

NATO WAR IN KOSOVO AND THE CIS: SHORT- AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS

While the implications of the NATO war against Yugoslavia for European security, international law, relations between Russia and the West have been widely debated since the moment the air strikes began, its impact on intra-CIS developments and policies of CIS member states, including Russia, on the post-Soviet space remained largely outside the focus of analysis. Such an approach appears to be erroneous, for some visible or latent processes, triggered by NATO actions, in future may well become an issue on the European security agenda.

Although, generally speaking, the CIS was affected by the Kosovo crisis in a many-fold and contradictory way, one critically important result does not raise doubts. After the 1999 war practically all the CIS states explicitly or implicitly realised that use of military force in order to achieve political goals became openly possible, not to say - required, in present-day Europe. Many of them started to shape their security and defence policies correspondingly. Concrete steps naturally varied from country to country, but the common process of creating, or strengthening, or allying oneself with somebody else's, power capabilities, was activated.

This paper intends to draw a general picture of how the post-Soviet space responded to the challenge of the war in Kosovo.

The war in Kosovo revealed further the lack of whatever homogeneity among the CIS states and increased centrifugal trends within the Commonwealth.

The need to take an official stand on the issue of NATO bombings of Yugoslavia puts all the member states and, consequently, the CIS as a whole, into a situation of a hard choice. Factors that were to be taken into account contradicted each other while goals of the Operation could be – and were – interpreted as beneficial for interests of some states, but totally detrimental for the others.

On the one hand, the newly-independent states of the CIS have found, or have been looking for, their own role and place in the international relations within the framework of the world order of the 1990s, where leading role of the UN and OSCE in crisis management was an axiom and where state sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders etc. were recognised as a supreme value. The practical revision of these principles, started by NATO actions, threatened to undermine many achievements of the state-building in the NES. On the other hand, by March 1999 a number of NIS, GUAM group in particular (Georgia Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova) has already chosen a pro-Western security orientation and in some of their capitals even thoughts of eventually joining Western security alliances have strengthened. This orientation demanded from them to show understanding, let alone - support, of NATO steps. Furthermore, the consent of these states to approve military intervention was apparently connected with expectations to receive political, or, maybe, economic dividends. At the same time a collision was going deeper between this group and those states, led by Russia, which either had their own conflict agenda with NATO (Belarus) or had no chance to see NATO coming to their security assistance in the foreseeable future (Tajikistan).

Another dividing line separated CIS states depending on whether and how they were involved into numerous ethno-political conflicts on the post-Soviet space. NATO de facto acted as a military ally of secessionist forces and, later on, carried out an operation of

separation of Kosovo from Yugoslavia¹ Of course, this was highly sensitive for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova as long as expressing political support to NATO would under the circumstances contradict the imperative to preserve their own territorial integrity (in Armenia the events in Kosovo would by definition be received differently). However, paradoxically enough, the very precedent of using force against one of the sides in conflict provided grounds – for the Georgian leadership for example – to hope for the similar solution in Abkhazia. Assistance to the central government looked quite within reach, if the formal criteria that had determined the use of force, would have coincided, i.e. if the opposite side could be portrayed as having demonstrated behaviour, unacceptable for the West (ethnic cleansing etc.)² Biased character of the Western decision, denial to universally apply the “liberal values” – Serbia is not the only country in Europe where minority rights are not fully guaranteed – could only strengthen this viewpoint and so did hopes for personal connections with Western leaders or a “democratic” image.

Religious factor was a point of special concern. Although the conflict between Serbs and Albanians was predominantly ethnic, rather than religious, it was widely seen as a confrontation between the Orthodox Church and Islam which was relevant to the CIS with its division into “Muslim” and “Christian” countries.

No wonder that in this situation the CIS could not arrive to a common approach towards the war in Yugoslavia. Belarus blamed NATO most radically and expressed readiness to provide Belgrade with military technical, not only humanitarian assistance, which was the view of Russia. Azerbaijan found itself on the other extreme; Baku not only from the very beginning demanded withdrawal of Yugoslav troops from Kosovo, but offered its soldiers to be sent there to serve in the Turkish peace-keeping battalion. All other states were between these two poles. The CIS summit on April 2, 1999 found a very amorphous formula. On a closed session, according to president *Yeltsin*, it urged “to stop the bloodshed”³ and demonstrated an intention to contribute to “just peaceful solution”.

Russia’s failure to consolidate the CIS on the Kosovo issue once again demonstrated its falling influence inside the Commonwealth. Furthermore, the value of Russia’s security guarantees and its very ability to act were challenged. Famous *Yeltsin’s* “we will not let them touch Kosovo” was openly ignored by NATO. In the course of domestic political debate the government recognised that it had no plan how to prevent Kosovo model being applied to the post-Soviet space.⁴

¹ In this context, it would be very interesting to analyse the reaction of non recognized states on the territory of the CIS (Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabakh, South Osetia, Transdnistria) and political movements, potentially able to launch separatist struggle. However, available materials are insufficient.

² This is why in summer 1999 Georgia wanted to have the UN Security Council include into its resolution on Abkhazia a formula on facts of ethnic cleansing of Georgians. The attempt, however, was not successful.

³ Quoted in *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, n. 5, 1999, p.55. Obviously, this differs strikingly from Russia’s own position which condemned the aggression and even froze its relations with the Alliance.

⁴ On March 27, 1999, Foreign Minister *Ivanov* during the extraordinary session of the parliament was asked a question what Russia would do, if NATO started bombing *Tiraspol*, *Sukhumi* or *Stepanakert* (capitals of non-recognized breakaway republics). Minister answered: “We will do everything to prevent it” which sounded totally inadequate to the atmosphere in the Duma and to the situation in general. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 1 April, 1999.

The CIS military-political space was irreversibly divided into two parts.

In April 1999 Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan formally withdrew from the Collective Security system, based upon the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty of 1992. The intention of the three states to make this step was known beforehand but their final decision not to prolong participation in the treaty symbolically coincided with the bombing campaign. The number of treaty members fell to 6 (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan).

Russia-centred system is based upon Russian armed forces and their capabilities as a central element, Russia's bilateral defence co-operation with armies of several CIS countries, co-operation in defence procurement and, last, collective mechanisms of the Tashkent treaty. The crucial role of Russian forces can be seen everywhere – from nuclear guarantees to unassisted peace-keeping in Abkhazia to protection and defence of the Tajik-Afghan border, let alone military-technical assistance provided to allies. Bilateral defence co-operation develops unevenly: it reached a culminating point in case of Belarus (see below) where a coalition is clearly emerging, while initiatives, engaging other countries, largely remained on a declaratory level. Co-operation in arms production is deeply rooted in the inertia of the post-Soviet integration and its cementing role will be, therefore, gradually eroding parallel to general decrease of intensity of post-Soviet co-operation ties.

The Tashkent treaty, a very amorphous body, which failed not only to create integrated structures of a defence alliance, but even to rise into a working coalition, still faces fundamental problems in defining its mission. It does not have a unifying security agenda, not to say a threat which would be a common priority for all. While Belarus and to a considerable extent Russia, especially after Kosovo, are concerned with developments westward of their borders, Asian members of the Tashkent Treaty (as well as Uzbekistan, for this matter, its withdrawal from the treaty notwithstanding) - and also Russia, are already involved into hostilities with Islamic extremists. Resources of Russia are insufficient to finance and fulfil both missions. It is likely in this connection that the future of the treaty is to be a “paper” organisation or to become formally replaced by the System of bilateral or multilateral coalitions with Russia (following the Russian-Belorussian model) or under its patronage which could increase the cohesion inside each of the “mini-blocs”, constituting the new security arrangement.

The future of the Russia-centric security arrangement in the CIS looks as follows. The System can ensure certain security interests of its members (air defence, partial protection against the “southern challenge”, guarantee against a large-scale aggression by means of nuclear umbrella), but its general effectiveness will be limited. Intrusions into Central Asia will continue to take place. Much will depend on the potential adversary. The interaction between the CIS collective security System and Western structures will at best be possible through individual efforts of member states. At worst, it will not take place at all: for the West, it seems more attractive to engage the CIS countries into bilateral or NATO-sponsored programs individually, while the value of the CIS collective security System as an institutional partner is very low.

The GUUAM “five” (Uzbekistan joined the group in April 1999) already now appear to be a bit more cohesive in planning its mission, although neutral status of Moldova on the one hand and complicated security agenda of Uzbekistan place certain constraints. GUUAM's dynamics are linked with the need to ensure common interests in the sphere of “new” energy transit, threats to territorial integrity of the four founding members which are interested in having at least limited power potential for their neutralisation, accentuated differences

concerning national security interests from those of Russia and, last but not least, Ukraine's ability to play a limited leading role in dealing with particular military or military-technical questions (if outside financial back up is provided).

All these factors pre-determine GUUAM's pro-Western security orientation. In 1998 Ukraine even tried to institutionalise relations with NATO and reach an agreement on regular consultations in "16 + 4" format (the initiative failed due to hesitance of NATO and the approach of formally neutral Moldova). In April 1999 GUUAM declared intentions to develop co-operation with NATO within the PfP and EAPC. Remindworthy, the declaration was made at the NATO Washington summit which as whole could not be taken out of the context of the war in Yugoslavia and deterioration of the Russia-NATO relations.

Practical military-political activity of GUUAM is mostly connected with co-operation between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine which, besides regular consultations of the military, are creating a joint peace keeping battalion whose function will be to protect the transit of oil through the territories of Azerbaijan and Georgia. In addition, these countries actively promote individual relations with NATO or its member countries. Georgia revealed its plans to apply for full NATO membership in 2005 and started to shape its defence policy correspondingly. In 1999 Georgia took part in 165 PfP events, including 9 multinational exercises.⁵ Azerbaijani Foreign Minister *Guliev* was reported to say that *Baku* planned to form a military-political alliance with Ankara and *Tbilisi* and confirmed the possibility to deploy a NATO base in his country.⁶ In March 2000 *Kiev* hosted an unprecedented session of the North Atlantic Council, while Ukraine's parliament adopted a legislation allowing to use the site in *Yavoriv* as a NATO training centre (although these actions, as well as some others, were partly intended to repair the damage to NATO-Ukraine relations, done by the bombing campaign, see below).

GUUAM's security co-operation, contrary to economic dimension, can bring sustainable results. First, the bloc can mobilise resources to solve concrete tasks. Second, it is a convenient vehicle for the Western security structures to strengthen their presence on the post-Soviet space without falling into an open confrontation with Russia (as it would be in case of plans, for example, to enlarge NATO to include any CIS states). At the same time, if the West for any reason decides not to stimulate GUUAM, its goals are to remain mostly declarations.

Revitalising the United Air Defence System of the CIS

The United Air Defence system of the CIS was Set U in February 1995 and initially included 10 member states. Before the war in Kosovo, developments within the system mostly reflected the drift towards the division of participating countries into two groups. While Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and some other members of the Tashkent Treaty gradually proceeded towards higher interoperability and were jointly on combat duty, others (Ukraine, for instance) were nearly lethargic.

The war in Yugoslavia exposed the need of all states to have a reliable air defence System in the situation when none of them could run one independently. As a result, if annual exercises on a Russian test site in Astrakhan in August 1999 secured participation of only 5 member countries, in August 2000 there were already 7 countries coming, including Ukraine (in addition, Azerbaijan was among the observers).

⁵ *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 27 April 2000.

⁶ *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 16 February 2000.

This form of co-operation remains attractive as long as it is very flexible (national forces stay under control of respective national authorities, unless they wish to join the efforts and structures) and allows the countries to define forms of their participation (from exchange of information to joint duty).

At the same time even the United Air Defence has no guarantees of its progressive development. It is too strongly connected with the CIS tradition, with its low-effective decision-making, let alone implementation. For years, it has not been properly financed. Finally, as soon as the immediate impact of the Kosovo factor is overcome, the difference in basic foreign policy and security orientations of the member countries will increase once again and the impact of centrifugal forces may prevail.

A clear anti-NATO accent (re)appeared in the Russian defence policy

Time coincidence between NATO enlargement to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic and the aggression against Yugoslavia gave a lot of credit to the voice of those forces in Russia that had been for years alarming the public opinion about the expansionist nature of the Alliance and demanding the country should protect itself from NATO threat first and foremost. Since March 1999 the influence of this viewpoint has grown considerably.

Even in spring 2000, one year after the strikes, according to an opinion poll, conducted by the Russian Public Opinion and Market Research Institute, there are no people in Russia who totally trust NATO. Only 5,7% of those polled trust NATO “to a certain degree“ while 59,7% do not trust it at all.⁷ In August 2000, a survey of highly-authoritative All-Russia Centre for Public Opinion Studies (VTsIOM) demonstrated that 54% of respondents agreed (definitely “Yes” and rather “Yes”) that Russia had grounds to be afraid of Western countries that were members of NATO, while only 32% disagreed (definitely “No” and rather “No”).⁸

In June 1999 large-scale command and staff exercises “*Zapad (West) 99*“ were held to train Air Defence troops and the Baltic Sea Fleet to defend the *Kaliningrad* special area and objects on the Kola Peninsula against massive air strikes. Russian strategic bombers were sent with a training mission to areas near Iceland and the Norwegian Sea.

More importantly, conceptual changes in Russian threat assessment, brought about or re-affirmed as a result of the war in Kosovo, were codified in the new Russian military doctrine, adopted in April 2000. Several provisions of this document are so directly linked with the events in Yugoslavia in 1999 and NATO enlargement that they deserve to be quoted in full. “Attempts to weaken (ignore) existing mechanisms of ensuring international security (UN and ISCE first of all)” and “use of military and power actions that circumvent universally recognised principles and norms of international law, as a means of “humanitarian intervention” without the authorisation of the UN Security Council “are named first and second in a row among the factors that destabilise the existing military-political situation (point I.3). Among the military threats to Russia there are “creating (building up) troops (forces) that leads to breaking the existing balance of forces near the border of the Russian Federation and borders of its allies, or in the adjacent seas”, “enlargement of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of military security of the Russian Federation”, “entry of foreign troops in violation of the UN Charter into territories of states, neighbouring and friendly to Russia” (point I.5)⁹

⁷ <http://www.russiatoday.com/features.php?id=151143>, visited on 14 April, 2000

⁸ <http://www.polit.ru/documents/309976.html>, visited on 8 September, 2000

⁹ Full text of the doctrine quoted in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 April 2000

Under these circumstances, particularly taking into account the mood of the public opinion, it will be very difficult to restore Russia-NATO co-operation to pre-Kosovo level, let alone to move it forward.

A strong impulse was given to Russian-Belorussian defence integration

This aspect cannot be taken out of the context of the Russia-NATO relations, touched upon in the previous thesis, however, it has somewhat autonomous dynamics due to specifics of international situation of Belarus and of its own problematic relationship with the West.

In 1999 Russia and Belarus planned to hold more than 60 joint command and staff exercises besides the coalition manoeuvres “*Boevoe Sodruzhestvo-99*”. In the beginning of 2000 Moscow and Minsk agreed to have a joint defence procurement order for 2000 and established a joint inter-state financial-industrial group “Defence systems”. An intrigue emerged when in April 2000 Belorussian president *Lukashenko* hinted that the joint grouping of forces would consist of 300 thousand men. Probably, what is meant here is not military build-up – Russian experts put together Belarus’s army (80,000), internal and border troops (60,000), troops of Moscow Military District together with internal and border units (150,000-170,000) and arrive to the same 300,000 - but growing interoperability and effectiveness.¹⁰

Apparently, after Kosovo Russia and Belarus should be particularly interested in strengthening air and missile defences. Two countries have a joint air defence system since mid-1990s. But in August 2000, for the first time, air defence troops of both countries, in contact with ships and units of the Baltic Sea Fleet, held exercises in *Kaliningrad* oblast to learn the Baltic theatre and the Western direction in general (before similar exercises used to take place on a Russian test site in Astrakhan). In addition, Russia builds an early warning station in *Gantsevichi* which should become operational this year (as agreed, Belarus will not charge Russia any rent at least for 25 years of lease).

A project of a trilateral Russian-Belorussian-Yugoslav Union was put onto political agenda

Although practical implementation of this idea at the moment looks totally unrealistic and impossible, it does not exclude political demonstrations of different kind which will, again, add to influencing the public opinion in an anti-Western tone.

In April 1999 Russian political class produced a mixed reaction on the application of Yugoslavia to join the Union of Russia and Belarus. On the one hand, the Russian Duma by a large margin of 293 votes against 54 endorsed the decision of FRY parliament on joining the Union and recommended to the Russian government to consider practical questions related to implementation of this decision. On the other hand, criticism, voiced primarily by the Russian governors who were at that time also members of the upper chamber of the Russian legislature, proved to be sufficient to influence president *Yeltsin* to speak against “quick” actions on founding the trilateral Union. Opponents mostly emphasised two points: first, that Union might drag Russia into the warfare on the Yugoslav side and, second, that supporting the “orthodox” side in the conflict would threaten to undermine ethnic and inter-confessional peace inside Russia.

¹⁰ See *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 April 2000

Moscow also has to take into account that at the moment allying itself with the Belgrade regime would strongly worsen the prospects of Russia's economic co-operation with the Western countries, would lead to deterioration of relations with the leadership of Montenegro, contacts with which are upheld, and would make it harder the task of transition towards a single Russian-Belorussian state, which constitutes an important foreign policy imperative of itself.

Ukraine-NATO relations were damaged

Ukraine's reaction to the NATO bombing campaign is most interesting not only for among the CIS states Ukraine is geographically closest to the Balkans, but also because its co-operation ties with NATO were most-advanced. Nevertheless, these ties were considerably damaged. Although since the spring of 1999 the official Kiev has successfully done a lot to camouflage the negative impact and, furthermore, much has been achieved by both sides to further develop the interaction, it is likely that it will take long before Ukraine's political elites and its public opinion will once again start seeing NATO as a European security "provider and guarantor" only.

The events demonstrated that, contrary to Ukraine's expectations, NATO in the course of its decision-making was not inclined to take into account the position or interests of Ukraine, whether or not Kiev wished to admit this. First, the bilateral Charter on Distinctive Partnership of 1997 was openly violated. The Charter contains provisions according to which the sides agreed not to use force or threat of force against any state in any way which would not be compatible with the principles of the UN Charter or Helsinki Final Act, to recognize rights of all states to choose and use their own means of ensuring security, to respect sovereignty, territorial integrity of all states and inviolability of borders, to prevent conflicts and settle disputes by peaceful means according to principles of UN and OSCE (article 2).¹¹ Later, Ukraine's attempts to mediate in the conflict (visit of defence and foreign ministers *Alexander Kuz'muk* and *Boris Tarasyuk* to Belgrade on March 27, president *Kuchma's* message to the Contact Group and the EU Troika, special settlement plan of April 1999) failed. This happened not only because *Kiev* with its open pro-NATO sympathies was an unacceptable mediator for Yugoslavia, but even more so, as experts point out, because from the Western point of view, to "return Russia on board" was more important compared to "keeping Ukraine on board".¹²

Second, a precedent of KLA's political victory, which was made possible due to NATO intervention, may, especially if Kosovo eventually *de jure* secedes from Yugoslavia, encourage those forces in Crimea that may start struggle to achieve separation of the peninsula from Ukraine. Such a scenario should not be excluded, particularly in a broader context of rising Islamic extremism. Indeed, in May 1999 massive violent protests of the Crimean Tartars against the policy of the central authorities took place. Factor of Turkey, ethnically close to Tartars and member in NATO, in the post-Kosovo world would draw a particular attention of radicals.

¹¹ There is an analogy with violating the Russia-NATO Founding Act. However, in Russia this document was always treated sceptically and, therefore, its violation did not come as a surprise. In Ukraine where, on the contrary, words about country's key role in Eastern European security were taken for NATO's real views, many were disappointed to see the difference between the words and deeds.

¹² J.Sherr, St.Main. Russian and Ukrainian perceptions of events in Yugoslavia. Paper F64, Conflict Studies Research Centre, RMA Sandhurst, May 1999, p. 19.

Third, NATO actions exposed Ukraine to a real military risk, related to the Russian naval base in Sevastopol. In case of Russia-NATO armed confrontation NATO would have to take military measures to prevent Moscow using the ships of the Black Sea Fleet in the Adriatic Sea or elsewhere, but that would mean to attack simultaneously objects on Ukrainian territory. Another scenario was connected with Russia violating Ukraine's air space to carry out Operations on the Balkan theatre.

Fourth, the war in Yugoslavia negatively affected interests of Ukraine as a Danube state and directly damaged environmental security of the country.

The results of NATO's neglect towards Ukraine's interests did not take long to reveal themselves. Popular sympathies to the alliance, never unambiguously high enough,¹³ plunged. According to a poll, conducted in April 1999 by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology, only 10% of the population thought NATO's actions were justified while 62% considered them to be an open aggression against a sovereign state.¹⁴ On March 24, the parliament by 231 votes against 43 passed a resolution, in which NATO bombings were blamed as aggression on the ground that Yugoslavia did not threaten any member of the Alliance, and called on the government to review Ukraine's relations with NATO. Speaker *Alexander Tkachenko* even put forward a proposal to provide Yugoslavia with technical (though not military-technical) assistance.¹⁵ Furthermore, the parliament called on the government to prepare a bill on denouncing the non-nuclear status of Ukraine.

A number of steps was taken to promote defence co-operation with Russia. On March 24, under a direct impression of NATO bombings, Ukrainian parliament ratified the basic agreements on the Black Sea Fleet leasing in Sevastopol, which had been awaiting ratification for almost three years and whose ratification was not guaranteed, although at that point already likely for reasons, other than Kosovo. In July 1999 Russia and Ukraine reached an agreement on the use of Ukraine's air space by the Black Sea Fleet. In March 2000, several additional documents concerning daily activities of the Fleet in Crimea were signed. Also, in summer 1999, Ukraine and Russia agreed to count the expenses of the former on repairs of the missile cruiser "Moskva" as a debt payment; as a result the cruiser returned to Sevastopol from *Mykolaiv* shipyards. In fall an analogous scheme was applied to Ukraine's strategic bombers Tu-95 and Tu-160, which Russia had been willing to purchase since long time, but the two sides could not have agreed about the price. In September-October 1999, and then in April 2000, several joint exercises were held. Although all this measures were unable to overcome a general pro-NATO focus in the defence policy of *Kuchma's* administration, they nevertheless made it look more balanced.

Conclusions

NATO war against Yugoslavia produced false expectations and false apprehensions. The former include, on the one hand, hopes of separatists of all kinds that one day they will be able to use KLA experience on drawing the Western public opinion on their side. On the other hand, some governments of Eurasia lost a good deal of realism and ceased to see the distinction between spheres of interest or influence and direct and immediate responsibility

¹³ See O. Potekhin. The NATO-Ukraine Partnership: Problems, Achievements and Perspectives. In: Between Russia and the West: Foreign and Security Policy of Independent Ukraine. Ed. by K. Spillmann, A. Wenger and D. Mueller. Peter Lang, Bern, 1999, pp. 158-161.

¹⁴ *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 27 April 1999.

¹⁵ *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 26 March, 24 April 1999.

for their security, which is highly unlikely to be fully taken upon themselves by their rational Western security partners.

As for the false apprehensions, Russia's return towards inertial patterns of post-Cold War threat assessment, which had been slowly but gradually eroding before Kosovo wider the impact of an imperative to deal with security problems in its south, rather gives rise to scepticism than optimism, regarding the future of European security.

False expectations can be a short-term phenomenon, provided there is a sufficient effort to prove them so. But impeded partnership between Russia and the West is something regrettable for both sides in the situation when both are facing security challenges of the new century.

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