

Springtime for NATO

When Western leaders assemble in Washington, later this year, to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of NATO, how will they assess the Balkan campaign of Spring 1999? The aim of the summit is a new mission statement for NATO, transforming it from a defensive alliance into a mobile, global police force which can hit a target state anywhere in the world to defend the interests of the United States, defined, of course, as 'human rights' and the 'free market'. Blair is, naturally, totally committed to the transformation of NATO. New Labour is harnessed to the chariot-wheels of US military policy and it is not for nothing that the US has plied the Ministry of Defence with Tomahawk missiles and state-of-the-art weaponry. The British defence and intelligence establishment is tied to the US with an umbilical cord. Germany, Italy and France are marginally more sceptical of the go-it-alone strategy, while massive anti-war demonstrations in Athens have seriously shaken the Greek government, making it difficult for Salonika to be used as a disembarkation port for ground troops. Even new NATO recruit, the Czech Republic, has distanced itself from

the bombing offensive. All these states still need to be convinced that it is wise to treat Russia with contempt. What is taking place in the skies over Serbia is, therefore, of critical importance in determining who wins this argument.

The main concerns of the United States in this war have little to do with the suffering of the Kosovan Albanians. If they had, the Western powers would have made a joint *démarche* with Russia, thus making it clear to Milosevic that he had nowhere to turn to. Such a joint approach would have meant Russian participation in any peace-keeping force and it is this that the Pentagon rejects. The launching of NATO aerial bombardment was a calculated demonstration that NATO can resolve problems like this by itself. The risk that it would unleash Serb paramilitary terror on Kosovo was manifest. That is why I believe that the US motives in this operation were sordid from the very outset.

Following in Brezhnev's Footsteps

The American decision to violate the sovereignty of a European state by ordering NATO air strikes against Serbia—the first time since Brezhnev launched the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia over three decades ago—poses two basic questions. What can justify this blatant disregard of international law and what future does NATO intend for the region? The answer to the first seems obvious. The American President, his English factotum and various European politicians, not to mention the overwhelming majority of the media, provide us with the reason every day. Milosevic is Hitler. Yesterday Saddam Hussein was Hitler and who knows which Hitler tomorrow has in store for the trusting citizens of Europe. In order to crush such a leader, who refuses to listen to reason, it is necessary to wage war. That Milosevic is a brutal leader has never been in doubt, and that the present Republic of Yugoslavia is based on the oppression of the Albanians of Kosovo is equally true. But this was already true in 1991, when Milosevic's rump Federation was recognized by every Western power and it was still true at the time of the Dayton negotiations of 1995, when no attempt was made by any party to raise the question of Kosovo.

That Milosevic's forces have committed crimes against the Kosovars is undeniable. But is he alone? The West's highly selective pattern of concern for human rights continues today, as we all know. Israel's Netanyahu is an even more brutish politician, a violent and racist demagogue who defies UN resolutions with impunity and regularly bombs targets in Lebanon. In fact, the very foundation of Israel was accompanied by massacres and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, who were swept off their land in a fashion not dissimilar to what is taking place in Kosovo today. And what of Milosevic's counterpart in Croatia, the ailing Franjo Tudjman? He may be approaching his end now, but he, too, in his time, has authorized the ethnic cleansing of Serbs and, on occasion, Bosnians. When he ethnically cleansed the Krajina of some 200,000 Serbs in 1995, his action was actually in

concert with NATO's Bosnian campaign. He presides over a régime which has rehabilitated the leaders of Croatian fascists who collaborated with the Nazi occupiers during the Second World War. His government has behaved thuggishly towards dissenters. But Netanyahu and Tudjman are on 'our side' and nothing else matters. The only function of the Hitler analogy is to obfuscate political discourse and to incite a stampede to reckless military action.¹

Plenty of crimes against humanity have been committed since Hitler. The Anglo-Saxon powers have fostered atrocities on a large scale in the second half of the century. In the name of freedom and democracy, they have backed dictators much worse than Milosevic—who, we should remember, has been repeatedly elected by the Serbs in the course of elections which have been far less rigged than Yeltsin's referendum on the Constitution, so cravenly backed at the time by Western apologists—and helped them to power on every continent. This was usually done after great massacres. The Indonesian dictator, Suharto, was being armed by Britain and America right up to the day he was toppled by a popular uprising, which received no support from either Washington or London. Indonesia, admittedly, is a far-away country, not visible from a Tuscan beach, but what about Turkey? It can certainly be sighted by a New Labour MP sunbathing on a Greek island. What successive governments in Ankara have inflicted on their Kurdish citizens is as bad, if not worse, than the treatment meted out to the Kosovars. The argument used by the Turkish authorities is exactly the same as that employed by the Serb leadership. In torturing, maiming, killing and denying autonomy to the Kurds, they are simply defending the unity of the Turkish state. How many TV viewers are aware of the fact that this is still taking place, or that Turkey is an important member of NATO?

A Bridgehead Against Russia

It is the blatant double standard that compels any critical observer to look for the deeper reasons that underlie this conflict. The need to protect the Kosovars served as the pretext for NATO's bombardment, but its real aim was to secure its control of this strategic region and to fortify an extensive NATO bridgehead in the heart of the Balkans. This action must be seen in the context of the expansion of NATO to include the larger, Western-oriented Western states. This expansion was never envisaged as including Russia which remains, as Gilbert Achcar has explained in these pages, the potential foe against which NATO measures itself.²

¹ The fact that left-wing columnists like Francis Wheen in *The Guardian* and Nick Cohen in *The Observer* have uncritically accepted the analogy is an indication of the strength of NATOpolitan propaganda in Britain. The first use of the Hitler analogy was against Nasser during the ill-fated Suez war of 1956. On that occasion, it did not prevent the Labour Party from opposing the war.

² Gilbert Achcar, 'The Strategic Triad: The United States, Russia, and China', NLR 228, March–April 1998, pp. 91–126.

Nevertheless, until fairly recently, the NATO strategists hoped that Russia could be brought to accept a symbolic role as a 'Partner for Peace' under Western, actually US, hegemony. To soothe Russian sensibilities, NATO also established a Joint Council with Russia which would supposedly discuss difficult problems of mutual interest. In a keynote address given as recently as 23 June 1998, the NATO Secretary General, Javier Solana, argued that it was essential, when tackling difficult issues such as Kosovo, that 'Russia . . . be on board'. He urged that it would be folly to exclude Russia completely when addressing any problem of European security or simply to present a hostile front. He urged that the Permanent Joint Committee of NATO and Russian personnel should address not only Kosovo—described as the critical security challenge—but also such issues as NATO-Russian co-operation in SFOR, disarmament, terrorism and 'the retraining of retired military personnel'. Solana also spoke of the need for a 'European Security Identity' within NATO.

The NATO aerial bombardment of March 1999 broke completely with this earlier approach. Indeed, the prior six months of pressure and negotiations with Milosevic had almost completely excluded Russia and entities such as the so-called Contact Group, which included Russia. During his visit to Cambridge University in mid-March, Mikhail Gorbachev repeatedly pointed out that agreement on Kosovo could have been reached if the West had been willing to use the international machinery set up with great effort and fanfare to tackle issues such as this by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The decision to exclude the approach most likely to secure a negotiated settlement meant that those who had determined NATO's strategy wanted a war. The decision of the Russian premier to abort his visit to the United States at the start of the air war made it perfectly plain that Washington was denying Russia's new government the earlier-envisaged role as partner. No doubt this is because the Primakov government no longer adhered to the abject stance associated with Kozyrev, the Russian Foreign Minister, described recently by Gorbachev as the 'former US Consul in Moscow'.³

Trampling on Collective Security

The NATO assault on Serbia thus marks a watershed in European politics. It reflects a decision by the United States to abandon all notions of a 'norm-based system of collective security' in Europe. This may have been wistful piety in any case, given a world ruled by Capital under US hegemony, but it is something that the Russians have been demanding ever since Gorbachev came to power and it is a demand that was echoed by a number of EU states, including Kohl's

³ See John Lloyd, 'A New Cold War in the Making', *The Financial Times*, 12 April 1999. Lloyd, reporting from an East-West conference in Berlin, quotes a pro-Western Russian liberal leader, Yevgeni Yasin, as saying 'Liberals now face a terrible defeat in the Duma elections later this year. The West has done something we thought impossible; it has united the country in hostility to it.'

Germany, following the end of the Cold War in 1989. The central reason why the NATO operation has taken place is that the West believes that Russia is still too weak to prevent such actions and that a network of bases and fortified positions must be constructed to contain Russia in future, plugging the gap in the Balkans from Greece in the south to Hungary in the north.

Some supporters of the war, such as *The Guardian's* egregious Jonathan Freedland, have argued that we should not worry about the ulterior motives of the Americans so long as they are doing the right thing, namely defending the Kosovars. And, likewise, we should welcome it if the Western powers have taken against an oppressor they have indulged in the past—arguing that, having sorted out Milosevic, the logic of their action now requires an equally tough line against Turkey and Israel. But the fact is that the NATO approach has been a disaster for the Kosovars—and, while the plight of the Kurds and Palestinians certainly demands our attention and support, it is absurd to suppose that NATO bombardment of Israel or Turkey will ever happen, or would have the desired effect if it did.

With the exception of the British, all European governments have hitherto refused to sanction any act of unilateral aggression, whatever the provocation, unless it had prior UN sanction. This was Germany's policy throughout the Nineties. The day after the bombardment started, Volker Rühle, the former German Defence Minister, insisted that German soldiers in Macedonia had been sent as 'peacekeepers' and 'not to make war' and therefore should be immediately withdrawn. It has also now emerged that a major reason for the dramatic resignation of Oskar Lafontaine was his total opposition to the NATO plan. He told the German Cabinet that it was reckless to follow the Americans in Kosovo. A German minister informed the *New York Times* that: 'In the end, it was Kosovo, that made him go.'⁴ The former German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, has launched a blistering attack on NATO's adventure and it is clear that the ruling SPD in Germany is seriously split on the issue. The bombers' faction in the Greens, too, might soon find themselves confronted by a rank-and-file rebellion. What this indicates is that a silent, behind-the-scenes war is being fought across Western Europe to determine the leadership of the EU. The US has used its old British Trojan Horse to lead a neo-liberal drive in the EU. Kosovo is a neat operation from the Anglo-American point of view to drag the EU behind NATO/US leadership of the world, and to replace the notion that Russian sensibilities should be catered for. American strategists, desperate to retain NATO as their battering-ram in the new Europe, manoeuvred Europe into a war in order to prove that NATO had a permanent function, that it was the ultimate arbiter and could act alone, presenting the rest of the world with a *fait accompli*. Action

⁴ In *Der Spiegel*, 12 April 1999, Oskar Lafontaine confirms that he left the cabinet because he opposed NATO's war and had been arguing against such a course since October 1998.

through the OSCE would have been more laborious, but it would have favoured a negotiated solution and would have meant obliging the Yugoslav government to honour an agreement which it had itself accepted.

Of course, a negotiated settlement would not have helped the market a great deal. The war certainly appears to have boosted stocks, as noted slightly defensively in the *Financial Times* of 12 April 1999:

It may seem a little macabre to look for beneficiaries of the Kosovo conflict, but then the stock market is not sentimental. Since NATO started its bombing raids on March 24, shares in British Aerospace and Smiths Industries have climbed nearly 9 per cent, while GKN is up 8 per cent and Raytheon by 7 per cent.

There is cold-blooded logic in this. Jane's, a military research group, estimates that NATO has spent close to \$1bn in less than three weeks, most of it on armaments and fuel. The US, for example, has fired off over 150 cruise missiles, made by Lockheed and Boeing at a cost of \$1.2m each, as well as losing a \$35m Stealth fighter, also built by Lockheed. Matra's missiles and Raytheon's laser-guided bombs have also been in action, while the heavy use of warplanes should benefit BAe, Rolls-Royce and the big US defence groups that service them and supply spare parts.

Further out, there may be a 'war dividend' if countries reassess their military needs in light of the conflict.

Speculation that NATO will be forced to send in ground troops equipped with fighting vehicles and helicopters has helped buoy GKN, which manufactures both.

NATO Strategy on the Line

If the NATO assault eventually forces the Serbs to accept a NATO peace-keeping force, it will be hailed as a major victory and will strengthen the Anglo-American alliance in the EU. But, if the air war fails to bring Milosevic to the negotiating table, then NATO will have to decide whether to commit ground troops—with all the hazards and difficulties entailed—or to abandon the unilateral approach and invite Russian mediation. If NATO splits, the results would be catastrophic for the Alliance, but not for Europe as a whole. That is why what is important for NATO planners is not how many Kosovars die in the process or become refugees, but how these deaths and displacements are perceived. If NATO is blamed for them, then they will have failed and moves towards a European Security Council, which includes the non-NATO states, might be revived. This is what the German and Russian states really want and they might yet succeed. In fact, the very existence of NATO has been an anachronism since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. NATO is, essentially, nothing

more than an instrument to secure US hegemony in Europe and, if the Kosovo operation is successful, the world.

Just before the bombing began, the Kosovan and Serb leaderships had agreed a three year period of autonomy, after which the issue could be re-discussed. The discussions broke down on the presence of a 'peacekeeping force'. The Serbs, not unreasonably, regarded the composition of this force as NATO-in-disguise. The Russians could have persuaded them that this was not the case if NATO had agreed to a Russian complement under UN auspices, but, before matters could proceed further, the United States said 'enough'. The Serbs left the table, the monitors were withdrawn and the bombs began to fall. Negotiations will have to begin again. It is unlikely that the Serbs will accept the presence of any NATO soldiers on their soil. The Kosovars, on their part, will refuse to tolerate Milosevic's special police units or soldiers. Both will be right and a solution might lie in a neutral UN or OSCE peacekeeping force, which does not contain soldiers from armies that have attacked either side.

Tomahawk Liberalism

Many despairing liberals and kind-hearted social democrats, understandably upset by the images of fleeing Kosovan refugees on television, have become keen warmongers. The Europe that is backing the American war in Serbia is the liberal, social-democratic half of the continent. In a simplistic political culture dominated by life politics, the shedding of tears for one set of victims is coupled with dropping bombs on their oppressors—even if the process means both creating new victims and bringing horrendous reprisals on those on whose behalf military action was undertaken. Sadly, the distorted news values of the main Western media allow both for much popular confusion and ignorance and for a ludicrous imbalance in presentation, such that the fate of three US soldiers is given as much prominence as the enforced exodus of 250,000 Kosovan refugees.

The Balkan conflict has divided both Left and Right in Britain. Tony Benn, Alan Clark, Denis Healey and Lord Carrington are opposed to the bombing, while Tony Blair, William Hague, Michael Foot, Paddy Ashdown, Ken Livingstone, Vanessa Redgrave, the Editor of *The Sun* and his admirers on *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, have supported the NATO offensive. Columnists in the left-wing Labour weekly, *Tribune*, came out in favour of ground troops. One can share the sympathy with human suffering, the hatred of cruelty and injustice that motivates the new warmongers. But it is the short-sightedness of such columnists that dismays us. A few months hence and some of them might regret their impatience.

Even the most servile NATO apologists, who fervently claimed that the bombing of Serbia was designed to help the Kosovars, must, surely, be able to see the scale of the humanitarian disaster that this has

unleashed. Were NATO's political leaders really surprised by the brutal reaction of the Serbian Government? The Defense Department spokesman in Washington was clear where his own organization stood: 'In the Pentagon, in this building, we were not surprised by what Milosevic has done. I think there is historical amnesia here if anyone says they are surprised by the campaign.' In that case, why was more not done to prepare for the flood of refugees? New Labour's Minister for Overseas Development, Ms Clare Short, explained on British television that, if the West had been seen to prepare for the refugees, people might have assumed this to be 'the inevitable effect of NATO's bombing action'. Here we have the grotesque logic of this entire operation in a nutshell. We knew the Kosovars would be victimized because of our bombing, but we could not acknowledge this in advance.

The bombing, as most serious observers on Right and Left had predicted, has utterly failed either to help the Kosovars or to weaken support for Milosevic. Interestingly, in Britain, the most sustained critique of the war has come from commentators associated with the Right: Corelli Barnett, Andreas Whittam-Smith, William Rees-Mogg, Alan Clarke, Norman Stone, to name but the most prominent. Most of the traditional liberal, social-democratic and anti-war Left, as well as their newspapers and journals, backed the NATO action. Since the bombing has failed, the liberal warmongers, who think nothing these days of violating national sovereignty—a crime for which Galtieri was crushed and Saddam is still being punished—are now calling for ground troops. This option was not favoured from the outset because NATO soldiers are willing to kill but not to die. Since this remains the NATO approach, there is likely to be a search for proxy warriors.

One is tempted to suggest that those on the Left calling for ground-troops should, if they are serious, set an example and volunteer to create International Brigades to fight alongside the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to establish the independence of Kosovo. This at least would be in harmony with the internationalist tradition. Socialists and liberals fought against Franco during the Thirties. Some of us active against the Vietnam war discussed the question of volunteers quite seriously with the North Vietnamese leadership. The principle is a basic one. You do not call on others to fight in what you regard as a just war unless you are prepared to do so yourself. In these 'third way' times, such brigades, no doubt, could be sponsored by companies such as Sandline, Somerfield, and so on. The new warmongers want NATO's armies to fight their war for them, willingly accepting the perversion of the Kosovan cause by Western strategic obsessions that will follow.

The KLA—A Progressive Force?

The Kosovo Liberation Army is not the military wing of a political movement. It is a very recent creation and has no connection with the parties that have won Kosovan votes in the past, such as that led by

Ibrahim Rugova. A recent report in the *Los Angeles Times* quoted in *The Guardian* claimed that the KLA was linked to organized crime, to drug traffickers and to Osama Bin Laden. It added: 'Ivo Daaider, until recently the National Security Council's top expert on the Balkans in the White House, said: "If what we are proposing here is starting a major guerrilla campaign to regain Kosovo, that is the Afghan syndrome".' Afghanistan today is certainly a grim reminder of where the West's anti-Russian obsession can all too easily lead. Daaider went on to say 'we won't be able to control these guys . . . they may not turn out to be a force that is in our interest'. However, it would be foolish to accept these comments at face value.⁵ The KLA is a national movement-in-formation. Even if the *Los Angeles Times* is accurate, the tide of refugees could significantly alter its composition, making it a truly representative organisation.

What is taking place is one of the last scenes in the tragedy which was the break-up of Yugoslavia. The West bears a central responsibility for encouraging this process. The claim that it is all Milosevic's fault is one-sided and erroneous, indulging those Slovenian, Croatian and Western politicians who allowed him to succeed. It could be argued, for instance, that it was Slovene egoism, throwing the Bosnians and Albanians, as well as non-nationalist Serbs and Croats, to the wolves, that was a decisive factor in triggering the whole disaster of disintegration. Once the collapse of the old Federation became unstoppable, then it was obvious that Kosovo had an equal if not greater right to independence than Croatia and Macedonia, let alone Bosnia. None of the latter have 90 per cent of the population belonging to one ethnic group. The Western powers refused to countenance Kosovan self-determination, because it was committed to a Bosnian protectorate based on exactly the opposite principle, the inviolability of the old republican frontiers. The entire record of the West in Yugoslavia is a long series of cynical and hypocritical manoeuvres, of which the bombing of Serbia is only the most recent, but will surely not be the last.

NATO bombing was designed, or so we were led to believe, to halt the flow of refugees. It has increased it a hundredfold. Pre-bombing spin had also implied that Milosevic wanted his country bombed so that he could quickly capitulate and isolate the more hard-line nationalists. This turned out to be pure fantasy. Another reason was to weaken political support for Milosevic within Serbia. Instead, as the Belgrade correspondent of the *New York Times* reported during the second week of the bombing, it has strengthened him. The bombing of Belgrade and the bridge in Novi Sad is hardly designed to win over the population. The citizens of Serbia are either angry and prepared for a prolonged resistance or in a state of sullen despondency. A moving appeal to the West from Father Sava, a member of the anti-

⁵ In a recent article in *International Viewpoint*, Catherine Samary has explained US hostility to the KLA by citing the group's Maoist origins.

Milosevic peace mission, based in the Decani monastery in Kosovo, highlighted the destruction caused to both Albanians and Serbs in the Kosovan town of Djakovica:

. . . we have the full moral right to protest against these crimes [NATO's bombs—TA] because our Church has strongly condemned acts against civilians committed by both Serb and Albanian extremists in this conflict and has made great efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the crisis. We are equally condemning these NATO attacks which do not differ at all from what we have seen in Kosovo so far. In fact there is a danger that NATO bombing produces a far greater humanitarian crisis than the one we already have. These inconsiderate actions will destabilize the Balkans and possibly create a European Vietnam which will obstruct the political and economic processes in Europe for years ahead.

The Three Ages of Yugoslavia

The bombing appears to have moved into Phase Three. Civilian and economic targets are now being bombed by NATO. If the aim here is to detach the population from Milosevic, then early indications suggest that this, too, is a failure. Well-known dissident figures are being forced into the arms of the Serbian leadership as a result of the bombing. If ground troops are actually despatched, the result could be a long and bitter conflict, not excluding acts of terrorism in Western European and North American capitals. There is, however, a more long-term problem in the region. The Bosnian solution—a NATO military protectorate where NATO chiefs remove political leaders at will—cannot serve as a model.

The old Yugoslavia was unique in the sense that it was founded twice this century. After the Treaty of Versailles, imposed by the victors of the First World War, it was conceived of as a Serb-dominated kingdom, a buffer carefully designed to exclude Soviet influence in the Balkans. The second Yugoslavia was born after a long resistance struggle against German fascism and its indigenous relays. Its leader, Tito, a Communist of Croatian origin, devised a federation based on a model equality between constituent nationalities and minorities, with the exception of Kosovo, which should have been, but never was, granted equal status within the Federation. He was also fierce in defending Yugoslav independence against both Stalin and NATO.

The second Yugoslavia did not survive its creator by too many years, but it does represent the most tranquil years this region has enjoyed. It would be difficult to recreate. We can not live by yesterday's clock, nor by today's, but by tomorrow's. During the sea voyages of old, a man was sent aloft a mast from where he could see icebergs and maelstroms and foundering ships which were invisible from the deck. Is the West going to repeat its mistakes in Yugoslavia or think creatively ahead? The break-up of Yugoslavia has already cost the EU

and the USA tens of billions of dollars. This war alone has, so far, been costed at 5 billion dollars and the figure will rise. If half this amount of money had been publicly offered for the economic development of all of former Yugoslavia, as part of a OSCE brokered compromise, we might have been spared the traumas of the last decade. Today, the EU could still underwrite a reconstruction plan based on the experience of Marshall Aid, and encourage, if not the rebirth of a third Yugoslavia, then a new Balkan confederation of states which would deal as a region with the EU. Such an arrangement would have to include an independent Kosovo. There are only two serious alternatives for this region. Either a series of NATO protectorates imposed by war and bloody battles, leading to the re-militarization of Europe and a new cold war with Russia, or a serious attempt to create a new regional framework and to engage Russia in constructive negotiations on all outstanding issues. The long-term future of the region should be decided within the framework of the OSCE, equipped, as the Russians have long demanded, with a secretariat and Security Council. Within such a forum, the European powers could raise issues of repression in Chechnya and the Russians could table policing in Northern Ireland, Corsica or Southern Turkey.

The West has reneged on Helsinki and its NATO enlargement policy is designed to exclude and isolate Russia. The message to the EU from Clinton and Blair is harsh and rigid: NATO can go it alone. Regardless of what finally happens in the Balkans, such a policy is short-sighted and foolish. It can only lead to new conflicts. Above all, it ominously portends a wild conflict between Russia and the West that could be more dangerous than the Cold War. NATO's first Secretary-General, the late Lord Ismay, once remarked that their aim was 'to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down'. Fifty years later, the world has changed, but NATO's logic appears to be the same. The dissolution of NATO might be the first step on the long road to world peace.