

# How Al Gore Set Up Uncle Sam

**H**ow often does the Russian government have to poke Uncle Sam in the eye and rub his face in the dirt before politicians in Washington figure out that Moscow doesn't want to be our good-faith partner?

Vice President Al Gore argued in 1995 that NATO would benefit from having a Russian military delegation set up camp permanently at alliance headquarters in Brussels. It would build trust and smooth relations, Americans were told. When Russia opened its new NATO offices, the United States found an inordinate number of the Russian delegates were GRU military intelligence officers. They came to spy, not to build partnership, but the United States said nothing.

Gore then argued that it would benefit NATO to bring a Russian military force into Bosnia as part of the alliance's IFOR peacekeeping force. And when Moscow couldn't pay to keep its troops there, the administration had the American taxpayers foot part of the bill. The Russians came, they spied, they disrupted. The United States paid and said nothing.

Last month it seemed Gore's bring-the-Russians-into-NATO policy might bear fruit. He had gotten Moscow to persuade Yugoslavia to pull out of Kosovo. The vice president booked himself on TV to take personal credit as NATO prepared to move into the breakaway Yugoslavian province and set up headquarters at the airport in Pristina, the provincial capital.

But Gore's Russian friends would disappoint him. Shortly before NATO's planned June 11 move into Pristina, Moscow rubbed Washington's face in the Balkan mess it had made for itself. Russian General Staff Chief Anatoly Kvashnin contacted Lt. Gen. Viktor Zavarzin, Russia's representative at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Zavarzin happened to be with the Russian contingent of the NATO peacekeeping force in Bosnia. Kvashnin ordered him to devise a plan to wreck NATO's peacekeeping strategy for Kosovo and ensure a Russian military presence in the Balkans: His NATO-provisioned forces simply would drive from Bosnia into Kosovo.

To fool NATO, Russian troops in Bosnia got into their armored vehicles and "kicked up dust around the place where the main forces were stationed, creating among their neighbors the appearance of the customary peace-

keeping bustle," according to *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. "The General Staff made fake communications with our Bosnia contingent, cursing out the commanders for 'burning fuel for nothing' and giving strict orders that they allow no liberties to be taken."

Then, the U.S.-subsidized Russian force collaborated with the Yugoslavian military for further military deception against NATO. A 200-man paratrooper battalion crossed from Bosnia into Serbia. "By agreement with the Yugoslav military," the Moscow paper continued, "it was arranged that to conceal the entry of the 'Zavarzin battalion' into Kosovo, a Serb military convoy would an hour before Zero Hour begin to move out from there to Serbia and in this way manage in the darkness to confuse the NATO people."

The Russian battalion took over Pristina airport, closing all entrances and exits and blocking the runway before NATO arrived. Lt. Gen. Michael Jackson, the British NATO commander who was to have made that very airport his headquarters, was livid, blaming the White House for holding back his forces and letting the Russians sneak in.

Gore's attempted show of statesmanship, on the very week he would kick off his presidential campaign, blew up in his face. Instead of airing live broadcasts of joyous Kosovar Albanians greeting victorious U.S. Marines, CNN showed ecstatic Serbs hailing Russian liberators. Instead of taking personal credit for bringing Russia into the Kosovo peace process, Gore could only sputter on ABC's *Good Morning America*, "Well, the — we didn't know they were going to go right there."

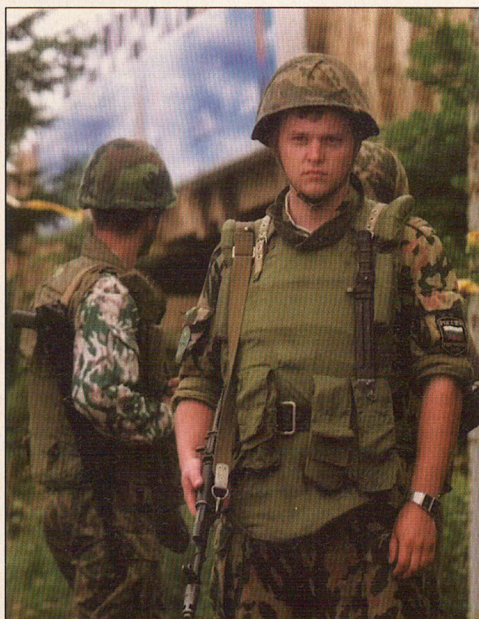
The administration stumbled over itself to attempt damage control. Defense Secretary William Cohen called the Russian force "insignificant." He and the State Department attributed the airport takeover to "confusion" in Moscow.

Washington only has itself to blame for the fiasco. The paratrooper battalion never would have been forward-based in Bosnia to

take over Pristina had it not been for the Clinton administration and for Gore personally, who insisted the Russians be part of the NATO "team." But it was a Republican-led Congress, fecklessly going along with hardly a word of dissent, that provided the cash to pay the Russian troops who seized NATO's planned headquarters in Kosovo.

No doubt the TV pundits soon will be calling upon us to admire the Russians for their creativity with American tax dollars, manipulation of Washington's feel-good strategists who wet themselves at the thought of offending Boris Yeltsin — and their overall chutzpah to kick NATO in the teeth while keeping both hands out for more Western bailouts of their corrupt economy.

By J. Michael Waller



REUTERS

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