

Matthias Küntzel

Germany and the Kosovo

How Germany's independent line paved the way to the Kosovo War

Contribution to the 2nd International Hearing of the European Tribunal concerning Nato's war against Yugoslavia. Hamburg, April 16, 2000 [1]

In 1991, a delegation of the German Bundestag visited Kosovo for the first time in order to talk with Kosovo Albanian nationalist leaders. This prompted - as early as 1991! - the warning by a senior member of the Yugoslavian parliament that "the British and the Germans would create a common intervention force with 70,000 soldiers in order to intervene in Kosovo." [2] Indeed an early and accurate prophecy! So what about Germany's role in preparing for the Kosovo war?

There were and there are strategic differences between German and the US policies about how to retain or enhance hegemony. "As a wealthy status quo power, the United States has an interest in maintaining international order", wrote Joseph S. Nye, Jr, a former US deputy secretary of defense. "In a world where there are some two hundred states but many thousands of often overlapping entities that might eventually make a claim to nationhood, blind promotion of self-determination would have highly problematic consequences." [3] Berlin, however, in seeking to create conditions for an ongoing expansion of German influence (that means: changing the international order) does not share this priority. As Rupert Scholz, the former German secretary of defense, explained: "The aim of maintaining "stability" in Europe seems to be a most dangerous one. There will not be any real stability, which is able to maintain peace, if individual nations are held prisoner in unwanted and unnatural ("unnatürliche") state organizations, which have been imposed upon them." Since 1990, German foreign policy has "constantly persisted in actively advocating a universal right of self-determination." [4]

This policy has a particular bearing on Kosovo. The hidden war about Kosovo's future started in 1995 at the latest. In February 1995 in the presence of Roman Herzog, Germany's President at that time, Germany and Albania signed a common declaration of principle at Tirana. This declaration is rarely mentioned in the literature but nevertheless decisive because it promised to find a "solution to the Kosovo question" by advocating the right of self-determination for Kosovo's Albanians. [5] Advocating self-determination for Kosovo's Albanians, however, meant advocating their right to secede from Yugoslavia. This declaration was in so far a kind of advance notice to continue Germany's 1991 course (recognition of Croatia) in order to further split up Yugoslavia following a racist (völkisch) concept of self-determination.

In the period following, the German government did everything it could to spur on the separation of Albanians within Kosovo. Germany supported and financed those nationalists who sought to pursue the goal of full independence by creating alternative governing institutions as well as independent Albanian educational and medical systems in Kosovo which systematically separated the majority of the people in Kosovo from the other peoples of Yugoslavia. In addition, German secret diplomacy was instrumental in helping the "Kosovo Liberation Army" (KLA), as they call themselves, since its creation in February 1996. The daily newspaper "The European" stated that "German civil and military intelligence services have been involved in training and equipping the rebels with the aim of cementing German influence in the Balkan area." [6]

During those years, Germany unilaterally supported the secessionist movements. In 1997 editor Johann Georg Reißmüller of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (a German daily newspaper) wrote: "The US government is not at all happy with Germany's policy in Kosovo".

It was, however, exactly that year – 1997 – that the crisis in Kosovo began to escalate. After the destruction of the Albanian army arsenals the KLA armed itself in order to start a large-scale nationalist rebellion. This development and the following counter-attack by the Serbian police moved Kosovo into the headlines and into the focal point of NATO's considerations. How did Germany and the United States react?

"The Clinton administration is still uncertain about how to deal with this crisis", later wrote the weekly newspaper Die Zeit. A senior official from the German foreign office was sent to Washington to put pressure on the deputy secretary of state, Strobe Talbott. "We urgently need U.S. leadership now" claimed Germany's emissary. [7] This pattern: Germany calls for the U.S. government - actually for a special wing of the U.S government - to act against Yugoslavia were repeated between March 1998 and March 1999 over and over again. Let us now take a closer look at that pre-war diplomacy which paved the way to war.

The US government is responsible for most of the war crimes NATO committed against Yugoslavia. But even in 1998, the Clinton administration - split in several fractions on how to deal with Milosevic and the Kosovo Albanians' nationalism - hesitated, reacting uncertainly on a case-by-case basis, oscillating between supporting the KLA and letting Milosevic have a free hand in smashing them. Germany on the other hand knew what to do and how to act. The grand design of Germany's Kosovo policy had been in effect by March 1998. It was revealed by Germany's informal ambassador to the Balkans, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, who on March 16, 1998 said: "We should try to tell Milosevic the plain truth through pressure and even military interventions that he can retain control over Kosovo as a part of Yugoslavia only if certain fundamentals are met. And if this is not the case, the territory there will have to be transformed into a kind of protectorate until those fundamentals are provided for." [8]

This idea of pushing the Kosovo's Albanians towards a military confrontation with Milosevic in order to create a Kosovo protectorate from now on became the central point of Germany's Kosovo policy - either by the Kohl/Kinkel CDU government or the Schröder/Fischer SPD-Green coalition. One condition was that international troops be stationed on Kosovo soil. As early as March 1998 Germany accordingly put this matter on the agenda at the London meeting of the international Contact Group on Yugoslavia. [9]

The other condition was that Nato would have to enter Kosovo against the will of the Yugoslav government. Accordingly, Germany sharpened its tone towards Belgrad. Milosevic became the main target and remained so whatever his policy looked like.

But France, the UK, Italy and the dominating voices within the US government still preferred to follow a less confrontational policy. In 1998, The European for example stated that "Washington realised that pushing the Kosovars towards a military confrontation with Milosevic, as the Germans wanted to do, would have a boomerang effect on the Balkans. The United States put maximum pressure on Germany to stop supporting the KLA behind the scenes, as did the other European countries such as Britain and France." [10] They termed the KLA activities "terrorist" and supported indirectly a Serbian counteroffensive against the KLA during the summer of 1998 and appealed to Milosevic and the moderate Albanian leader Rugova to begin talks. The KLA, however, succeeded in provoking the Serbian police force and in escalating armed clashes time and again. The policy of de-escalation turned out to be a permanent failure as long as there was a continuity in the supply of KLA weapons and KLA mercenaries across the Albanian border.

It was therefore not at all surprising that in the summer of 1998 all the efforts of the United Nations and the majority of Nato countries (including the US) concentrated in the goal of cutting off the arms and soldiers supplies in favor of the KLA. The Albanian government headed by Fatos Nano who had disassociated himself from the KLA supported this plan. Inside NATO the idea of sending 7000 soldiers to cut off the traffic in weapons began to take shape.

During this crucial situation, however, Germany's covering up for the KLA became both public and evident: The German government vetoed the cutting-off of the supply of weapons for the KLA! Klaus Kinkel, then head of the German foreign office said: "Of course you have to consider whether you are permitted from a moral and ethnical point of view to prevent the Kosovo-Albanians from buying weapons for their self-defense." [11] Volker Rühle, then head of the ministry of defense answered to this consideration with an unequivocal No: "You cannot resolve the Kosovo conflict by sending troops to Albania to seal the border and thus be acting in favor of Milosevic." [12] Rühle's message was quite clear: everyone who tries to seal the border in order to find a peaceful solution is taking sides with Milosevic. In order to disassociate yourself from Milosevic you have to escalate the war between the Kosovo Albanians and the Serbs by delivering more and more weapons to the KLA!

This open German solidarity with the KLA has been as much an isolated provocation as has the recognition of Tudjman's Croatia in 1991, 50 years after the formation of the first Croatian state under the rule of the fascist Ustashi regime.

Just like 1991 Germany again stood nearly alone against a huge majority of countries in Europe and the world. Just like 1991 Germany again supported a movement with a background rooted in the Nazi past, because the KLA is partly led by the sons and grandsons of extreme right-wing Albanian fighters, the heirs of those who fought during World War II in the fascist militias and the "Skanderbeg Volunteer SS Division" raised by the Nazis. [13] The "National Front of Albania" (Balli Kombetar) which collaborated with Nazi leaders in 1943/44 today boasts about its influence within the KLA which has a program that seems to be a modified version of the 1943 Nazi utopia.

Thus the program of "ethnic cleansing" which Germany exported into the Balkans in 1941 remained alive within the movement of the Kosovo Albanian nationalists during the 80s. "The nationalists have a two-point platform" wrote the New York Times in 1982: "First to establish what they call an ethnically clean Albanian republic and then the merger with Albania to form a greater Albania." [14] Whenever the KLA talks about "liberation" or "freeing" this has been up to now understood in the Nazi-sense of "free of something" i.e. "free of Jews" ("judenfrei"), "free of Gypsies" or "free of Serbs". No one could be really surprised when, beginning with June 1999, the de facto rule of the KLA turned out to be a daily and a deadly trap for thousands of non-Albanians, especially defenceless Serbs.

In the summer of 1998 Germany and the USA took not only opposite but conflicting sides: While the USA - in the words of General Shelton, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff - has had "concerns about the techniques that are being used to put down, to squelch the uprising" [15] Germany on the other hand acted as the protective power for the KLA. This confrontation includes a strategic conflict within NATO: Is the Atlantic Alliance supposed to help or to hinder the KLA? Should NATO as the KLA's airforce contribute to the revision of state borders and the further diminishing of Yugoslavia? Or is the alliance bound to clap down on such a type of militant secessionism?

It was Germany's insistence and the ignorance or thirst for adventure within the leadership of the other NATO powers that brought the world's biggest military alliance eventually in favor of the Albanian nationalists. Germany has "given evidence of its preparedness to lead" praised the influential Frankfurter Allgemeine. [16] Now Germany once again took the lead in pressing for military intervention in Kosovo. The New York Times reported: "German officials seem increasingly inclined towards charting a military course to stop the violence in Kosovo." [17] Indeed. "Mr. Kinkel threatens with a Nato intervention in Kosovo" proclaimed the headlines of German papers on June 5, 1998. "The United States, unlike Germany, rejects a snap decision about a military intervention", wrote Frankfurter Allgemeine the following day. Volker Rühle was the first government official in Europe who as early as June 15, 1998 spoke in favor of a strike against Yugoslavia even without a UN Security Council green light. This suggestion played havoc with not only the UN Charter but also with the German constitution and the Treaty of Moscow concerning German unification. This proposal was later taken up positively by the USA. We have to conclude, therefore, that Germany is not only guilty of committing the crimes which are connected

with the US-led bombing of Yugoslavia, but is responsible for ardently working towards triggering this war. The German concept for Kosovo includes the following:

- to make a stand against the Yugoslav government
- unlimited support for the Kosovo Albanian nationalists who demand independence and a lasting unification with Albania
- to demand for air-strikes against Yugoslavia in order to achieve a NATO protectorate for Kosovo which is supposed to be only an interim step towards the independence of Kosovo.

Strategic differences between German and the US policies diminished considerably in 1999 when the Clinton administration decided to go to war in favor of the ultra-secessionist KLA. They seem to gain, however, new weight in the post-war debate about the final status of Kosovo. US Secretary of State Madelaine Albright recently rejected the idea of creating a greater Albania, whereas German policy seems to be pushing in the opposite direction.

Karl Lamers, the influential CDU foreign affairs spokesman for the opposition in the Bundestag said about the transformation of Kosovo into a NATO protectorate that this is "only the first step towards the separation of Kosovo from Yugoslavia" and that an independent Kosovo will be "only an interim step to merging ("Anschluss") with Albania." [18] Recently, Lamers mentioned with great satisfaction "that everything we are actually doing in Kosovo, e. g. the creation of a new currency zone, is aimed at creating an independent Kosovo...". [19] Even Germany's red/green coalition government does not want to recognize Kosovo as being a province of Yugoslavia. That is the reason why in his last major statement Joschka Fischer - Germany's vice-chancellor and secretary of state - let the question of "the future status of the Kosovo" open claiming that it would be impossible to resolve this now. In an interview with a French newspaper, however, he made clear that he had no doubts about the Kosovo's future status: "The international community is present in Kosovo and the Balkans in order to show that - according to the example of resolving the 'German question' in 1990 - the 'Albanian question' could be resolved only with the agreement of the neighbouring states." [20]

US government circles are quite aware of the ambitions of their rival, Germany. Zbigniew Brzezinski called the Berlin republic a "geostrategic main actor" and a "subversive big power inspired by an ambitious vision". Strobe Talbott, the deputy secretary of state, characterized Germany as the seismic focal point of the current geopolitical earthquakes which are disrupting the Atlantic Alliance as well as the Balkans. He emphasized that Germany is "the epicentre of thoses processes - enlargement and expansion, extension and deepening." [21]

Within the context of the war against Yugoslavia the other great powers, however, not only reacted to aggressive German moves but pursued their own special interests as well. The United States wanted to retain its influence in Europe, to strengthen a worldwide role for NATO and to weaken Russias influence within the new world order. Great Britain und France were eager to demonstrate their military superiority over Germany and wanted to give a starting signal for the establishing of an independent European intervention force (together with Germany) vis-a-vis the USA. Each of these nations is a rival to the others and is trying to retain or achieve as much influence and power as possible. The war against Yugoslavia has been the first, however, to be spurred on by Germany as an attempt to redesign current world order after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This war has put the irrational elements and the destructive roots of capitalistic societies into a new light.

(Not published)

[1] This contribution is a short description of a broader study: Matthias Küntzel, Der Weg in den Krieg. Deutschland, die Nato und das Kosovo, Elefant Press, Berlin 2000. The author's e-mail address: MatKuentzel@aol.com.

[2] This warning was published in the Yugoslavian journal Polityka; see the minutes of the Bundestag meeting June 16, 1991, pp. 2560-1.

[3] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Redefining the National Interest, Foreign Affairs Vol.78 No.4, July/August 1999 pp. 22-35.

[4] See Rupert Scholz, Das Festhalten an ungewollten Staaten schafft keine Stabilität, in: Die Welt, December 12, 1991; Rupert Scholz, Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht und die deutsche Politik, in: Internationale Politik 4/1995, S.51.

[5] "Deutschland und Albanien ... bekräftigen das Recht aller Völker, frei und ohne Einmischung von außen ihr Schicksal zu bestimmen und ihre politische, wirtschaftliche, soziale und kulturelle Entwicklung nach eigenem Wunsch zu gestalten." This declaration is published in the Archiv der Gegenwart, March 13, 1995, pp. 39819-20.

[6] Roger Fallgot, How Germany Backed KLA, in: The European, 21-27 September 1998. See for more details M. Küntzel, Der Weg in den Krieg pp. 59-64.

[7] See Die Zeit, May 12, 1999.

[8] Christian Schwarz-Schilling, March 16, 1999, Deutschlandradio, quoted in: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, Stichworte zur Sicherheitspolitik, April 1998, p. 47.

[9] Russia, the USA, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Germany are members of this informal but influential group.

[10] Roger Fallgot, *ibid.*

[11] Interview with Klaus Kinkel, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, July 30, 1998.

[12] Mr. Rühle is quoted in the Frankfurter Allgemeine, June 9, 1998.

[13] See Chris Hedges, Kosovo's Next Masters? in: Foreign Affairs, Vol.78, No.3, May/June 1999, pp.24-42. "Although never much of a fighting force, the Skanderbeg Division took part in the shameful roundup and deportation of the province's few hundred Jews during the Holocaust. ... The decision by KLA commanders to dress their police in black fatigues and order their fighters to salute with a clenched fist to the forehead has led many to worry about these fascist antecedents." (*ibid.*)

[14] See Marvine Howe, Exodus of Serbians Stirrs Province in Yugoslavia, New York Times July 12, 1982.

[15] See New York Times, June 16, 1998.

[16] See Frankfurter Allgemeine, September 26, 1998.

[17] See New York Times, June 10, 1998.

[18] See the minutes of the Bundestag parliamentary session of April 15, 1999.

[19] See the minutes of the Bundestag parliamentary session of April 5, 2000.

[20] See Le Monde March 25, 2000, emphasis by the author.

[21] See Frankfurter Allgemeine, February 5, 1999.