

Eastern Europe and the Balkans: From Socialist Bloc And Non-Alignment To U.S. Military Colonies

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April 23, 2021. Today, we commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the bombing of the Radio TV of Serbia headquarters.

Twenty-two years ago the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was in the seventh week of a bombing war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, one which saw over 1,000 Western military planes fly over 38,000 combat missions, bombs dropped from the sky and Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from the Mediterranean Sea.

Having quickly exhausted military targets, NATO warplanes resorted to bombing so-called targets of opportunity, including bridges on the Danube River, factories, Radio Television of Serbia headquarters in the capital (where sixteen employees were killed), a refugee column in Kosovo, the offices of political parties and the residences of government officials and foreign ambassadors, a passenger train, a religious procession, hospitals, apartment courtyards, hotels, the Swedish and Swiss embassies and the nation's entire power grid.

U.S. Apache gunships and British Harrier jet aircraft were deployed for attacks on the ground and Yugoslavia was strewn with unexploded cluster bomb fragments and depleted uranium contamination.

The 78-day bombing campaign, NATO code name Operation Allied Force and U.S. Operation Noble Anvil, was promoted in Washington and other Western capitals as history's first "humanitarian war."

The U.S. and NATO dramatically escalated the reckless assault with an overnight attack on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on May 7 in which five American bombs simultaneously struck the building, killing three and wounding 20 Chinese citizens. The government of China denounced the action for what it was, a "war crime," a "barbaric attack and a gross violation of Chinese sovereignty" and "NATO's barbarian act."

During the long Cold War it was assumed that military action by the North Atlantic military bloc would result in the death and injury of soldiers and civilians in member states of the Warsaw Pact. But NATO's first victims were Serbs and Chinese.

When the war ended on June 11, the West had achieved what it set out to accomplish:

50,000 troops under NATO's command entered Serbia's Kosovo province, where over 12,000 remain eleven years later.

The Pentagon commissioned Kellogg, Brown & Root to construct the nearly 1,000-acre Camp Bondsteel and its sister base Camp Monteith in Kosovo, which continue to operate to the present day.

Kosovo had been wrenched from Serbia and on February 17, 2008 declared itself an independent nation, recognized as such by the U.S. and most all of its NATO allies, though not by almost two-thirds of the world's nations.

In 1999 NATO Secretary General Javier Solana moved across the street as it were in Brussels to become the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in which post he supervised a "trial separation" for what remained of Yugoslavia, and the very name of Yugoslavia was wiped from the map as the Western-sponsored State Union of Serbia and Montenegro succeeded it in 2003.

Three years later Montenegro, with a population smaller than that of the American city of Memphis, became the world's newest nation. To demonstrate after the fact what had been planned before, a U.S. guided missile cruiser visited the coastal city of Tivat within months and an American submarine, USS Emory Land, arrived there in 2007 to mark the first anniversary of Montenegro's nominal independence.

In the year following the break-up of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the last-named joined NATO's Partnership for Peace apprenticeship program and the following year was granted an Individual Partnership Action Plan and signed a Status of Forces Agreement with NATO for which the U.S. is the depositary government. In late 2009 it received a Membership Action Plan, the final step before full NATO membership. This March Montenegro became the 44th nation to contribute troops for NATO's war in Afghanistan. All these developments occurred in four years.

Since the beginning of NATO's post-Cold War expansion in 1999, nations of the former Warsaw Pact and of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have become Western military colonies, hosting visits by and basing troops and military equipment from NATO and its individual members, especially the U.S. So far this year former Warsaw Pact countries Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and most recently Albania have announced their willingness to accede to U.S. and NATO requests for interceptor missile facilities to be stationed on their territories.

The U.S. has acquired four military bases in Romania and three in Bulgaria over the past four years and will soon activate a Patriot Advanced Capability-3 interceptor missile installation in the east of Poland, 35 miles from the Russian border. Longer-range anti-ballistic missile interceptors are to follow according to Polish officials.

NATO has a major training center in Poland, the world's first multinational strategic airlift operation at the Papa Air Base in Hungary, and de facto possession of a former Soviet air base in Lithuania. After meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates earlier in the month, Lithuanian Defense Minister Rasa Jukneviene announced that the Pentagon chief confirmed U.S. support for a permanent military base in the Baltic Sea region where NATO warplanes have been conducting air patrols since the induction of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the bloc in 2004.

The Lithuanian defense chief also said the Pentagon wants to extend NATO air patrols in the area "till 2018 and beyond."

Washington plans to establish a missile shield communications center in the Czech Republic, where Britain is currently leading multinational air combat exercises, Operation Flying Rhino 2010, with 2,000 foreign and 1,000 Czech troops.

Air bases in Bulgaria and Romania were employed for the attack on and invasion of Iraq in 2003 and have been used regularly for the nearly nine-year U.S.-NATO war in Afghanistan.

After the invasion of Iraq, new NATO members the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland sent troops to the country, as did then NATO candidates and partners Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

Offering Washington troops for the war in Iraq was a prerequisite for advanced NATO partnerships and eventual full membership. Nine of the above nations were awarded the second in return for their services. Bosnia, Macedonia and as of last year Montenegro have been granted Membership Action Plans, introduced at the 1999 NATO fiftieth anniversary summit in Washington, D.C. as the penultimate stage of full integration. Georgia and Ukraine were presented special Annual National Programs by NATO shortly after Georgia's war with Russia in August of 2008.

All twelve new Eastern European NATO members have troops in Afghanistan, as do prospective members Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Georgia, Macedonia and Montenegro.

NATO has taken over the former Warsaw Pact and former Yugoslavia, in the first case without firing a shot. In the second through two bombing campaigns (Bosnia in 1995 and Serbia in 1999) and three deployments of ground troops (Bosnia in 1995, Kosovo in 1999 and Macedonia in 2001).

All ex-Warsaw Pact nations outside the former Soviet Union now have soldiers killing and dying under NATO command in Afghanistan, as all but the erstwhile East Germany did in Iraq, though none of them did under Warsaw Pact obligations during the ten years of Soviet involvement in the South Asian nation. Seven of fifteen former Soviet republics also have troops serving under NATO in the Afghan war zone.

The U.S. and other major Alliance powers conduct regular multinational Partnership for Peace military maneuvers in all three former Soviet Republics in the South Caucasus - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - and have held comparable exercises in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

The major purpose of the war games and other drills is to prepare the militaries of the host and participating nations for interoperability in military, including combat, missions abroad, most prominently in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past few years.

Georgia had 2,000 troops in Iraq in 2008, at the time the third largest foreign contingent, although its population is only slightly over four million, a fraction of that of the U.S., Britain and other major troops providers.

Most of those troops were flown back to Georgia on U.S. military transport planes during the five-day war with South Ossetia and Russia in August of 2008. Georgia will soon have almost

900 troops in Afghanistan, the largest per capita contribution of any of the 50 nations supplying soldiers to NATO for the fighting there.

During the 36 years of the Warsaw Pact member states aside from the Soviet Union rarely deployed military units outside their borders and never overseas.

In the past decade all non-Soviet members and all former Yugoslav republics but Serbia have had their sons and daughters deployed by NATO to such frequently farflung war and conflict zones as the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq and adjoining countries like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan (Germany) and Kuwait. Over a hundred Polish, Romanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Latvian, Hungarian, Lithuanian and Slovak soldiers have returned to their homelands from Afghanistan and Iraq in coffins.

When the Soviet Red Army left Bulgaria in 1947 no foreign troops were stationed in that nation until U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited it two years after its NATO accession to sign an agreement on three military bases there: The Bezmer Air Base, the Graf Ignatievo Air Base (recently certified as meeting "100% compliance" with NATO requirements) and the Novo Selo Training Range.

The last Soviet troops left Romania in 1958. When Nicolae Ceausescu became leader of the nation in 1965, he distanced his country from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, forbidding exercises and deployments involving other states.

In 2005, the year after Romania gained full NATO membership, Condoleezza Rice visited Bucharest and secured four bases for the Pentagon and NATO: The Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base (already used for the war against Iraq), the Cincu and Smardan training bases, and the Babadag firing range.

The U.S. recently concluded military exercises with Bulgaria - Operation Thracian Spring - from April 22 to 28 and led joint air force exercises with Bulgaria and Romania from April 12 to 16 at the Aviano Air Base in Italy.

This February Romanian and Bulgarian government officials announced that they would accept American and NATO Standard Missile-3 interceptor installations and the troops to man them.

In 1960 Albanian leader Enver Hoxha turned against the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact allies, aligning himself with the People's Republic of China. No foreign troops or bases were allowed in the country.

Starting in 1993 the U.S. Sixth Fleet began conducting naval exercises with Albania, acquired the use of military bases there and deployed troops to a forward base it established near the port city of Durres for the war against Yugoslavia in 1999.

Last week the nation's prime minister and the chief of staff of the armed forces - after meeting with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen - announced their willingness to host U.S. and NATO interceptor missile facilities and the soldiers who will accompany them.

Albania, along with Croatia, with whom U.S. Special Operations Command Europe just concluded two months of air exercises for what was described as "large-scale counterinsurgency, stability and counterterrorism operations" abroad, are NATO's newest

members, joining in 2009.

NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, American Admiral James Stavridis, was in Bulgaria on April 26 and 27 and Secretary General Rasmussen is expected there on May 20.

Even affiliating with the Brussels-based bloc demands conditions that are onerous and inflexible. NATO partners are told which Western arms manufacturers they must purchase weapons from, where their troops are to be deployed, who their friends and who their enemies are around the world. The full foreign policy orientation of candidates and members is dictated from Brussels and Washington.

NATO is a bloc that no nation has ever withdrawn from or will be allowed to leave.

Before his visits to Albania and Croatia late last month the latter said at NATO headquarters in Brussels, "My dream will come true if - one day - we could see all countries in the Balkans as members of NATO. They belong to the Euro-Atlantic Community. I hope to see their flags represented here among all other NATO nations."

Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nikolay Mladenov visited Washington, D.C. at the end of April to meet with among others U.S. National Security Advisor James Jones, and pledged support for NATO and European Union membership for both Serbia and Kosovo.

At last month's NATO foreign ministers meeting in Estonia, Bosnia's Membership Action Plan was approved.

NATO's Kosovo Force is training and arming the Kosovo Security Force, an army in formation under NATO control.

With the demise of the Cold War former members of the Warsaw Pact may have hoped for a demilitarized Europe, one free of armed blocs. Instead the first and preeminent Cold War military alliance, NATO, will soon have engulfed almost every nation on the continent.

The new nations of former Yugoslavia, a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement which had never been in any military bloc, will not be spared that fate.

Rasmussen won't have long to wait for his dream to be realized and for the flags of all nations and pseudo-nations in Eastern Europe to fly at NATO headquarters. And at bases in Afghanistan and other combat zones.

Foreign troops will be based permanently on their soil as their troops are deployed far abroad.

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