

How the German government is reigniting the conflict in Kosovo

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The German government is pursuing the declared goal of transforming Germany into Europe's leading power and the Bundeswehr into the most powerful army in Europe. This—and not its purported concern for freedom and democracy—is why it is fueling the Ukraine war and pouring an additional €100 billion into rearmament. Germany's war policy is not limited to Ukraine; it is also setting the Balkans on fire again.

In December, Serbia and Kosovo were on the brink of a military conflict that had the potential to turn into a major conflagration. An attempt by the Albanian-dominated Kosovo government to assert its authority in the Serb-populated north sparked violent protests. Ten members of parliament, 500 police officers and numerous judges and local politicians from the Serb minority resigned in protest. Demonstrators set up roadblocks and exchanged fire with the Kosovo police.

The Kosovo administration closed border crossings to Serbia, and Kosovo Premier Albin Kurti called upon NATO to send more troops to the country and increase its Kosovo Force (KFOR) mission, which has been deployed in the region since 1999. The KFOR contingent currently consists of 3,800 troops from 28 countries. For his part, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has placed Serbian armed forces on alert and asked NATO permission to send his own troops to the area. According to Igor Simić, the former vice president of the Kosovo parliament, it was the “most explosive situation since the end of the war over twenty years ago.”

In the meantime, the situation has eased somewhat, but observers anticipate that it is only a matter of time before the conflict flares up once again.

As usual, Western propaganda has ignored the background of the conflict and instead identified a single villain responsible: Aleksandar Vučić, the president of Serbia, the country which has the closest ties to Russia of all the Balkan states. Serbia, like all other Balkan states, is seeking membership in the European Union and has condemned Russia's military action against Ukraine. It has not, however, severed its ties with Russia and refuses to go along with the European Union's sanctions.

In fact, the renewed escalation of the Kosovo conflict is a direct result of the aggressive policy of the European Union, which is using the Ukraine war to reinforce its political and economic dominance over the Western Balkans. Germany is playing the leading role in this process.

Since the European Union and the United States provided political and military support for the breakup of Yugoslavia into seven small states in the 1990s, the EU has admitted two of those states, Slovenia and Croatia. The admission into the EU of the remaining five, as well as Albania, is envisaged but has been repeatedly delayed.

France in particular opposed admission, fearing that further expansion of the 27-member EU would render it incapable of acting in foreign policy and further strengthen Germany's weight. In 2019, President Emmanuel Macron vetoed the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, a move which led to serious disagreements between Berlin and Paris.

With the Ukraine war, the EU's stance has changed. Berlin in particular

is now pulling out all the stops to speed up the integration of the Western Balkan states into the EU.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Kosovo, Serbia and North Macedonia in June last year. At the beginning of November, he invited the heads of government of these three countries, as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania to a Western Balkans Summit in Berlin, which was also attended by EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Then, on December 6, the first EU-Western Balkans Summit took place in Albania, with all heads of state and governments of the 27 EU member states and EU leaders travelling to Tirana.

The aim of both summits was to accelerate the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. Several agreements were reached to facilitate the movement of goods and people and speed up accession negotiations. Bosnia-Herzegovina was given the status of a candidate country.

Germany and the EU want to achieve several goals with this.

In terms of foreign policy, the Western Balkans are to be firmly integrated into the war front against Russia, and economically cut off from the influence of Russia and China. China has financed numerous infrastructure projects in the region and is trying to gain better access to Europe via the port in Piraeus, Greece.

“An EU enlargement towards the East is a clear gain in terms of our geopolitical interests,” declared a document drawn up by the Seeheim Circle, a grouping consisting of 91 members of Chancellor Scholz's SPD in the Bundestag. Serbia, which agreed to a three-year gas supply contract with Russia last summer and an agreement on foreign policy consultations with Moscow in September, is seen as the main obstacle.

The admission of the Western Balkan states to the EU, some of which have had candidate status for years, is also intended to create the preconditions for the admission of Moldova and Ukraine, which the EU favours for geopolitical reasons.

Another motive of the EU is to seal off the Balkan route, through which refugees from war zones in the Near and Middle East attempt to reach Europe. Serbia and Albania, for example, have so far allowed visa-free entry to nationals of several countries who then try to enter the EU-Schengen area.

Admission to the EU is linked to an extensive procedure that obliges candidates, among other issues, to abide by budgetary discipline, a demand which can only be met by massive savings at the expense of an already impoverished working class. To this end, Brussels and Berlin are working closely with the elites of the Balkan states—as they did in the break-up of Yugoslavia—and are playing off different nationalities against each other along the lines of “divide and rule.”

Kosovo plays a key role in this regard. It already provided the pretext for the war in 1999 against Serbia, which stood in the way of Germany and the US at that time. On the contrived pretext that it was committing genocide in Kosovo, NATO commenced a war against Serbia without UN backing, forcing Kosovo to secede in the process.

Although the province with its nearly 1.8 million inhabitants clearly belonged to Serbia under international law, the major powers placed Kosovo under international administration. In 2008 Kosovo declared its independence and in 2013 it was recognised as an independent state by the US, Germany and most European powers.

In order to achieve this end, Washington and Berlin collaborated with forces responsible for major war crimes and maintained close links to organised crime. Several commanders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) have since been sentenced to long prison terms by a special court in The Hague. Hashim Thaçi, who served as a key witness to US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer to justify the war and later became head of government and president of Kosovo, is now also on trial in The Hague for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The inviolability of state borders, invoked as a sacred principle after the Russian annexation of Crimea, was simply swept aside in the case of Kosovo.

The parallels between Kosovo and Crimea are so obvious that five EU member states still refuse to recognise Kosovo's independence. These include the governments of Spain, Cyprus and Greece, which fear that any such recognition would legitimise separatist movements in their own countries. Ukraine has not officially recognised Kosovo for the same reason, although Kosovo is one of Ukraine's most ardent supporters in the war against Russia.

For German foreign policy, such double standards play no role. In 1999, the NATO war against Serbia served as a welcome opportunity for the country to ditch its abstinence from foreign military interventions enforced following the crimes carried out by the Nazis in World War II and to participate in an imperialist war for the first time since 1945. Now the German government, once again headed by a Social Democrat and including the Green Party, is using the regime in Pristina to put pressure on Serbia and increase its influence in the Balkans.

Berlin's recent advance has encouraged Kosovo Premier Albin Kurti to reassert his claim to the Serb-populated north of the country. Serbia, which continues to consider Kosovo as part of its territory, had concluded a normalisation agreement in 2013 under pressure from the EU that provided extensive self-government rights for Serb majority communities. In return, Serbia respected Kosovar institutions.

While Serbia largely fulfilled the agreement, the Kosovar side did so only in part. For example, the law on Serb majority municipalities was passed but never put into force. In fact, an unstable equilibrium prevailed. The Serb minority, estimated at between 100,000 to 200,000 depending on the source, largely administered itself and maintained close relations with Serbia, while Belgrade and Pristina made makeshift arrangements.

With his decision to no longer tolerate Serb car number plates in the Serb-populated north of Kosovo from the first of November, Kurti deliberately torpedoed this status quo. It was a provocation intended to subject the Serb majority communities to Pristina's dictates—and was understood as such.

In so doing Kurti had the backing of Berlin. On December 11, as the conflict escalated, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Green Party) demonstratively gave him her backing. She declared on Twitter that Kosovo had reduced tensions, while Serbia's rhetoric was having the opposite effect. Serbia's proposal to send its troops to Kosovo was "completely unacceptable."

This turns reality on its head. Even the conservative German daily *FAZ*, which usually supports the aggressive foreign policy of the German government, had to admit that in Brussels "it was noted attentively that the Serb [Vu?i?] behaved constructively in the recent dispute over number plates, while Prishtina sought to provoke."

The arrogance with which Germany acts against Serbia and other countries that stand in the way of its geopolitical interests is also shown by

a commentary that appeared in the weekly *Die Zeit* on 4 January. In language reminiscent of Kaiser Wilhelm II's infamous "Hun speech" and the war rhetoric of Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, it read:

Punish Serbia, of course that sounds harsh and very imperialistic. But the EU has learned, especially in the past year, and somewhat involuntarily, that it is only taken seriously when it can also get tough and is prepared to inflict pain on others. Toughness against Russia, toughness against China and toughness against EU member Hungary are part of the Union's necessary geopolitical coming of age. And getting tough with Serbia is overdue.

As is the case in the Ukraine war, where Berlin has lined up against Russia alongside admirers of such Nazi collaborators as Stepan Bandera, the German government is also following the criminal footsteps of the Nazi regime in the Balkans. Its most important ally in the Balkans during World War II was the fascist Ustasha dictatorship of Ante Pavelić in Croatia which murdered almost a million Serbs, Jews, Roma and anti-fascist Croats. It maintained its own death camp in Jasenovac and had men, women and children burned alive.

The Yugoslav partisans organised themselves under the leadership of Josip Tito's Communist Party to fight against this barbarism and the German occupation and were persecuted by the German Wehrmacht with indescribable brutality. The strength of the partisan movement was based on the fact that it united all the oppressed of Yugoslavia, regardless of their national and ethnic backgrounds, in a common struggle. Out of this united struggle emerged the Yugoslav state after World War II, which enjoyed great support among the working class.

Tito, however, had never broken with the political conceptions of his Stalinist past. He rejected linking the future of Yugoslavia to the international expansion of the proletarian revolution but tried to find a middle course between Moscow and Washington. He reacted to growing economic and social problems by strengthening nationalist currents in various different regions of the country.

The representatives of the Ustasha, who had found refuge abroad in the West with the support of the Vatican, regained influence. The German foreign intelligence service BND developed close ties with Croatian nationalists as early as the 1970s. When Yugoslavia broke apart in 1991, the government of Helmut Kohl (CDU) recognised the independence of Slovenia and Croatia at a pace that met with reservations even from its American, French and British allies.

The German initiative set in motion the nationalist fury that was subsequently supported by the US and other European powers in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and members of other minorities suddenly found themselves living in states where they had no rights. Germany itself worked closely with Franjo Tuđman's regime in Croatia, which revived the traditions of the Ustasha.

With the escalation of NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, the wars in the Balkans and the Middle East unleashed by the US and its European allies in the past decades are breaking out once again.

This confirms that these wars were never about "terrorism," "weapons of mass destruction," "freedom" or "democracy," as official propaganda claimed. They are—like the First and Second World Wars—imperialist wars for the redivision of the world between the great powers, which will lead to nuclear destruction if not stopped by the intervention of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and its affiliated parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) are building a mass socialist movement of youth and the working class against war, based on the overthrow of its root cause, capitalism. This goal is at the

heart of the SGP's current election campaign in Berlin.



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