had hoped to secure this aim with the agreement of Russia. Now, however, German support for the secession of Kosovo at the behest of an alliance of Western powers has enraged Moscow and once again ignited the fuse of the Balkan powder keg.



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