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Clinton's Kosovo "Victory"

BY GARY DEMPSEY

WHEN IT APPEARED THAT BELGRADE HAD ACCEPTED THE G-8 FRAMEWORK for peace in Kosovo, Clinton administration officials and their defenders began to tout the success of NATO's air war against Yugoslavia. Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon, for example, claimed, "No matter where we are today, we're there because of the steady, professional, and strong application of air power over the last 10 weeks." Similarly, Paul Begala, former Clinton aide turned political commentator, proclaimed, "By God, [the air war's critics] were wrong."

Such gloating proved premature; negotiations are now tenuous. Furthermore, the truth of the matter is that Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic is not giving in to NATO's bombs. Milosevic achieved his political and strategic goals weeks ago: He secured his grip on power inside Yugoslavia and pushed ethnic Albanians out of a huge swath of Kosovo. His latest diplomatic actions are aimed at buying more time and eventually locking in his gains.

Moreover, Milosevic gets a better deal under the G-8 framework than under the peace plan that Western powers tried to prod Belgrade into signing last March in Rambouillet, France. Look closely at the G-8 framework endorsed by the Yugoslav government. Three of the provisions that made the Rambouillet plan unacceptable to Belgrade are gone.

First, the Rambouillet agreement stipulated that NATO troops would not be limited to the province of Kosovo but could deploy anywhere in Yugoslavia. Specifically, Chapter 7, Appendix B, Section 8 of the document stated: "NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft, and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY [Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] including associated air-space and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right of bivouac, maneuver, billet, and utilization of any areas or facilities as required for support, training, and operations." As far as Belgrade was concerned, that provision was a recipe for NATO occupation of Yugoslavia. The G-8 agreement, however, speaks only of a "deployment in Kosovo of effective international civil and security presences."

Second, the Rambouillet agreement would have guaranteed that Kosovo's population, which is overwhelmingly non-Serb, could vote to secede from Yugoslavia after three years of interim administration. Chapter 8, Article 1, Section 3 of the agreement stated: "Three years after the entry into force of this Agreement, an international meeting shall be convened to determine the mechanism for a final settlement for Kosovo, on the basis of the will of the people [and the] opinions of relevant authorities." The G-8 agreement, however, makes no reference to a referendum after three years and clearly states that the political administration of Kosovo must be consistent with "principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia."

Third, the Rambouillet agreement would have mandated the deployment of NATO troops on a NATO mission. The G-8 agreement, however, refers to an "international security presence, with substantial NATO participation," that will operate "under UN auspices, . . . acting as may be decided under Chapter VII of the Charter." Authority for the Kosovo operation will be shifted to the United Nations, where Yugoslavia has two key allies in the Security Council, Russia and China.

What's more, a footnote to the G-8 agreement states, "It is understood that Russia's position is that the Russian contingent [to the Kosovo peacekeeping mission] will not be under NATO command and its relationship to the international presence will be governed by relevant additional agreements." Under the G-8 plan, Russia could have

its own administrative sector in Kosovo. Given the cultural and historical ties between Russians and Serbs, ethnic Albanian refugees are unlikely to return to a Russian sector. The result would be the de facto partition of Kosovo, something Milosevic probably desired from the outset.

But this "Rambouillet-lite" peace accord is only the latest episode in an ongoing fiasco. The Clinton administration's ill-conceived Kosovo policy has failed to meet almost all of its objectives, especially the protection of Kosovar Albanian civilians and the stabilization of the Balkans.

Even if the impasse is broken and an agreement is signed, the war has already caused enormous problems. U.S.-Russian relations are at a post-Cold War low, and the prospects for pro-Western candidates in this winter's Russian parliamentary elections are bleak. Russia still has more than 6,000 aging nuclear missiles; the election of anti-Western forces could doom the START II arms control agreement.

This Clinton "victory" also means deploying U.S. troops for yet another multi-billion-dollar, open-ended military commitment. Beyond that, U.S. soldiers involved in the operation will be obligated under the G-8 agreement to disarm the Kosovo Liberation Army, which still seeks an independent Kosovo. Thanks to the Clinton administration, Milosevic may get the last laugh, as Belgrade's headache becomes Washington's headache.



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