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# **KOSOVO: RUSSIA'S RESPONSE**

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The NATO attack on Yugoslavia has met with a predictably negative Russian response. Moscow is firmly opposed to any attempt by NATO to use force to compel Belgrade to reach a Kosovo settlement. There is a broad-ranging consensus in Russia against NATO intervention. The attack also follows just 12 days after Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic formally joined NATO. Whilst the accession of these three states and the decision to attack Yugoslavia are not connected events, they may well confirm to Moscow her perception that NATO is an aggressive, expansionist bloc which is arrogantly claiming for itself the role of Europe's policeman, and usurping the role of the UN and OSCE. Moscow has been quick to draw attention to the fact that there is no explicit UN mandate for the attack on Yugoslavia, and has also emphasised that there exists no justification in the 1949 Washington treaty for such actions.

Moscow's options are, however, currently extremely limited. Her military and economic weakness imposes enormous constraints on her ability to counter NATO action. Indeed, Russian weakness is one factor that makes vigorous action by NATO against Yugoslavia possible. It is difficult to imagine that NATO would have been so willing to act in this manner if the crisis had occurred when Soviet power was at its zenith in the pre-Gorbachev era.

Her initial options would appear to be confined to the realm of diplomacy. The raising of formal protests in the UN Security Council and the OSCE would appear to be the most likely response. A Russian attempt to push through a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution condemning the NATO action failed. Russia may also attempt to raise protests through the Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Council (EACC) and the NATO-Russia Joint Permanent Council (JPC) set up under the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997. However, none of these actions will dissuade NATO from its current course.

Boycotting and suspension of cooperation with NATO by abandoning consultation within the JPC, and other fora such as EACC, is a more likely option. Russia-NATO cooperation through PFP is already limited, and will become even more so. Russia has now closed down the NATO office in Moscow. It is possible that Russia may also abandon CFE talks, although this is unlikely, as NATO widening increases the incentive for Moscow to agree on new CFE limits. The attitude of the Duma is even more hostile to NATO action than that of the Russian leadership. It is therefore unlikely to ratify START-2 (the ratification debate is due

to begin on 2 April). Possible US withdrawal from the 1972 ABM treaty had already hardened attitudes against START-2.

Beyond these measures it is difficult to see what more the current Russian leadership can do to affect NATO intervention. Russia lacks the military power to come to Yugoslavia's aid. She is likely to continue to propose a diplomatic approach, urging fresh meetings of the Contact Group. She may also even attempt secretly to persuade Milosevic to become more flexible, perhaps proposing that any foreign implementation force in Kosovo would contain a large Russian component. Milosevic is unlikely, however, to accept such a proposal.

The Yel'tsin/Primakov leadership is currently reluctant to risk a major breach with the West. The desire for IMF finance, and various other forms of assistance from western states and international organisations, means that Russia is likely to confine itself to diplomatic protests and possible attempts to relaunch diplomatic approaches to resolving the conflict. The visit undertaken by Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, and Defence Minister Igor Sergeev to Belgrade on 30 March is an example of such an attempt. However, if NATO action intensifies, especially if ground forces are ever introduced, then domestic pressures on the Russian leadership to pursue a harder line against the West will grow stronger. It would be unwise for any Russian leadership to ignore these pressures. Russia's political institutions are fragile, and it is not far-fetched to postulate that a supine Russian response to a significant intensification of NATO actions against Yugoslavia could result in the overthrow of a weak leadership and its replacement by one more willing to confront the West.

Even under the Yel'tsin/Primakov leadership, Russia could move to a more assertive policy. Direct military confrontation would still be unlikely, but arms supplies could be resumed (possibly by elements of the Military Industrial Complex with the tacit approval of the Russian state), despite any UN embargo (Russia may well oppose any renewal of UN arms embargo anyway). The most likely weapons to be supplied would be mobile air defence systems and EW equipment. Moscow is also likely to supply intelligence on NATO to Belgrade. Russian volunteers from extreme nationalist groups may decide to fight alongside their Serb brothers, although this has been opposed by the Russian Foreign Minister. If splits occur between NATO members, with some opposing or becoming lukewarm about the military operation, then Russia may endeavour to create a diplomatic front with these states in order to put pressure on those states that are still committed to the military operation.

Whatever the final outcome of the Kosovo crisis, Russia's relations with the West and NATO will have been substantially soured. The domestic pressures on the current and successive Russian leaderships to pursue a more nationalist and anti-western foreign policy will grow more intense. The perception of NATO as an aggressive, expansionist bloc will grow stronger, as will the perception that NATO could possibly undertake similar operations in parts of the former USSR. NATO embassies in Moscow will be much more closely watched. The climate for western business will be much less hospitable. Hostile perceptions will not just be confined to political elites.

The Russian response to further NATO widening will be even more hostile. Relations with the USA will be the most affected, and Russia will intensify its

rhetorical attacks on the USA as a world gendarme. Russia will continue to argue for a reduction of the US role in European security affairs, and if rifts do develop in NATO, then Moscow may try to exploit any US-West European rift. The temptation for Russia to cultivate relations with states such as China, Iran and India as an alternative to close ties with the West will grow stronger. A future militant anti-western leadership is also likely to pursue closer relations with pariah states such as Iraq and Libya, and will take a more aggressive approach towards selling arms and military know-how abroad. Russian concerns about NATO and US "penetration" of the former Soviet states will intensify. The development of closer security ties between the USA and Azerbaijan may well be seen by Moscow as being in concert with the Kosovo operation as part of a NATO thrust to encircle and isolate Russia. Moscow will be particularly concerned about her "soft underbelly" in Central Asia and especially Kazakhstan. Given the close Russo-Belarusian relationship, it is possible that Russia could deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. Russia's already vehement opposition to the Baltic states' possible accession to NATO will grow. Russia may refuse to accept western money sent regularly to unemployed Russian scientists with "lethal knowledge" and then blame NATO. Russia may also cease cooperation with the West in combating organised crime and drug trafficking.

Domestically, Russia may be tempted to turn away from IMF/Western prescribed reform strategies. Although the current Russian leadership is committed to reaching agreement with the IMF on the release of financial assistance, and desires to reach agreement over Russia's debts, the crisis in Russo-Western relations caused by the Kosovo crisis could induce Moscow to turn its back on the west and Moscow could no longer seek integration into the international economic system. Russia could even decide to default on her debts, which would inflict a major crisis on the international financial system.

## **APPENDIX**

### **CHRONOLOGY OF THE RUSSIAN REACTION TO THE CRISIS**

On Monday, 22 March, Russian Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov said that he hoped that there would be no bombing of Serbia as this "would have an enormous destabilising effect on the situation in Yugoslavia, Kosovo and also Europe and in the World as a whole" (TASS 22 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3490 B/4, 23 March 1999).

According to unspecified but apparently reliable sources Primakov was to fly to the USA on 23 March (Tuesday) in the morning but would cut his trip short if NATO attacked Serbia (Interfax 23, March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3491 B/7 24 March 1999).

Without saying what specific measures would be taken, Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev said that his ministry was ready to respond appropriately if air strikes were carried out against Kosovo (Russia TV, 23 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3491 B/7, 24 March 1999).

On 23 March Sergeyev has warned that strikes at Kosovo may turn into another Vietnam (Interfax 23 March 1999, BBC SWB, 3492 B/2/3 25 March 1999).

24 March (Wednesday) - in a telephone conversation with French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, who requested the call, Yel'tsin strongly protested against the US-led drive to use military force against Yugoslavia (Interfax 24 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3492 B/1 25 March 1999).

On 24 March Primakov announced at the airport, after his return from Shannon, where his trip to the USA was aborted, that he was informed by the USA, 21.00 Moscow time, that it was 98% certain that there will be strikes against Yugoslavia (Russia TV 24 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU, 3492 B/1 25 March 1999). Primakov warned previously "We have been complying with the arms embargo so far..." when asked whether Russia was going to lift sanctions against Yugoslavia (NTV Moscow, 23 March 1999, BBC SWB SU/3492/B/2, 25 March 1999). An hour and forty minutes after Primakov's statement at the airport, Boris Yel'tsin issued a statement in which he condemned the NATO air strikes and called for "an immediate end to this military adventure which threatens the lives of civilians and may cause the situation in the Balkans to explode" (TASS, 24 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3493/ B/1 26 March 1999).

At the end of the meeting with Primakov, Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, mentioned that "Belgrade must be aware of its responsibility" for resolving the Kosovo problem and opt for signing the political agreement drawn up at the Rambouillet talks and that the Kosovo talks must continue (TASS and Russia TV, both 24 March 1999, BBC SWB, 3492/B6/7, 25 March 1999).

At a news conference in Moscow, Ivanov said that the Rambouillet peace documents are "practically null and void" (Interfax 26 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3485 B/9, 29 March 1999).

It was announced on 24 March that the chief Russian Military Representative in NATO, Lt-Gen Viktor Zavarzin, was to be recalled to Moscow (Interfax, 24 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3493 B/4, 26 March 1999). Two Russian signal officers responsible for communication between NATO and the Russian contingent in Bosnia Herzegovina left on 29 March (ORT 29 March 1999).

Very late in the evening (24 March) the chief of the Baltic Fleet press service quoted the Baltic Fleet commander, Admiral Vladimir Yegorov, that the forces under his command are ready to fulfil any order from the Russian defence minister and that 95% of the ships are ready to sail at any moment although the fleet has not yet been put on higher state of readiness (TASS 24 March 1999, BBC SWB SU/3493 B/5, 26 March 1999).

After a "mutual phone call" the presidents of Russia and Ukraine, Boris Yel'tsin and Leonid Kuchma condemned the air strikes against Yugoslavia (Interfax 24 March 1999, BBC SWB SU/3493 B/8, 26 March 1999).

Boris Yel'tsin declared that Russia has unspecified extreme measures at its disposal but it will not use them (ORT 25 March 1999).

Minister of Interior Stepashin, the head of the Federal Counter-Intelligence Service during the first stage of the Chechen conflict, predicted that NATO intervention would fail, as has Russia in Chechnya (ORT 25 March 1999).

Sergey Karaganov, the chairman of the Foreign and Defence Council said that the Russian-American relations will suffer as a result of the NATO action in Kosovo

but that both countries have many common goals and they have to live together (ORT 25 March 1999).

Belarus declared its readiness to accept Russian nuclear weapons on its soil (ORT 25 March 1999, "Vmeste").

The Russian CGS Army Gen Anatoliy Kvashnin said that the KAL supplies drugs to Europe. Kvashnin added that he sent a personal letter to the chairman of the NATO Military Committee, General Klaus Neuman, and SACEUR Gen Wesley Clark, explaining "where, what, how and why" the drugs are supplied (TASS 25 March 1999, BBC SWB SU/3494 B/7 27 March 1999).

Col-Gen Yuriy Baluyevskiy the head of the Main Operational Directorate of the Russian General Staff announced at a press conference that only certain units and formations, including those responsible for information gathering in the conflict area, were put on higher state of readiness (ORT 26 March 1999).

Yuriy Brazhnikov Director of the International Co-operation Department of the Ministry for Emergency Situations, declared that the Ministry has an aviation group on 3 hours stand-by at Zhukovskiy air base in case of humanitarian need (ORT 26 March 1999).

All factions in the Duma support the Russian government position on Kosovo with the leader of Yabloko, Grigori Yavlinskiy, stressing that his party is against any involvement in the conflict (ORT TV 26 March 1999).

On 26 March the NATO information representative in Moscow is told to leave Russia (TASS 26 March 1999, BBC SWB, SU/3494 B/5 27 March 1999).

President Yel'tsin sends Prime Minister Primakov, Foreign Minister Ivanov and Defence Minister Sergeev to Belgrade to seek political solutions (ORT 29 March 1999). Primakov also took with him the heads of the SVR Gen. Trubnikov and of the GRU Gen Korabelnikov (ORT 30 March 1999 and RTS 30 March 1999).

Quoting the Russian Ministry of Defence, Russian TV claimed that the F-117 destroyed over Yugoslavia was shot down by a Russian made defence system "KUB". The program showed a still photo of SA-6 Gainful (ORT 29 March 1999).

Russia began to evacuate their citizens from Belgrade, via Hungary. The first flight, during the night of 29/30 March brought 147 people, with 160 waiting to be picked up in Budapest and the rest ready to leave Belgrade (ORT, 30 March 1999).

Boris Yel'tsin began his annual speech to the Federal Assembly on the state of the country by criticising NATO action in Yugoslavia but added, "The tragic mistake of the American leadership should not result in a prolonged crisis of US-Russian partnership". He emphasised also that Russia would not allow itself to be sucked into the conflict (ORT 30 March 1999).

Boris Yel'tsin and President Aleksandr Lukashenka of Belarus discussed, in a telephone conversation, among others, the situation in Yugoslavia (ORT 30 March 1999).

According to Lt-Gen Aleksandr Rukhsin a representative of the Russian Ministry of Defence at the "Far Eastern Military Region", the Strategic, Command and Staff

Exercises, which are to continue between 29 March and 4 July 1999, are to undergo unspecified readjustment "in connection with the events in the Balkans" (ORT 30 March 1999).

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