

KOSOVO, THE RUSSIA

OPTION, AND CHECHNYA

Craig Scott

In early March of 1999 the Rambouillet "agreement" structuring an interim autonomy regime for Kosovo showed early signs of becoming a dead letter. Notably, Yugoslavia seemed willing to live with a short-term solution of robust regional autonomy for Kosovo, but was adamant it would not agree to NATO troops on its soil to oversee

There is little evidence that Western powers took the Russia option seriously, let alone pursued it with any vigour. Instead, NATO continued both to insist that its troops were a bottom-line part of the Rambouillet "agreement" and to promise military strikes if Yugoslavia (Serbia) did not "agree." After Serbia refused to sign on these terms at Rambouillet, Serb armed forces accelerated their military campaign in Kosovo,

bombing while refugee outflows and atrocities continued throughout Kosovo, Russian diplomacy played a role in orchestrating the terms for the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces and the insertion of a UN force side by side with a transitional NATO presence. Russian troops were made part of the UN mission set up by the Security Council. After a face-saving dash to beat NATO to Kosovo's Pristina airport, they settled into a professional and co-operative relationship with the other UN mission countries and with NATO – according to the laudatory comments of UK General Jackson in an interview with Spain's *El Pais* paper at the time of his departure as military head of the Kosovo mission in October 1999.

But let us return to the NATO decision not to negotiate the shape of a Rambouillet military force and to start bombing when Serbia refused to sign at Rambouillet. Two important members of the UN other than Russia – China and India – reacted with outrage. Can such outrage be readily dismissed as either legalistic or as the self-serving stance of states with their own Kosovos to worry about? No, such a response would be too easy. The NATO intervention was *not only* about protection of civilians. It was about the

and enforce the deal. However, Belgrade said it would accept a substitution of Russian (and Belarussian) troops for NATO troops, albeit adding the troublesome condition that Yugoslavia must be admitted into these two states' military alliance.

upping the ante. NATO responded by making good on its threats and launching a massive air attack. The ferocity of Serbia's assault in Kosovo escalated, and the bombing of Belgrade and much of the rest of Serbia intensified.

Eventually, after months of NATO

complicated business of coercively restructuring a state's constitutional order. Without the overriding authority of the Security Council to endorse Rambouillet under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, "agreement" could not be imposed by outside states absent two signatures – nor, in the context of military threats, could its legality be easily assumed, even were Serbia to have joined the Kosovars in formally "consenting" to it.

Would the Russia option have been inimical to the combined objectives of peace and justice in Kosovo? Had the Security Council brokered the substitution of a Russia-led mission for the contemplated NATO deployment, there was a very realistic prospect that Russia would have taken great care to act with a firm sense of its larger responsibilities. France operated remarkably evenhandedly when authorised (belatedly) to go into Rwanda; the US managed to keep excessive self-interest under control when authorised to go into Haiti; and Russia would have felt pressure to act likewise.

To have engaged Russia in this way would have put Russian prestige on the line and offered the tangible benefits of future support from, and partnership with, the West. The incentives for faithful performance of a UN mandate would likely have weighed more heav-

ily than any interest in a sacrificial siding with Serb violence.

The Security Council need not have given Milosevic everything he was demanding. First, there could be no question of allowing Yugoslavia to join Russia and Belarus in military alliance. Secondly, any UN force had to have a Russia-led quality without being exclusively Russian and Belarussian. The UN mission would need a critical mass of non-NATO troops from such nations as Sweden, Ireland, and Brazil. Finally, given the state of Russia's finances, funding would have been crucial, and NATO states would have had to agree to fund at least Russia's component of the UN operation.

A number of mutually supportive results might possibly have been achieved.

- Systemic concerns about the rule of law and the future authority of the Security Council would have been treated as important as the credibility of NATO.
- Milosevic would have had a way to save face, but, if he had refused to accept a version of his own counterproposal, Russia and China would have been more likely to support the UN defence of Kosovo (even if only by abstaining on a Security Council vote to authorise NATO intervention).
- It would have taken seriously the

desirability of engaging Russia and not treating Russia as some sick man of Eurasia to be ignored or bought off.

- The spirit of compromise between Russia and NATO could have had symbolic effects for the engagement of the Yugoslavian communities under Rambouillet.

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By December 1999 Kosovo had largely disappeared from the news, apart from some sporadic coverage of the anti-Serb campaign of vengeful violence and purifying displacement occurring in the new Kosovo – a campaign that NATO and the UN have not been able to prevent. Russian troops have not broken out of the professional and co-operative mode noted by General Jackson. They have not sided in any active way with the remaining Serb civilian population of Kosovo.

Meanwhile, of course, then-President Yeltsin and his advisers have become characters straight out of *Dr. Strangelove* with their senseless and brutal conduct in Chechnya. So, the lamb in Kosovo co-exists with the (rogue) lion – or bear, to mix a metaphor – in Chechnya.

There seems little reason to suppose that this bifurcated approach would not also have been the case had Russia in fact ended up leading a Rambouil-

Resolution 2001 (1999)

From February 26 to March 2, 1999 Prof. Scott co-taught an intensive course with George Stephanopoulos called Hard Choices in International Politics. On March 1 and 2 students in the course were organised to simulate Security Council deliberations around the issue of Kosovo. The following is the mock Security Council resolution they came up with.

The Security Council, ...

Conscious of the need to take the following measures acting under Chapter VII of the Charter,

let/UN mission. Indeed, it is more than arguable that Russia would have had to comport itself as a model of responsibility in Kosovo in order to present its account of the conflict in Chechnya as that of a reasonable actor not given to unnecessary use of military force.

We should also keep in mind that, if the counterfactual of a Russia-led mission in Kosovo had happened, the massive NATO bombing campaign of Serbia would not have taken place. And if that bombing had not taken place, Russians would not now be reacting with disbelief and ire to Western condemnation of the Chechnya campaign which they see (with whatever lack of nuance) as little more than the mirror image of the policy of the West in Kosovo.

Had Kosovo been handled differently, Russia would have been engaged as the West's partner on the international stage, and, as such, would now be more susceptible to entreaties to act humanely in Chechnya. It would also have been deprived of two handy discourses (that of double standards and that of nationalistic paranoia) which unworthy politicians are adept at using in order to rally the support of their home audiences. ■

- 1 Authorises**, upon express indication by Yugoslavia of its acceptance of the terms of the Rambouillet Peace Agreement other than such parts of the Agreement pertaining to deployment of NATO troops, the deployment in Kosovo of a multinational operation under the command and control of Russia and Belarus to use all necessary means to uphold the terms of the Agreement;
- 2 Prohibits** any other Member States or any other actors to intervene unless expressly authorised by the Security Council in a subsequent resolution;
- 3 Requires** the alliance of Belarus and Russia not to admit Yugoslavia as a member of that alliance until at least the expiry of a period of two years from the date of adoption of this resolution;
- 4 Establishes** a Working Group of the Council for purposes of monitoring the activities of the operation in Kosovo and reporting to the Council on such activities, details of the composition and procedure of the Working Group to be detailed in a subsequent resolution;
- 5 Stresses** the unique character of the present situation in Yugoslavia and its deteriorating, complex and extraordinary nature, requiring an exceptional response;
- 6 Decides** that this resolution shall automatically expire two years after the date of its adoption;
- 7 Decides** to remain actively seized of the matter.

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IN THIS ISSUE

ASIA OPTION,

COMMUNITY

AND AT HOME

