

Russia, Kosovo, and Security Cooperation

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Increasingly, discussion of policy options to salvage the disastrous US policy on Kosovo has turned to the prospect of an intervention mission with ground forces. The primary American objection to such a force is based on the problem that the American public does not support such a policy.

Should these objections become outweighed by the view that the United States must accept responsibility for stopping the humanitarian disaster it has helped to create, the United States will have to face another major obstacle to such a mission. Intervention with NATO forces alone and without Russian participation will lack legitimacy and is likely to be the final blow against meaningful Russian security cooperation with the United States for a very long time. Somehow, a way must be found to end this crisis through cooperation with Russia.

Legitimacy and Intervention

NATO's circumvention of the UN Security Council in order to launch air strikes against Yugoslavia unilaterally and solely on NATO's terms was a mistake. Since the end of the Cold War, the West has insisted that policies to adapt NATO have been for the purpose of spreading peace and stability throughout Europe. Russian objections to NATO enlargement have been met with soothing words that NATO is and will remain a purely defensive alliance. All along, however, Russia's political and military elite has been focused on the practical realities of the effects of NATO expansion.

In military terms, NATO's role in Europe has grown, its capabilities have been adjusted for the post-Cold War security environment, and with its three new members the territory on which it can operate has moved eastward toward Russia. Although moderates have not joined this argument, a substantial portion of Russia's political and military leadership has warned that NATO has sought to expand its capabilities in order to be able to dictate terms in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

In political terms, NATO is the single most important forum for security relations within and around Europe--and Russia is not a member. The 1997 agreement between Russia and NATO that created a partnership council was clearly not intended to involve Russia in important discussions on European security. Russia has not devoted any real effort to developing this council, but even if it had its importance would have been limited by the

United States' determination not to involve Russia in the serious work of the alliance. Therefore, even for Russia's liberal and moderate political and military elites who do not subscribe to the more sinister interpretation of NATO's persistence after the Cold War, NATO has a strongly negative image as a council of the great powers that excludes Russia.

With its war on Serbia, NATO has undermined its claim to be only an alliance for collective defense. By its actions, NATO has legitimated the more alarmist and radical views of NATO's military intentions and capabilities, and moved their wild scenarios to the center of Russia's spectrum of views on security and cooperation. By choosing to work through NATO and thus excluding Russia from the single most important decision about European stability that has been made since the end of the Cold War, the West has severely undermined support in Russia for substantial security cooperation with the West. From the Russian perspective, it appears that the West is interested in cooperating when it is a matter of limiting Russia's freedom of action for the common good of controlling weapons or weapons technologies, but unwilling to be constrained in considering international solutions to political-military crises.

This damage has already been done, but matters could get still worse. So far, Russia's political leadership has said that it will continue to cooperate in important security issues, including nuclear and conventional arms control and nonproliferation. However, the West should not believe that Russia has an interest in such cooperation regardless of Western policies. In particular, should the United States decide upon a unilateral policy of occupation of Kosovo with NATO ground forces, it will substantiate the Russian security elite's wildest fear: that the United States means to use a restructured and expanded NATO to revise borders wherever it sees fit in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Should NATO unilaterally occupy Kosovo and impose a partition on Serbia, it will convince Russia's moderate leadership that the international system on which it has based its policies of security cooperation has no future. Such a policy will mean Russia must deal with a system that is not based upon international law and cooperation among the great. Instead (from the Russian perspective), in this system the rules are changing all the time and are unilaterally defined by NATO. The court is self-appointed, attorneys are absent, there is no higher court to appeal the ruling, and the court itself both passes judgements on its own policies and enforces them with unconstrained military power.

The implication of such a system is that the only way to object is with military power. Russia's decision to send a reconnaissance ship, and possibly warships, to the Mediterranean is a sign that Russian policy is moving in this direction. With the UN removed from the picture, there would be nothing legally preventing Russia from sending arms to Serbia. If political-military cooperation with NATO is precluded by NATO itself, Russia will fall back upon whatever traditional balance of power instruments it can still manage in its weakness.

Yet it is difficult to escape the conclusion that an occupation of Kosovo has become necessary, given the scale of the humanitarian disaster, the potential for instability in neighboring countries, and the impossibility of restoring Albanians to even a portion of Kosovo's territory under anything short of full-scale military protection. A solution to the Kosovo crisis has gone far beyond what peacekeeping forces can accomplish, and no one should ask soldiers to go in with anything less than the mission of peace enforcement.

For such an intervention to be legitimate, it must not be decided and executed by NATO alone. It is time to recognize that an undertaking of this scale requires at least the assent and preferably the active participation of all Europe's great powers. Unless NATO intends to invade and fully occupy all of Yugoslavia itself, it will need some measure of assent from Serbia, even if only tacit agreement to partition Kosovo. Because it is conducting an undeclared war on Serbia, NATO alone simply cannot be seen as a legitimate player in a resolution of the crisis. Without international legitimacy and evenhandedness, Serbia will not be convinced that an occupation force will stop at partition, and the military conflict could continue at a low level indefinitely.

Russia is no match for the United States, but by its geopolitical position, economic potential over the long term, and overall military capability, Russia is one of Europe's great powers. It is in the interests of NATO's leading powers that the settlement of the Kosovo crisis--with an eye toward the long-term and the next millennium--be done in cooperation with Russia, and with the agreement of the United Nations Security Council. Only in this way will the military mission and the political settlement have the international legitimacy they need.

Russia's Stakes--and Responsibilities

Russia's stakes in this crisis have nothing to do with Serbia. Milosevic has lied to and manipulated the Russian leadership nearly as much as he has the West. Recent polls have shown that there is little support for Serbia: the Russian public blames both parties for the conflict, with less than 10% supporting military assistance to Serbia. Russia has condemned Milosevic's policies in several UN resolutions, and as a member of the Contact Group it supported the proposals for Kosovo's autonomy under international military oversight. Russia has successfully cooperated with NATO in Bosnia in precisely such a military mission. To be sure, Russia preferred that Kosovo not become a separate state, and in that regard this case differs from Bosnia. But Russia's leaders are realists enough to know that Kosovo's autonomy within Serbia is an option of the past. Russia's real stake in this crisis is its future role in European security. Russia's outrage at NATO intervention is due to the exclusion of Russia from its proper role in international security affairs and the breathtaking enhancement of NATO's political and military roles. As Chechnya made clear (along with Moldova, Abkhazia, and Tajikistan), Russia's leadership does not have any serious principled objections to the use of military force. Russian objections are not to the use of force per se, but to the use of force by NATO, unconstrained by the UN, and without regard to Russia.

If accomplished in the proper manner, an international occupation for the purpose of partitioning Kosovo and restoring its displaced Albanian population could achieve active Russian support, and Russian military participation. Russia's military forces would require international financing to be able to conduct such a mission given the state of Russia's economy and the inability of the Russian government to even meet its most urgent international debt obligations. However, while not as modern or as successfully reconstituted for post-Cold War missions as NATO forces, Russian military forces are capable of traditional missions of territorial control and defense. If nothing else, a Russian military contribution would reduce the need for large numbers of American ground forces.

What it comes down to is whether it is worth it to the United States to prevent a further rupture in US-Russian relations, to solve the crisis in Kosovo effectively, and to avoid making bitterness and failure the legacy of NATO's post-Cold War mission in Kosovo, rather than European peace and stability. Russian participation will impart legitimacy to the drastic measure of invasion, occupation, and partition of a sovereign country--and however justified action against the Serbian leadership might be, that action needs international legitimacy. Russian participation also holds the promise of making the mission effective in both military and political terms. By participating on the ground, Russia can reassure itself and its domestic critics (who will be active in decrying cooperation with NATO, to be sure) that the settlement is being implemented as agreed among the great powers. By involving the Russian military, NATO and Russia can build on the positive experience of the Russian military in Bosnia. Most of all, Russian participation makes UN Security Council approval possible, a factor that is absolutely crucial for international legitimacy for the occupation and partition of Kosovo. Only in this way can the US disentangle itself from a hollow victory that destroys the possibility of future security cooperation in Europe.

For its part, however, Russia must begin to behave like the responsible great power it claims to be. Some of the Russian government's rhetoric on the Kosovo crisis has been truly astonishing in its extremist and unsupportable accusations and implicit threats. Russia needs to rely upon its most responsible and professional voices. Most of all, Russia's security elites simply have to acknowledge that there is a devastating humanitarian crisis, and that the innocent civilian population of Albanian Kosovars are truly the victims of Milosevic's deliberately inhuman policies. Russia must stop making excuses for Milosevic: without agreement on this common purpose there can be no basis for a great power settlement of the Kosovo crisis.

The United States has perhaps one last chance to grasp the promise of multilateral cooperation with Russia for security in Europe. If this fails, we will not return to the Cold War. However, it is a serious mistake to think that there is no difference between a Russia that cannot do anything to stop us, and a Russia that actively cooperates in the areas of security that most engage American national interests: nonproliferation and stability throughout Eurasia. President Yeltsin has signaled an openness to the great power model of settling the Kosovo crisis by calling on the G-8 to meet. As we begin to move toward

the Post-post-Cold War era, America's leaders should remember that it was cooperation that won the Cold War.

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