

# Moscow's meddling threatens the disintegration of Yugoslavia

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The Balkan nation of Yugoslavia is gripped by a devastating economic crisis, and raging Albanian-ethnic separatist disorders in the Autonomous Region of Kosovo, part of Serbia. The related crises of economy and ethnic separatism have reached proportions threatening Yugoslavia's national existence, and the gravity of the crisis is being publicly acknowledged by the Yugoslav leadership.

At the end of June, the national Communist Party paper *Borba* wrote that, unless something is done soon about Kosovo, "part or the whole of Yugoslavia could turn into another Lebanon" or "another Cyprus." Kosovo could become "another flash point of clashing interests in the Balkans between the blocs and between some [of Yugoslavia's] neighbors." This theme was echoed in a commentary by the Slovenian party paper, *Delo*. Referring to the beginning of Kosovo's troubles with Albanian separatist riots in 1981, *Delo* wrote, "The events in Kosovo touched off the longest and deepest crisis in the history of the new Yugoslavia."

On June 26-27, there was an emergency two-day Yugoslav Central Committee Plenum called to deal exclusively with the crisis in Kosovo. The Plenum drafted measures to attempt to reverse the cumulative effects of six years of highly organized Albanian separatism, steered from neighboring Stalinist Albania with the aim of incorporating Kosovo into a "Greater Albania." The terrorism has involved systematic violence—murder, rape, and beatings—against the region's Serb and Montenegrin minorities. These minorities comprised more than 20% of Kosovo's population in 1981, but the terror has caused a heavy migration, reducing Serbs and Montenegrins to about 15% of the population at present. As the Yugoslav press has repeatedly stressed, the reign of terror has been abetted by means of massive separatist infiltration at all levels of the region's party, government, police, and secret police apparatus.

In Kosovo itself, the Socialist Alliance of Kosovo recently held its 17th local conference, where delegates warned that the continuing exodus of the non-Albanian minorities threatens to produce a civil war situation. "The people of Kosovo do not want civil war, but those who brought us to

this situation do," one delegate said.

The plenum's opening speech was delivered by Marko Orlandic, a Montenegrin member of the Central Committee presidium, who said that the situation posed a "serious threat to the stability of Yugoslavia." He stressed the need to eliminate the "pronounced differences between the leadership of the republic of Serbia and the leadership of Kosovo." Orlandic blamed the increase in "illegal counterrevolutionary activities" on Albanian interference, declaring that the party "will resolutely prevent Albania or anyone else from interfering in Yugoslavia's internal affairs . . . under the pretext of concern over the allegedly endangered position of the Albanian nationality in Yugoslavia."

The 165-member Central Committee formally reached a consensus that Kosovo was Yugoslavia's "gravest moral, social, and political problem." They adopted measures banning any further emigration of Serbs and Montenegrins, declared that everything necessary would be done to restore law and order in the region, and that the party, government, and police forces of Kosovo would be purged of Albanian subversives.

Few Yugoslavs, however, effectiveness of these measures.

## IMF austerity and fragmentation

Underlying the separatist crisis is a devastating economic crisis. At the central committee plenum, a large part of the blame for the unrest in Kosovo was placed on the lack of party unity, which has hindered measures linking Kosovo's economy with the rest of Yugoslavia. The real unemployment rate is almost 55%!

Yugoslavia's foreign debt stands at \$23 billion, and under conditionalities imposed by the International Monetary Fund, no net Western credits have been supplied to Yugoslavia since the early 1980s. The conditions for even periodic debt roll-over arrangements have been severe austerity. This has included the enforced closing of numerous "unprofitable" industrial enterprises, generating high unemployment nationwide. Under IMF-dictated wage austerity, real wages

have dropped substantially, to a point where most working-class families can no longer make ends meet.

In short, since the early 1980s, living standards have collapsed. In the same time frame, new industrial and infrastructural investments have fallen sharply, hitting the more backward eastern regions of Yugoslavia especially hard, such as Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and, of course, Kosovo, which has the highest unemployment rate in the country.

This year, under IMF dictate, Yugoslavia passed a draconian wage law, and a bankruptcy law, which—slated to take effect July 1—is aimed at accelerating the closing down of “unprofitable” enterprises. According to the Belgrade tabloid *Vecernje Novosti*, the new bankruptcy law will affect the 7,031 enterprises that are reported to have suffered losses in the first quarter of the year. This threatens at least 1,600,000 workers!

According to a Yugoslav source, it is certain that the new law will *not* result in the closing of over 7,000 enterprises, but conservative estimates do suggest that at least 200 enterprises, employing some 31,000 workers, will be closed in the immediate future.

In early March, the introduction of the new wage law—pegging wages to productivity—triggered the country’s largest strike wave of the postwar period, involving at least 420 strikes and 60,000 workers.

### **Army takeover not excluded**

The Kosovo crisis has brought the Serbs (Yugoslavia’s largest ethnic group, comprising some 40% of the population) to the boiling point. This situation has very important institutional ramifications, for the Serbs also comprise roughly 75% of the Yugoslav Army’s officer corps, and almost all of the military high command. Beginning in March, calls for the Army to take over in Kosovo began in earnest.

In a March interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, then Yugoslav President Mikulic (Yugoslavia alternates its President every year) raised this prospect himself, warning that if Yugoslavia’s “constitutional order” were threatened, the government would use “all means” at its disposal, adding: “And that includes the Army.”

### **Moscow fishing in troubled waters**

Beginning in mid-June, another element—the Soviets—was added to the Yugoslav crisis, threatening to turn it, in the not-too-distant future, into a full-blown strategic crisis. This occurred through a signal article in the June 17 *Izvestia*, hinting not too subtly, at the possibility of future Soviet intervention into the Yugoslav crisis.

*Izvestia* focused on the Yugoslav economic crisis, and, then using language not heard since the Polish crisis of 1980-81, warned that “anti-socialist elements, steered from the outside . . . are actively trying to rip up the authority of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.” The concluding passages were even blunter: “Today, as never before, the question is

sharply posed, whether Party unity can be maintained. Things have to be done, and done quickly. It’s not hours, but minutes that count.”

Significantly, the *Izvestia* article directly preceded the arrival in Belgrade of Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, and left little doubt as to the real agenda of that visit.

The Yugoslav crisis was again spotlighted in *Pravda* on June 29, in an article on the Yugoslav Central Committee Plenum, emphasizing the “threat to stability” caused by the Kosovo crisis. “Measures taken to date” by Belgrade have been “ineffective.” There has “not been a united view on solving the problems in Kosovo,” and as a result, “instability continues in the region.” *Pravda* cited the worries expressed at the plenum that “especially young people . . . are most influenced by [Albanian] nationalist forces . . . and support them.” *Pravda* also reported that Yugoslavia’s highest unemployment rate was in Kosovo, and finally, reported that the plenum “resolved to study the question of some of the former leaders of Kosovo . . . and their responsibility for the political course leading to 1981.”

The new Soviet media line on Yugoslavia coincides, not by chance, with an emerging pro-Moscow Balkan axis, comprised of Greece (nominally a NATO member), Bulgaria, and Albania. The axis is directed against NATO member Turkey and neutral Yugoslavia. The Greek-Bulgarian axis can be formally traced to last year’s signing of a non-aggression pact by Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu and Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov. The pact contained secret clauses for political-military consultations in the event of “crisis.” Directly following the Yugoslav Plenum, the Greek chief of the general staff, Air Vice Marshal Nikos Kouris, flew to Bulgaria for secret talks at the Bulgarian defense ministry July 1-2. On July 15, Papandreu will travel to Bulgaria to meet with Zhivkov in a town near the border.

The “silent partner” in this axis is Albania. Greece’s treachery to NATO has freed Albania’s “rear,” while Albania directs subversion in Kosovo.

Largely unknown in the West, but very prominent in the minds of the Yugoslav military, is the fact that neither Bulgaria or Albania has ever terminated their 1947 military alliance, an alliance directed at only one “enemy,” Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav military command is quite aware that the ultimate author of these intrigues is Moscow. On June 27, Yugoslav Admiral Simic delivered a speech to the assembled Central Committee, warning that “any hesitation” in cracking down in Kosovo “would be intolerable.” Simic further warned: “In the plans of those who make military exercises in this part of Europe [the Warsaw Pact], Kosovo is envisaged as the point of departure for the disintegration of Yugoslavia.”

Moscow has something to ponder. As the Axis powers of World War II (which included Bulgaria) learned the hard way, intervening in Yugoslavia can get one stuck in a hornets’ nest.