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Russia's Policy on the Kosovo Crisis: The Limits of "Cooperative Peacemaking"

From the outset of the Kosovo crisis, Russia has been actively involved in the conflict regulation process in its capacity as a member of the Contact Group on the Former Yugoslavia, the UN Security Council and the OSCE. Along with the United States and the European Union, Moscow helped to mediate the Rambouillet and Paris talks. After NATO attacked Yugoslavia, Moscow initiated several diplomatic steps to end the war and ended up taking part, although on special terms, in the NATO's KFOR operation in Kosovo.

Western Perceptions of Russia's Kosovo Policy

Citing primary motives for Russia's involvement in the Kosovo crisis, Western observers first and foremost point out that by struggling to play some role in the conflict regulation process, Russia is trying to preserve its big-power influence pursuing the cause of the so-called "residual imperialism." Russia's constant "dissention" with Western and especially US policies in this and other post-Cold War regional conflicts is most commonly interpreted as a continuation of a "post-imperial syndrome" and an attempt to recover a voice on the world stage. Often cited are Russia's obsession with its "mystic pan-Slavic mission" in the world and its longstanding historical commitments to stand by the Serbs. Also, Moscow's dissention is seen as an attempt by the Kremlin, and personally by President Yeltsin, to appease nationalist/communist domestic opposition by taking on a more active foreign policy course and to reap needed political benefits from such displays of diplomatic independence. Finally, Moscow's position on the

Kosovo crisis – that has tended to accent the right of Belgrade authorities to safeguard Yugoslavia’s territorial integrity – is interpreted as close to the one with which it defended its own bloody conflict in the breakaway region of Chechnya. Most of the above-mentioned motives are emotional, psychological and cultural. It might be easier to dismiss the factors driving Russia’s foreign policy as largely irrational and to explain away everything by Moscow’s retrospective thinking, but it does not help to shed the light on the real nature and direction of Russian foreign policy.

Russia’s “post-imperialist” ambitions and retrospective thinking are gravely exaggerated as a main factor driving Russian foreign policy at the end of the 20th century. Russia has suffered a painful erosion of its international prestige since the Soviet collapse. It certainly took the Russian political elite some time to adapt to the loss of a global empire and the sense of mission in the world, as well as to realize that Soviet global ambitions led to an obvious over-stretch of the country’s resources. The absolute maximum of contemporary Russia’s ambitions is reflected by its desire to become an independent power center in a multipolar world. The absolute majority of Russian international affairs experts stick to different versions of multipolarity¹ as the dominant type of the coming post–Cold War world system. This vision is especially widespread among experts working in the field of strategic (Sergei Rogov, Alexei Arbatov) and geopolitical (Eduard Pozdnyakov, Konstantin Sorokin, etc.) analysis studies.² The concept of polycentrism/ multipolarity is also widely shared by Russian

1 Interpreted as relative comparability of the aggregate potential of several states when no single state is apparently superior to others.

2 Pozdnyakov, Eduard A., ed. *Geopolitika. Teoriya i praktika*. Moscow: Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), 1993; *Rossiya v poiskakh strategii bezopasnosti. Problemy bezopasnosti, ogranicheniya vooruzhenii i mirotvorchestva*. Moscow: IMEMO, 1996; Gadzhiyev, Kamaludin S. *Geopolitika*. Moscow: “Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya,” 1997; etc.

“civilizationists.”³ However, the current stage in international relations is widely – and correctly – seen as an interim period and covered by as time passes other theories, such as the views of such a concept of “plural (relative) unipolarity” put forward by Alexei Bogaturov, which is increasingly gaining prominence.⁴ According to this concept, in a situation where the U.S. plays a leading role in global politics and economics, but is not quite ready to take sole responsibility for the state of the world and feels the need to pay more attention to domestic priorities, the “plural unipolarity” emerges as the dominant, although interim, type of international system.

As far as “neo-Slavophilism” is concerned, a widespread image of Russia and Serbia as Slavic friends and allies for centuries is oversimplified at best. An important distinction should be made between traditional Russian-Serbian people-to-people ties based on common historic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and government-to-government relations that throughout history have been somewhat complicated. In certain historical periods Russia and Serbia have enjoyed close ties: both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, while pursuing their own national interests, helped Belgrade resolve its nation/state-building problems. These periods of rapprochement were, however, followed by years of estrangement and mutual distrust. Soon after 1878 as well as after 1945 Belgrade, having achieved its strategic goals with the help of Russia (including military assistance) refused to go along with it, struggling instead to become a regional power center in the Balkans – a goal that contradicted Russia’s interests in the region aimed at achieving a balance of forces. Although there is no doubt that in the historic memory of the Balkan peoples Russia remains a power that once played a major, if not decisive, role in helping them build their statehood, the present external political behavior of most Balkan

3 See, for instance, Samuilov, Sergei M. *Mezhnatsional’niye crisisy v Yevrope: sodержaniye, rol’ Zapada i politika (tsivilizatsionnyi podkhod)*. Moscow: Russian Science Foundation, 1994; Moiseyev, N.N. *Tsivilizatsii na Perelome. Puti Rossii*. Moscow: Institute for Socio-Political Studies, 1996; etc.

4 Bogaturov, Alexei D. “Pluralisticheskaya odnopolyarnost i interesy Rossii.” *Svobodnaya Mysl*, no. 2 (1996): 25-36.

countries is motivated not by Russia's past merits but by its present inability to help them integrate into the world economy. That is primarily why most Balkan countries have turned to NATO and the European Union. In short, Moscow has no illusions of the possibility of rebuilding its influence in the Balkans through friendly relations with Belgrade. In this situation Slavophile rhetoric is frequently used by Russian leaders (at the June 1998 Moscow talks with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, President Yeltsin stressed that "We do not forget that we are Slavic states and friends."⁵) In summary, pan-Slavic rhetoric is used by Moscow primarily as a tool of political/ideological manipulation; Russia's political elite is too rational to share these ideas sincerely.

Domestically, the crisis in Kosovo has been one of the few international developments that was able to galvanize the attention of the Russian foreign policy elites. It should be noted, however, that the assumption that one of the main driving factors behind Moscow's policies in regional conflicts was an attempt to appease domestic opposition lost much of its sense at least since early 1996, when Andrei Kozyrev was replaced by Yevgeni Primakov as Russia's foreign minister. Under Primakov, Russia's foreign policy became one of the few areas of national politics where a semblance of a nation-wide consensus was emerging and particularly among the foreign policy elites. Prior to NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia, it was within the elites that anti-Western and especially anti-American sentiments were the strongest when projected on the post-Yugoslav situation. These growing anti-Western and anti-American sentiments were increasingly shared by both the left and the right, including many liberals – a situation best demonstrated by a series of almost unanimous votes by the State Duma on a number of documents on the situation in Kosovo.⁶

The only objective factor leading to rapprochement between Russia and

5 "Vstrecha presidenta Rossii Yeltsina i presidenta Yugoslavii Milosevicha v Kremle." *Serbia v mire*, July/August 1998: 6.

6 As of the end of March 1999, the Duma had passed 46 resolutions on the Yugoslav and Kosovo crises.

Serbia on the Kosovo crisis is the fact that both states have encountered an insoluble dilemma in their domestic policies – that of the right of national minorities to self-determination (secession included) versus territorial integrity of a sovereign state. On the Chechnya/ Kosovo parallel, Russia has reaffirmed its support for territorial integrity of the new independent post-Soviet states since 1994-95, when the Chechen conflict came to a head in the Caucasus. There are certain similarities that could be traced between situations in Chechnya and Kosovo, especially as far as respective insurgency movements are concerned. Both separatist movements emerged in the early 1990s following the dissolution of the USSR and the Federal Yugoslavia. Both formed military/ paramilitary units (the “Armed Forces of Ichkeria” and the KLA) that operate not only in Chechnya and Kosovo, respectively, but in the neighboring countries and regions as well, and receive financial and military aid from the outside – both from national diasporas and from foreign organizations, including terrorist groups. However, there are many fundamental historic and geopolitical differences in the way the Kosovo and the Chechen conflicts have developed. After all, Russia is not Serbia. Chechnya never had the same historical, cultural and religious (“mythical”) meaning for Russia as Kosovo has for Serbia. The Chechens have always made up a majority of the territory’s population, there is no Chechen-populated “Albania” bordering Chechnya in the Caucasus, and Russia’s nuclear power status makes any major interference from the outside highly unlikely. Last, but not least, following the 1994-96 war, Russian federal authorities recognized the constitution and sovereignty of the Chechen Republic within the Federation and its legitimately elected president.⁷

This is not to say that all of the above-mentioned factors do not have any impact on Russia’s policy in the Balkans and in Kosovo, but to point out that this impact has been rather marginal as compared to other considerations. The key to understanding Russia’s policy on the ethnic and political conflict in Kosovo is to realize that it was only remotely related to the conflict itself. The only goal pursued by Mos-

7 For more details, see Pain, Emil. “Armed Conflict in Kosovo and Chechnya: A Comparison.” *The Forced Migration Monitor*, no. 25. (September 1998): 1, 4-6.

cow with regard to the Kosovo crisis that is directly related to the situation in the Balkans is to provide regional security and stability – a task that is not specific or unique for Russia, which is shared by most European countries and could be realized only at the European rather than at the national level.

The Russia-NATO Context

If there were one word to explain Russia's involvement in the Kosovo crisis, that word would be "NATO." Russia's policy on the Kosovo crisis and reaction to what is happening in the Balkans can be understood only through the prism of Moscow's complicated relations with the North Atlantic Alliance, that has become the main irritant in Moscow's relations with the West, at least since the debate on NATO expansion. During that debate NATO tried to assure Russia that it was a purely defensive alliance, legally incapable and politically unwilling to undertake offensive military action. And, ironically, for some time Russia did view NATO's internal transformation as a prospect for positive change in the nature of the Alliance and as a "positive" alternative to its external expansion to the East.

The NATO military action against Yugoslavia, launched immediately after the formal entrance of the three new members into the alliance, has justified all the worst-case fears of Russian opponents of NATO expansion. Moreover, the bombing campaign sent a message to Moscow that it is in fact a changing NATO, but a change in the most undesirable and threatening direction for Russia, now facing a military alliance with an offensive military doctrine (with certain provisions that can be interpreted as a declaration that the European part of Russia is an area of NATO's responsibility) and moving closer to Russian borders while attacking a sovereign non-NATO state on the way.

The lack of clarity in geographic areas in which NATO was ready to deploy its forces coupled with the Alliance's determination to get more actively involved in "out-of-area" missions that were not "artificially" limited by any geographic boundaries, as they did not fall under the

Article 5 collective defense mandate, made a dangerous mix for Russia even before NATO attacked Yugoslavia. Moscow clearly did not want NATO's "out-of-area" missions to be conducted *in the area* of Russia's vital national interests. Russia strongly opposed Central and East European accession to NATO precisely to forestall the Alliance move into the former Soviet territory. Russia fears that NATO expansion to the CIS borders will radicalize and destabilize internal situations in the neighboring countries, such as Ukraine. Under certain circumstances, this could spark internal splits or even civil wars in those countries that would inevitably drag in Russia – a role that Moscow does not want and cannot afford to play. It comes as no surprise then that Russia is trying to do everything to prevent this from happening.

Even in better times, NATO-Russian cooperation was far from intensive and failed to dispel these concerns. In Russian eyes, the PfP program has proved to be nothing more than a route to, or even a basic foundation for, NATO expansion. The Russian military did not participate with any frequency in PfP exercises and the program as a whole did not evolve as a mechanism for developing NATO's relationship with Russia. A week before NATO attacked Yugoslavia, Russia had officially declared that it will limit its participation in the PfP to the role of an observer – apparently in reaction to the formal accession of the three former Warsaw Pact allies to NATO.

Trying to minimize the negative effects of the first round of NATO enlargement, Russia signed a Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security with NATO in Paris on 27 May 1997. That Act was supposed to present an attempt to put NATO-Russian relations on some sort of a contractual foundation and to expand cooperation in many areas, including peacekeeping, anti-terrorism efforts and halting the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Although the Act did not give Russia any right of say – let alone a veto – with respect to NATO's internal adaptation or non-Article 5 operations, by putting issues of mutual concern including the most controversial ones on the agenda of the NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council, Moscow could supposedly acquire limited political influence within the Alliance that it might not have gained otherwise. However, the extent to which

the NATO-Russian Founding Act has contributed to European security and stability has been minimal. The Founding Act itself contained seeds of many contradictions and misperceptions by allowing for varying or even mutually exclusive interpretations (differing views existed even with regard to the status of the Act – whether it was subject to international law as claimed by the Russian side or a mere political declaration as implied by NATO). Another major problem that Russia had with the Founding Act was that it did not resolve any follow-up problems of the Alliance’s enlargement by not limiting any consequent NATO expansion rounds. The fact that the Act was viewed by the Alliance merely as a short-term political declaration was best demonstrated by NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia. These violated several of the basic principles of Russian-NATO relations envisaged by the Act, such as “refraining from the threat or use of force against each other as well as against any other state, its sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence,” and “preventing conflicts and settling disputes by peaceful means.”⁸

Apart from these formal arrangements, at the time when it seemed that NATO-Russian relations were improving, certain expectations were expressed by both sides with regard to ad hoc practical cooperation in the field. The relatively smooth operational integration of Russian forces in the Implementation/Stabilization Force (IFOR/SFOR) has prompted some observers to conclude that “clearly, there is potential for combined operations on a larger scale.”⁹ However, even prior to the first complete break of NATO-Russian ties that occurred in response to NATO aggression against Yugoslavia, any actual or potential Russian ad hoc participation in NATO peacekeeping/ enforcement operations was bound to:

- be limited to a few geographical areas where cooperation with NATO would not hamper Russia’s national security interests (to

8 *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*. Paris, 27 May 1997. Part I.

9 Christman, Daniel W. “NATO’s Military Future.” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 11 (Spring 1996): 78.

put it more bluntly, the closer to the CIS borders NATO intended to operate, the less likely any cooperation between the two organizations was going to occur);

- be of symbolic, rather than substantial significance, similar to Russian participation in IFOR/SFOR (although some notable achievements were made – especially in the area of military-to-military contacts);
- require very specific and detailed command and control arrangements which explicitly diverge from the current procedures in the NATO integrated military structure (nothing could be more illustrative than the incorporation of the Russian forces into the US sector of IFOR/SFOR where the Russian brigade served under the tactical control of the commander of the 1st Armored Division, and received operational instructions from the SACEUR through the Russian military representative at NATO – a command arrangement not to be found in any field manual).

It comes as no surprise then that since the outbreak of the Kosovo crisis in early 1998 Russia's attention was focused almost exclusively on NATO activities in the region. NATO's decision to undertake a direct assault against the territory of a sovereign state, that has not attacked a NATO member, without a UN mandate, was viewed in Russia as a logical progression of NATO's drive to become the dominant security organization in Europe, a dangerous international precedent and a final blow to all that was left from the post-World War II international system. While the first military operation in NATO's history that took place in Bosnia in 1994 was at least based on a free interpretation of a loose UN Security Council resolution, this time even a vague UN mandate was conspicuously absent. These concerns were exacerbated by the fact that at the 50th Anniversary summit NATO adopted a New Strategic Concept that extended the alliance's sphere of operations and opened the way for further actions without the UN Security Council mandate. Although the Concept recognizes "the primary responsibility of the UN Security Council for the maintenance

of international peace and security,”¹⁰ it does not require the alliance to obtain an explicit UN mandate for military actions beyond its territory (the call to formally remove the requirement for the UN mandate has stirred not only opposition from Russia and some nations outside NATO, but criticism within the Alliance itself).

It is fear of the expansion of Western power moving closer to Russia’s own borders and perceived as ultimately directed against Russia (or its closest neighbors) at a time when the country has lost much of its own world influence and its economy and military are in shambles, that primarily explains the ferocity of Moscow’s opposition to military action against Yugoslavia. For Russia, trying to resist by all possible means the policy of turning the former Yugoslavia into a series of protectorates that potentially could lead NATO from the Balkans to move further into a Eurasia full of troubled or failing states, is not just a matter of principle but a matter of its own security, if not survival. This concern was best expressed by Nikolai Ryzhkov, leader of the “Narodovlastiye” parliamentary group who asked: “Will we be next? Who can guarantee that, if not Russia, then someone close to Russia will not be punished in the same way?”¹¹

“Counter-measures” and Constraints

Numerous internal and external limitations have so far contributed to Moscow’s foreign policy pragmatism. Turmoil at home, both economic and political, radically limits Russia’s ability to force any major international shift and places strict limitations on its involvement in regional conflicts and on breaking ties with the West. Prior to NATO

10 *The Alliance’s Strategic Concept*. Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C., on 23 and 24 April 1999. Part II, para. 15.

11 Transcript of the Plenary Meeting of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, 3 February 1998.

air strikes against Yugoslavia, Russia repeatedly made it clear that it did not intend to sacrifice relations with the West over Iraq or even Kosovo, and would try to minimize the consequences of both crises in order to escape a long-term confrontation with the West. Even after NATO attacked Yugoslavia, Russia did not appear to be marching deliberately towards a new isolation from the West.¹² This careful stance coupled with a conspicuous lack of Russia's economic resources led most Western observers to conclude that Russia's threats of taking "serious" retaliatory measures in protest to Western actions in Kosovo were hollow and Moscow no longer had effective levers to influence the situation. Indeed, all of Russia's dire warnings of a new confrontation, at least estrangement, in case the West proceeded with NATO expansion regardless of Russia's opposition, had not come true. It seems that in the West it was no longer questioned whether punitive air strikes against Serbia were worth further jeopardizing the already strained relations with Moscow. Russia's ability to take countermeasures in response to Western actions – and its limits – was best demonstrated by Moscow's reaction to the NATO attack on Yugoslavia that led to the worst crisis in Moscow's relations with the West since the end of the Cold War.

At the international level, Russia's first logical reaction to Western actions in Kosovo took the form of using legal instruments in

12 On 25 March 1999 Ivanov noted that "we are not in favour of a breach of diplomatic relations with the U.S." (calling them highly valued) and "clearly realize how important for the world as a whole are relations between Russia and the U.S.:" Ivanov's remarks at a press conference in Moscow. (Translation E.S.). Amid Russia's protests over the bombing, Moscow and Washington reached an agreement on 24 March on the U.S. purchase of \$300 million worth of enriched uranium taken from dismantled nuclear warheads. Russian officials also concluded energy and medical agreements, including cooperation in fighting tuberculosis, and worked out ways to enhance foreign investment in the Russian oil and gas industries. Michel Camdessus, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, arrived in Moscow for another round of talks over whether the Fund will resume loans from a promised \$22 billion aid package. Primakov also assured German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder that Moscow would continue its cooperation with the European Union.

international organizations in which Moscow still has some leverage, such as the UN Security Council where Russia holds a closely guarded privilege of a veto power. After NATO launched its first air strikes against Yugoslavia, Moscow called for an urgent UN Security Council vote to stop the NATO attacks¹³ and introduced a resolution calling for “an immediate cessation of the use of force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and urgent resumption of negotiations” that was predictably rejected.¹⁴ The setback at the UN Security Council did not come as a surprise to Russia. On the contrary, it underscored once again one of the most serious strategic problems facing Moscow – an almost total lack of allies on the international scene – a logical result of the country’s foreign policy in the early 1990s, when Moscow voluntarily gave up all of its former allies and loyal regimes in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere (Russia’s highly limited capacity to find allies and build alliances is a long-term trend that has to be taken into account by Moscow’s strategists and foreign policy planners). However, Russian diplomatic activity at the UN has demonstrated that maybe some of Moscow’s unorthodox strategic initiatives involving other powers, such as the idea of forming a “strategic triangle” involving China, Russia and India to ensure regional stability put forward by Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov on 21 December 1998,¹⁵ are not as groundless as they may seem at first sight.

At the CIS/regional level, NATO air strikes have helped to create a more favorable atmosphere for developing bilateral political, security and military ties with Russia’s western CIS neighbors, Belarus and Ukraine.¹⁶ In particular, Russian military efforts focus on developing an

13 Other measures included proposals to convene a General Assembly meeting to discuss the aggression and to arrange a meeting of the Contact Group in Moscow.

14 UN Security Council Draft Resolution S/1999/328, 26 March 1999 (not adopted: 3Y – 12N).

15 “Primakov Seeks ‘Strategic Triangle.’” *International Herald Tribune*, 22 December 1998.

16 Russian and Belorussian military experts were reported to be making feasibility

integrated air defense system and military cooperation with Belarus. Russian troops will be returning to Belarus as both countries will create a “regional group of armed forces.” In an effort to accelerate military cooperation within the CIS, more attention will be given to the usefulness of a Russian military presence in the CIS, the importance of better training and emphasis on training exercises. However, the CIS itself is undergoing a period of deep crisis. Any CIS-wide “countermeasures” would be absolutely impossible to agree on, and a view shared by some of NATO’s European members that an expansive/aggressive NATO vision could foster rival regional security blocs (one of them dominated by Russia) does not look realistic at this stage.

Finally, Russia could react by taking unilateral political-military and military steps. After NATO attacked Yugoslavia, some of the “countermeasures” proposed (both officially and unofficially) included:

- political and humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia: Russia has immediately extended humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia and has offered to represent Yugoslav interests in Britain, France, Germany and the United States; also, for the first time, Russia has entered into a full-scale public information war with Brussels and Washington;
- unilaterally lifting economic sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia;
- severing ties with NATO: Russia has withdrawn its NATO ambassadors, cancelled a series of planned military contacts, expelled the Alliance’s envoys from Moscow and for almost four months “totally froze” all cooperation with the alliance;

studies on the redeployment of tactical and strategic nukes and bombers into Belarus. The Ukrainian parliament, apart from making a rather emotional declaration of its refusal to accept the non-nuclear status for Ukraine, at the same time passed all three additional agreements with Russia on the Black Sea Fleet unexpectedly fast. Also, meeting in Moscow on 25 March, the defense ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan adopted a joint statement condemning the NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia as “a threat to peace and security.”

- severing bilateral military cooperation with countries taking part in attacks against Yugoslavia;¹⁷
- military and technical assistance/arms transfers to Yugoslavia (although the option of unilateral lifting of the international arms embargo against Yugoslavia was seriously considered and widely discussed, arms deliveries to Yugoslavia would have been difficult since most routes of transportation were blocked either by NATO forces or by pro-NATO countries);
- intelligence sharing – perhaps the single most important and realistic countermeasure to be taken;¹⁸
- stepping up combat readiness of the Russian Armed Forces (although highly resource-constrained)¹⁹ and redefining Russia's military doctrine. Perhaps nowhere will the military impact of Kosovo be studied more thoroughly than in Moscow. NATO's bombing campaign against Yugoslavia made the task of reviewing Russia's defense and military policies more urgent than ever and demonstrated the need for a general strengthening of Russia's military forces, greater reliance on nuclear weapons in Russian military planning and increased defense spending that would not only mean a greater burden on the economy, but would also translate into a greater incentive for increasing arms sales. The current military doctrine, developed in consistence with the 1997 National Security Concept that identified internal and local

17 Moscow had, for instance, cancelled preparations for a joint early-warning command center (that was supposed to open in Colorado in December 1999), cooperation with the US in dealing with the year 2000 computer problem, and several bilateral visits and contacts.

18 Russian officials, including Anatolii Kvashnin, chief of the General Staff, had hinted several times that Russia was prepared to exchange intelligence data with Yugoslavia.

19 Such as ordering 35 Northern Fleet vessels (including the huge guided-missile destroyer, the "Pyotr Veliky", and an aircraft carrier, "Admiral Kuznetsov") and 20 vessels of the Pacific Fleet, to what was described as naval exercises, and sending up to seven vessels (including a military reconnaissance ship) to the Mediterranean "to insure the security of Russia"; etc.

conflicts as the main threats to the state and judged a major ground attack as highly unlikely, is already being reworked;²⁰

- halting nuclear disarmament and cooperation (an area that customarily falls the first victim of any deterioration in US-Russian relations). The Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)-II Treaty has been pronounced dead by the Duma, and most other US-Russian nuclear disarmament programs were temporarily halted.

Even from this list, which is far from complete, it is clear that only a few of the proposed “counter measures” were in fact implemented. Given the general public moods within the country, Russia’s overall response to the crisis has been very moderate and restrained. While denouncing the NATO strikes against FRY, the Russian government managed to avoid helping Belgrade militarily. In spite of increasing domestic pressure, Russia stopped short of violating the UN arms embargo and sending any combat ships to the Adriatic. On the other hand, despite the largely symbolic nature of some of the above-mentioned steps, it was the first time that a sequence of “counter measures” was proposed, discussed and set to be implemented in a consistent, orderly and gradual manner. Also, no matter how limited, some of the steps actually undertaken are not likely to be short-lived.

The Domestic Context

However, the main fall-out of NATO military actions against Yugoslavia has been of a deeper and more critical nature. As far as Russia is concerned, the most important consequences of Western policies in Kosovo are to be found on the domestic front. This was best demonstrated by Russia’s public reaction to NATO air strikes against

20 See the new draft of the Russian military doctrine: “Voyennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii.” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 9 October 1999.

Yugoslavia. A new war in the Balkans has had a profound effect on the entire Russian society. Moreover, public criticism of NATO aggression was characterized by several new trends.

- Even by foreign policy standards, the domestic consensus on NATO aggression against FRY among all the state ministries and agencies, political parties and interest groups was exceptional. All the major political candidates and parties have condemned the bombings and have expressed strong anti-NATO sentiments. The largely polarized political factions of the Russian Duma united solidly behind Primakov's government.
- Russia's criticism of NATO aggression was much harsher than previous disapproval of Western action in regional conflicts (such as in Bosnia or Iraq) that was growing steadily, but slowly.
- If previously anti-Western sentiments were mostly cherished by the Russian political elite, this time they reached all stratas of the Russian society. Never before in the post-Cold War years has NATO action triggered such a sharp response from ordinary Russians: most polls consistently showed nearly 100 percent opposition to NATO's military campaign while up to 70 percent of Russians viewed the NATO military campaign in Yugoslavia as a "direct threat to Russian security." Even the mass media – one of the most pro-Western segments of the Russian society – expressed broad sympathy for Yugoslavia (it is important to note that opposition to NATO's attacks on Yugoslavia was not based on ignorance of Serbia's actions in Kosovo. The Russian public was well informed of Serbia's actions against Kosovo Albanians; the refugee situation and ethnic cleansing were reported by the Russian media).
- For the first time Russia's youth played an active role in most of the protest actions, with university and even high school students composing the bulk of protesters – probably, a single most important long-term trend in domestic moods.

- For the first time, the protests spread from Moscow to almost all the provinces.²¹

Overall, the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia has, more than all the previous Western actions in Kosovo or Iraq and/or NATO enlargement earlier, stimulated anti-Western sentiments and an environment of distrust in Russian/Western relations, which was further transformed to and coupled with the general disappointment with the Western-type liberal economic reforms. These trends in the public mood and political environment will undoubtedly have an effect on the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. Subsequent events, such as the war in Dagestan, another round of the Chechen drama and terrorist attacks on the Russian cities, although somewhat diverting immediate public attention from Kosovo, only emphasized how dangerous for Russia, facing numerous ethnic-political conflicts along its periphery and inside the Federation itself, is the precedent of an outside military alliance throwing its might on the side of armed separatists. Thus, the Kosovo crisis or, to be more precise, Russia's (in)ability to adequately respond to NATO's policy on Kosovo, although not likely to be the main issue in the election campaign, will certainly add to the general public feeling of Russia being isolated and side-lined internationally, at least in Europe, and threatened not only internally but also externally from all directions.

21 Apart from demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, similar events were held outside U.S. consulates in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Vladivostok. In other cities throughout the country, U.S. flags were burnt in protestation. The German consulate in Novosibirsk was set on fire. Legislative assemblies from Primorskii Krai to Karelia as well as interregional associations, such as Bolshaya Volga, adopted statements protesting NATO's aggression, while Khabarovsk Krai Governor Viktor Ishayev announced the formation of an anti-NATO political bloc. Throughout the country, many Russians, especially retired and active military officers and noncommissioned officers, volunteered for duty in Yugoslavia and several national parties opened recruitment offices for volunteers. In Khabarovsk, Colonel-General Viktor Chechevatov, commander of the Far Eastern Military District, announced his willingness to head any military unit dispatched to Yugoslavia.

For the West, these critical changes in Russian domestic moods and attitudes will prove to be far more important in the long term than any immediate “retaliatory” steps undertaken by Moscow in response to NATO’s bombing campaign against Yugoslavia or any subsequent NATO actions in Kosovo.

Russia in KFOR

It is against this background that Russia’s role in ending the war in the Balkans as well as Russia’s current participation in the international peace effort in Kosovo should be analyzed.

From the beginning of the crisis, Russia has consistently presented itself as the voice of reason, demanding that a solution to the Kosovo conflict can only be reached by peaceful means, under the guidance of the UN and/or OSCE. During NATO’s bombing campaign, Russia, as the only major European power not drawn into the conflict directly (in Yeltsin’s words, “We are not the ones taking part in this war and we did not start it”), was able to present itself as the main party able to play a credible mediating role – primarily through the Kremlin’s chief Balkan envoy, ex-prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin’s “shuttle diplomacy.” It was Chernomyrdin’s political initiative to form a double team involving himself and a European leader to persuade Milosevic to make a deal that was seized upon by the US and ultimately the G-7.

However, since the agreement was reached and subsequently endorsed by the Yugoslav parliament, the overall Russian position on it remained unclear. While the Kremlin hailed the accord as a success of Russian diplomacy, in the parliament and in the military criticism has prevailed. Likewise, among the wider public there was a widespread feeling that Chernomyrdin had betrayed Russian interests in giving in on two of Moscow’s key demands: an immediate end to the bombing campaign and deployment in Kosovo of a multinational peacekeeping force under the United Nations flag, with the participation of only those NATO countries which did not take part in the bombing campaign. In a situation when any move contributing to the capitulation of Yugoslavia

was close to political suicide in Russia, it came as no surprise that only someone as domestically unpopular, as loyal to the Kremlin and as little prepared to handle foreign policy issues, as Viktor Chernomyrdin, could be found to perform the job. The general dissatisfaction with Chernomyrdin's mission was aggravated by irritation about the way the agreement was interpreted by NATO, especially in a part that concerned Russia's involvement in the peacekeeping operation on the ground.

From the beginning of the crisis Russia's official position has been that in principle Moscow is prepared to send peacekeeping troops to Kosovo (with Belgrade's consent and with sufficient international legitimacy). However, for many Russian security experts it is still not clear why Russia should be involved on the ground as part of KFOR at all. The counter-arguments are numerous and have a wide public appeal. One of the most popular and powerful counter-arguments questions how Russian participation in KFOR helps to advance Russia's national security interests: simply put, this view could be summarized as "Why should Russia help NATO to clear the mess in Kosovo to which the Alliance has contributed?" Much had been said about the need for Moscow to distance itself from Belgrade if it wanted to become a true mediator. But it should be kept in mind that for the same reason it is only logical that Russia should in no way be associated with NATO (one of the parties to the conflict in March-June 1999) either.

Another important consideration is related to obvious financial constraints. While initial training and equipment expenses (approximately 60 million Roubles, i.e. approximately \$2,5 million) were paid by the Ministry of Defense (MOD), all the other expenses (logistics, transportation, personnel, etc.), that comprise \$36,8 million for 1999 and another \$40 million for the first half of 2000, are to be paid by the Ministry of Finance and should come from Russia's federal budget. It seems that the only way for Moscow to pay the cost of its peacekeeping force is from additional budget income, mainly from arms exports, that would otherwise go to the needs of the MOD and military-industrial complex. Coupled with other demands – especially those brought about by hostilities in North Caucasus – the overall burden on the Russian

defense budget has increased dramatically.

It was also argued that from the point of conflict regulation the deployment of Russian troops in Kosovo could make sense only in areas with compact Serb populations or in a separate Russian sector that could serve as a safe haven for the province's Serbs (although there is little dispute between Russia and NATO that this could lead to the division of the province into ethnic cantons, Russia disagrees with NATO in viewing cantonization as perhaps the only way to protect the local Serbs, short of complete partition of the province). Otherwise, it was argued, Russian peacekeepers would be subject to constant and unnecessary risks from the KLA and the generally hostile Albanian majority.

During the very tough talks on Russian participation in KFOR held first in Moscow and then in Helsinki, the military critics of Chernomyrdin's peace plan tried to "limit the damage" by insisting on a separate sector for the Russian forces in Kosovo. As a result of these efforts and of Russia's surprise dash to the Pristina airport, the agreement detailing Russia's role in KFOR was signed in Helsinki on 18 June by US Secretary of Defense William Cohen and Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev. The Helsinki agreement gave Russia an enhanced role in the peace operation, as compared to IFOR/SFOR, and full operational (politico-military) command and control over its forces (with tactical command and control resting with KFOR).²² This was a departure from the deployment scheme initially offered to the Russian side by the US (according to this plan, Russian troops would be permanently deployed in the US sector only).²³ However, the Helsinki agreement, although designating Russia as the only country to be represented in more than one sector, explicitly stated that Russia would not control a sector of its own and implied that Russian troops are not

22 See both Cohen's and Sergeyev's remarks in: "Transcript: Helsinki Press Briefing on Russia's KFOR Role," 18 June 1999. *USIS Washington File*, 10 June 1999.

23 For more details, see Zavarzin, Viktor. "Ya Veryu v Buduscheye Kosovo" ("I Believe in the Future of Kosovo"). *Trud*, 14 September 1999.

likely to be deployed in Serb-populated enclaves.

Not surprisingly, the only logical answer to why Russia still accepted the Helsinki terms and agreed to the current arrangement is, again, its obsession with the “NATO factor.” According to this logic, Russia, as a weaker side, simply has no alternative but to find some form of cooperation with NATO for tactical, if not for strategic reasons, however much many of its military and civilian officials, let alone the general public, would oppose this. Thus, on the one hand, Russia could not afford to completely ignore NATO while, on the other hand, any formal association with NATO could not be “sold” domestically, especially with both parliamentary and presidential elections in the offing. The way out of this political expediency was found in the form of a compromise solution – Russia’s ad hoc participation in NATO’s KFOR operation on the ground.

Only time will tell whether this was the best choice to be made. Doubts about the viability of Russia’s KFOR involvement persisted from the very beginning of KFOR’s deployment. Several months after the Russian paratroopers’ dash to Pristina it was still, according to Head of Defense Ministry’s Directorate for International Cooperation Col.-Gen. Leonid Ivashov, “premature to speak of a close interaction between the Russian contingent and KFOR.”²⁴ The situation on the ground in Kosovo remains extremely complicated, and the wedge between NATO and Russia is widening as the United Nations resolution 1244, which authorized KFOR, has been ignored.

It is quite symbolic that while preventing Yugoslav forces from having any control in the province in violation of Yugoslavia’s territorial integrity, NATO has welcomed the transformation of the KLA into an armed civil force for what increasingly seems an independent Kosovo. The new Kosovo Protection Corps has been described by United Nations and KFOR officials as a civilian force to oversee humanitarian and disaster assistance. However, the rebels see this force as a step toward the national army of an “ethnically clean” Kosovo independent

24 Quoted in: “NATO Charged With the KLA Bias.” *Associated Press*, 9 September 1999.

of Yugoslavia. The agreement signed on 20 September 1999 allowed the KLA to remain a unified entity, commanded by the KLA chief of staff, and to keep the same structure under a new name. It is also unlikely that the Corps will lack access to additional weapons and ammunition. The NATO-KLA deal has prompted Serbian leaders to resign from the Kosovo Transition Council, caused more Serbs to flee the province and may herald a new period of tension between the UN and NATO missions and the Kosovo minority communities.

On the one hand, in a situation when the KLA's complete disarmament was simply impossible, the NATO-KLA deal could be interpreted as the Alliance's attempt to use the Kosovo Protection Corps as a key element in trying to return the rebels to civil life. This attitude was best expressed by Major Roland Lavoie, a KFOR spokesman, who stressed that "basically, we don't want to have a conflictual approach" towards the KLA.²⁵ But on the other hand, Russia suspects NATO of being not totally disinterested in using an organized ethnically Albanian structure that can quickly rearm as an instrument of its own policy in the Balkans. The bottom line here is that, inadvertently or not, NATO helps to create an "ethnically clean" Albanian state in Kosovo by legalizing its wartime ally, the KLA.

In a situation where Russia remains the only European power interested in the full implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, Moscow has few options in Kosovo. The more likely scenario will be to pull Russian forces out of the province.²⁶ If Russia's decision to take part in the KFOR operation were a mistake, it would never be too late to correct it. The question is whether Russia and NATO can afford to sever their joint KFOR operation. While for NATO Russian participation has made possible the UN authorization that lent legitimacy to the international occupation of part of a sovereign

25 *KFOR Press Update*. Pristina, 20 September 1999.

26 See, for instance, Eddy, Melissa. "Russia Opposes U.S. Plan for Kosovo Army." *European Stars and Stripes*, 8 September 1999. A Russian description is Gornostaev, Dmitri. "Sozdaetsya 'Korpus Kosovo.'" *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8 September 1999.

country, it also allowed Moscow to play a certain role in protecting Serb interests and to serve as a last fence against Kosovo's de facto independence. Last, but not least, the Kosovo operation has been the only pretext for the Russian government to justify the revival of contacts with NATO. Without this public excuse, Russia will have to limit its contacts with the Alliance to discussing only issues such as disarmament and confidence-building measures, mainly through bilateral ties with some of NATO's member states.

There is also another scenario – less likely, but still hypothetically possible. The KLA's open hostility towards Russian troops that led to the Orahovac deadlock and a series of earlier incidents has not only demonstrated the KLA's ability to control significant developments in Kosovo even when it opposes KFOR, but also tempted some observers to speculate that these developments might encourage Moscow to carve an independent role for its troops in Kosovo – something that Russia insisted on from the very beginning.

The next few months will be decisive for Russia's role in KFOR. In any case, the looming potential for Russia to withdraw support from KFOR will not make NATO's task in Kosovo easier.

Conclusion

In the pre-Kosovo era, Russia on the one hand, and the United States and its NATO allies on the other, were almost getting used to acting as a “good cop – bad cop” team, with Moscow touting prospects for peace as Washington/Brussels threatened military force – a division of labor that sometimes proved to be mutually beneficial and had a positive impact on the conflict resolution process. By taking a softer line, Russia would in some cases have better chances of resolving regional disputes. Theoretically Moscow was not the only international actor that could play the “good cop” part (a number of neutral states, the UN, OSCE and even the EU are other examples). However, the combination of general reluctance to sanction the unconstrained use of force in settling international disputes with traditional ties to many

“rogue states” and anti-Western regimes, a decades-long first-hand international experience, still substantial representation in major international organizations, and the ability to talk both to the West and to its opponents probably give Russia a unique opportunity to assume this role on a global scale. “Cooperative peacemaking” not only helped Russia to realize some of its own foreign policy interests but also tied it closer to the West – a “good cop” made no sense without a “bad cop.” It is interesting to note in this context that some of Russia’s peace initiatives were best realized when put forward by Russia’s Western partners rather than by Moscow itself: it was largely due to Russia’s efforts that the international involvement on the ground in Kosovo first took the form of a civilian verification mission under the auspices of the OSCE.²⁷

Throughout the Kosovo crisis up until the KFOR deployment, Russia remained the only major power in Europe that was not dragged into the war in the Balkans and that has preserved its capacity to act as a mediator, especially in helping to end the conflict between NATO and Yugoslavia. However, the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia undertaken in violation of the UN Charter, as well as some of NATO’s subsequent actions in Kosovo, have clearly demonstrated the limits of Russia’s cooperation with the West in general and in regulating regional conflicts in particular. The main lesson to be drawn by Russia from the Kosovo crisis has been that from now on any armed separatist/terrorist group, provided that it has the support of an outside force – the US and NATO – can hope to get a semblance of international legitimacy. The implication of such a system is that the only way to object is with military power and with the policy of *fait accompli*.

As the situation in Kosovo/Yugoslavia has demonstrated, Russia on the one hand, increasingly assumes a role of a dissenter with Western

27 This idea was put forward by Russian diplomacy, supported by the Kremlin and raised at the talks with the Yugoslav leadership. Prior to the Holbrooke-Milosevic meeting, the Yugoslav leaders’ initial agreement to the deployment of the OSCE verification mission in Kosovo was given to Russian Foreign and Defense Ministers on 4 and 8 October 1998.

policies and actions in regional conflicts, and on the other starts to behave more like a “rational actor” on the world stage, putting its own national interests above any idealistic dogmas. Russia’s influence in the regions outside of its own borders today is sharply limited by both internal and external factors which makes it all the more pressing to use whatever means and resources Moscow still possesses in a more effective and creative manner.