

Full Circle: NATO Completes Takeover Of Former Yugoslavia

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In 1991 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was a nominally defensive military bloc with sixteen members that, as the cliché ran, had never fired a shot.

In 1991 the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was the only simultaneously multiethnic and multiconfessional nation (entirely) in Europe, consisting of six federated republics with diverse constituencies.

By 2009 NATO had grown to 28 full members and at least that many military partners throughout Europe and in Africa, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Asia and the South Pacific. Next month NATO is to hold a summit in Estonia to be attended by the foreign ministers of 56 nations. Last month a meeting of NATO's Military Committee in Brussels included the armed forces chiefs of 63 nations, almost a third of the world's 192 countries.

By 2008 the former Yugoslavia has been fragmented into six recognized nations (the former federal republics of Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) and a semi-recognized province of Serbia, Kosovo.

Until the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991, NATO had never staged operations outside the territory of its member states.

In 2004 it ran eight operations in four continents, including a training mission in Iraq and combat deployments in Afghanistan. The first former Yugoslav republic, Slovenia, was inducted into NATO in that year along with six other Eastern European nations in the bloc's largest-ever expansion.

The Alliance's first three military operations, however, all occurred in the former Yugoslavia. In 1995 NATO launched Operation Deliberate Force against the Republika Srpska with 400 aircraft and over 3,500 sorties and stationed troops in Bosnia afterward.

In 1999 it unleashed the relentless 78-day Operation Allied Force air war against Yugoslavia and in June of that year deployed 50,000 troops to Kosovo.

Two years later it sent troops to and initiated the first of several operations in Macedonia following an armed conflict in that country.

The three interventions preceded September 11, 2001.

After NATO invoked its Article 5 collective military assistance clause following the latter

date, NATO Partnership for Peace affiliates as well as full member states started to deploy troops to Afghanistan.

After the U.S. and British invasion of Iraq two years following that, soldiers from Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia were deployed to the war zone in that nation to prove their loyalty as NATO candidate countries. Montenegro did not gain its Western-backed independence until 2006, but has already been levied for troops for the Afghan war. Croatia was rewarded with full membership in 2009 and Macedonia would have accompanied it into the ranks of the world's only military axis except for the lingering name dispute with Greece.

In December of 2008 the complete transfer of contributing states' troops from Iraq to Afghanistan began and there are now military personnel from five of the six former Yugoslav republics – Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Slovenia – committed to NATO in the world's longest active and deadliest war theater.

In the post-Cold War epoch the former Yugoslavia has been the laboratory for global NATO, its testing ground and battleground, the prototype for the disintegration of nations and for their transformation into economically nonviable monoethnic statelets and Western military colonies.

The NATO military command in charge of the Balkans, Allied Joint Force Command Naples formed in 2004, oversees the eleven-year NATO military operation in Kosovo, Kosovo Force (KFOR), and has a headquarters in Bosnia and in Macedonia and a new military liaison office in Serbia. (Croatia and Slovenia are now full members.)

In addition to the Adriatic Charter initiative launched by the United States in 2003, which successfully prepared Albania and Croatia for NATO membership and is currently doing the same for Macedonia, Bosnia and Montenegro with Serbia and Kosovo to follow, the Allied Joint Force Command Naples is the major mechanism for recruiting troops from former Yugoslav republics for wars abroad. Particularly for that in Afghanistan, but the Naples command also operates the NATO Training Mission – Iraq in Baghdad.

Considered by many observers as a major architect of the breakup of Yugoslavia, Richard Holbrooke, now U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, delivered an address in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar last month in which he “drew parallels between the Bosnian war and the onslaught against the Taliban in Afghanistan,” and said:

“The U.S. has led and won similar wars in Kosovo and Bosnia with the support of the international community. And we are very optimistic about Afghanistan too.” [1]

In the same month the parliament of the Republika Srpska passed a law allowing for a referendum on its current status within Bosnia – two years after the U.S. and almost all its NATO allies supported and recognized the secession of Kosovo from Serbia – and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reacted by stating that the Barack Obama administration does “not want to see any moves to break up Bosnia,” and to insure the integrity of Bosnia (and breakaway Kosovo also) she “reiterated Washington's support for EU and NATO integration of Western Balkans countries, Serbia included.”

“But the NATO piece of it, I'm watching very closely because...we want Bosnia-Herzegovina to feel like they're welcome.” [2]

Also in February, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Gordon sounded the same theme while speaking at the Harvard Kennedy School. In a presentation called The Obama Administration's Vision for Southeastern Europe, Gordon said "To fully achieve European and therefore American security, we believe that peace and stability should not only extend across northern and central Europe, but also southeastern Europe," with special emphasis on "Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Turkey." [3]

In completing the incorporation of all of Southeastern Europe into the U.S.-dominated military bloc, the current American administration would put the capstone on "the historic project of trying to bring democracy to the whole of Europe."

In particular, "the Obama administration will seek to position Bosnia for future membership in the European Union and NATO," and in reference to Serbia, "The door to NATO membership is open".

According to Harvard's daily student newspaper, Gordon noted in his speech that "yesterday marked the second anniversary of Kosovo's independence: a sign that progress has been made." [4]

Earlier this month former NATO secretary general George Robertson joined the chorus pushing the Alliance's absorption of the Balkans: "Serbia can offer a lot....I believe it wants to become a part of [the] European mainstream rather than to stay on the margins. All the neighbors of Serbia will be members of the EU and NATO. I am convinced that all the Western Balkan countries will be part of the Alliance in ten years." [5]

Serbia, by far the most populous of all former Yugoslav states with more than 7 million citizens, is receiving the most attention from NATO at the moment.

Mary Warlick, newly appointed U.S. ambassador to the nation, recently "announced that the door of NATO membership is open to Serbia" and said "the United States fully supports the European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Serbia and is doing all it can to facilitate Belgrade's efforts in this direction." [6]

Her comments were reiterated by NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, the U.S.'s Admiral James Stavridis, who in early February visited Serbia's capital "to establish personal relationships and strengthen cooperation and partnership" and meet with the nation's president, defense minister and chief of staff of the armed forces. (NATO opened a military liaison office in Belgrade in December of 2006 when Serbia joined the bloc's Partnership for Peace program.)

Stavridis' NATO delegation was briefed "on the progress and continued efforts to professionalize the Serb military" and "participated in the annual National and Armed Forces Day reception." [7]

Last year the pro-Western government of President Boris Tadic signed an Individual Partnership Program with NATO.

Recently the public affairs chief of the Serbian Ministry of Defense announced that a "Serbian mission [to] NATO will be officially opened by the beginning of June, which is in accordance with participation in the program Partnership for Peace," and will be staffed by

six officers. [8]

On the same day, and to provide a blunt indication of what further NATO integration means, a Serbian news source disclosed that troops from the nation are being readied for peacekeeping deployments in Uganda, Lebanon and a third nation as yet unidentified.

Whereas “the participation of the Serbian Army in international peace operations has until now been limited to sending observers and medical experts,” the country’s armed forces have “organized courses [for] which Serbian experts will be enabled to participate in infantry units and mine clearing units.”

Moreover, military analyst Aleksandar Radic said “NATO and the EU follow the participation of countries in peacekeeping missions very closely. The countries in our region have understood that and started participating in these missions in order to gain a reference for joining international organizations.” [9]

Serbian soldiers are inching ever closer to the Afghan war theater.

But not with the support of their countrymen.

Last month the results of a TNS Medium Gallup poll in Serbia showed that “only 20 percent of Serbian citizens would support NATO accession, which is four percent less than last year.” [10]

In tandem with moves to drag Serbia deeper into the NATO nexus despite widespread popular opposition, Brussels and Washington are consolidating their hold on the other three former Yugoslav republics not yet full NATO members: Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and a delegation of the permanent representatives of all 28 member states arrived in Bosnia on March 23 to consult with leaders of the nation on a Membership Action Plan, “an essential stepping stone on the road toward alliance membership.”

A senior official in Bosnia’s Foreign Ministry announced that “We expect that Bosnia will be invited to join [the] MAP in Tallinn,” [11] a reference to the NATO foreign ministers meeting in Estonia on April 10.

Earlier this month the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nikola Spiric, visited NATO headquarters in Brussels to meet with Rasmussen and to address the North Atlantic Council.

“NATO Allies thanked Mr. Spiric for the invitation extended to the North Atlantic Council to visit Bosnia and Herzegovina later this month and looked forward to the next meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in April, when the Membership Action Plan for the country will be discussed.” [12]

A week earlier a high-level NATO delegation headed by Admiral Mark Fitzgerald, commander of Allied Joint Force Command Naples, arrived in the Macedonian capital of Skopje to meet with Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, Defense Minister Zoran Konjanovski and chief of the Army General Staff Miroslav Stojanovski and discuss the Army of the Republic of Macedonia’s “contribution to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, the achievements of the Republic of Macedonia in the implementation of reforms and the participation in the

command structure of the Alliance as well as ARM's progress in the application of the NATO operation skills concept."

The delegation also inspected a military base in Krivolak where Fitzgerald and his colleagues were "introduced to the new training capacities and the project of its development into a regional center." [13]

On February 22nd Boro Vucinic, Montenegro's defense minister, visited NATO headquarters and met with Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero. The latter "reaffirmed NATO's willingness to continue providing relevant assistance and expertise to Montenegrin authorities" and "expressed satisfaction with Montenegro's decision to become a contributor to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan." [14]

In mid-March Admiral Fitzgerald was in Montenegro and at a press conference expressed his satisfaction at his host nation's movement toward the North Atlantic bloc, stating "he had witnessed a significant improvement in the past two years," and said "Montenegro had demonstrated it was a 'responsible and reliable partner' in the membership process."

Speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro Ranko Krivokapic said that NATO membership was a "national priority" and that for the Alliance "it is also strategically important to have this part of the Adriatic coast integrated into the NATO structure." [15]

On March 22 NATO's KFOR launched five days of exercises throughout Kosovo in conjunction with the European Union's EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo) and the separatist Kosovo Police Service (KPS).

The drills are headed by NATO commander Markus Bentler.

In an allusion to Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority that KFOR, EULEX and the KPS are training to subjugate in common, a KFOR statement on the exercises said:

"KFOR will handle its force in Kosovo very flexibly and determinedly. The aim of these operations is to strengthen the capacities of KFOR, EULEX and the Kosovo police so that they could respond to any scenario that brings security into question." [16]

The putative president of the Republic of Kosovo, Fatmir Sejdiu, recently returned from NATO headquarters and a meeting of the bloc's North Atlantic Council - usually reserved for the ambassadors of full member states - where he had updated those envoys on the "general evolution in Kosovo, Kosovo's objective [of making] further progress and, especially, its ambition to become a member of NATO."

Sedjiu had also "thanked the North Atlantic Council ambassadors for all the support that NATO has [provided] and is providing to Kosovo and has expressed the commitment of our institutions to an active partnership and close cooperation with NATO."

At a press conference in Pristina after his return, he spoke of his offer to make members of the Kosovo Security Force, a NATO-trained national army in embryo, available for "NATO peacekeeping operations." [17]

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In 1991 the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and from the following year onward the

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, presented an obstacle to NATO's drive to the east - the former Soviet Union and Asia - and to the south - the Middle East and Africa.

In the story of Aesop's a bundle of sticks tied together could not be broken but, once separated, each could be easily snapped in two.

In completing the fragmentation of Yugoslavia NATO removed a crucial impediment to its expansion into a global military force. In its place it has acquired seven new members and candidates and as many potential sites for training camps, air and naval bases, and transit points for moving troops and weapons to new war zones on three continents and in the Middle East.

- 1) Tanjug News Agency, February 17, 2010
- 2) Tanjug News Agency, February 26, 2010
- 3) Harvard Crimson, February 16, 2010
- 4) Ibid
- 5) Tanjug News Agency, March 11, 2010
- 6) Radio Serbia, February 5, 2010
- 7) NATO Public Affairs, February 16, 2010
- 8) Radio Serbia, March 22, 2010
- 9) Blic, March 22, 2010
- 10) Tanjug News Agency, February 11, 2010
- 11) BalkanInsight, March 23, 2010
- 12) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, March 3, 2010
- 13) Makfax, March 16, 2010
- 14) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, February 22, 2010
- 15) Xinhua News Agency, March 18, 2010
- 16) Tanjug News Agency, March 22, 2010
- 17) President of the Republic of Kosovo, March 22, 2010

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