

## British threaten to unleash a new Balkan war in Kosova

by Konstantin George

Hardly had the Iraq crisis been somewhat defused for the moment, than the United States was hit with another strategic distraction, this one in the Balkans. The new crisis, carrying the potential to unleash a new Balkans war, was launched with a political explosion in Kosova, the ethnic Albanian region in the territory of Serbia, whose 90% ethnic Albanian majority has been brutally oppressed for the last nine years by the Serbian regime in Belgrade.

On Feb. 28, Serb paramilitary forces massacred at least 30 Kosova Albanian villagers. The pretext was an ambush the day before, in which four Serb policemen were killed by an ethnic Albanian terrorist outfit known as the Kosova Liberation Army. The Serbian response, ordered out of Belgrade by dictator Slobodan Milosevic, the President of rump Yugoslavia, was reminiscent of actions by Nazi forces in occupied Europe during World War II, where, if German occupation troops were killed, the Nazis would take reprisal by selecting at random and executing 50-100 civilians residing in the area where the attack on the occupation forces had occurred.

The Serbian massacre in the village of Likosane has in turn triggered what could be described as a Kosova *Intifada*, with demonstrations of about 50,000 each on March 1 in the central Kosova Drenica region, at the funeral for the massacre victims, and on March 2, in the Kosova capital of Prishtina.

### The hand of London

Belgrade is the regional executor of this operation, but the strategic responsibility for the Kosova explosion can be traced to London, via two British assets which are nominally opponents of each other:

1. The "Yugoslav," i.e., Serbian, Milosevic regime in Belgrade, which, under British direction, launched the Balkan

War of the early 1990s, and whose ideology has always been to promote a more or less ethnically pure "Greater Serbia."

2. A hard-core terrorist operation on the ethnic Albanian side known as the Kosova Liberation Army (UCK), whose ideology, which demands the creation of a "Greater Albania," belies its British pedigree. In the 19th- and 20th-century history of the Balkans, there has never been a group operating under the banner of "Greater" whatever, that was not a British creation. As the UCK says in its communiqués, this "Greater Albania" would be carved out of not only Kosova, but also other regions where ethnic Albanians predominate: the western third of the Republic of Macedonia, plus a chunk of the Republic of Montenegro, which, along with Serbia, forms rump Yugoslavia.

The UCK, which announced its existence in April 1996, draws financial and other support from the Popular Movement for a Republic of Kosova (LPRK), the leading pro-"Greater Albania" and anti-peaceful resistance underground group in Kosova. The LPRK (formerly LPK, or Popular Movement of Kosova) has functioned as the pro-violence opposition to the dominant movement among Kosova's Albanians, the LDK of Dr. Ibrahim Rugova. Rugova, often called the "Kosova Gandhi" because of his principled commitment to securing Kosova independence through non-violent forms of struggle, until about a year ago had commanded the support of the overwhelming majority of Kosova Albanians.

The LPRK has been funded and supported by "Albanian" intelligence, first under the Communist Enver Hoxha regime, and then under the post-Communist President of Albania, Sali Berisha, a notorious British asset. The Berisha support, including the ferrying of arms into Kosova, has continued since his ouster as President last year, through his clan base of support in northern Albania, bordering on Kosova.

What makes the situation so explosive is the Kosova population's understandable desperation. While Rugova still commands the support of a majority, his support has been waning, especially among the youth. Given the high Albanian birth rates, those 25 and under comprise the majority of the population, and given the Serbians' apartheid policy against Albanians, their situation is the most desperate of all: no hope for a future in Kosova, unless something changes drastically, fast. This situation has produced among the youth—the majority of whose conscious memories has been under the post-1989 Serbian apartheid system—a growing sympathy for acts of violence, and a general impatience with peaceful protest, which youth see as having gone nowhere. This phase-change among the youth, and the decline of Rugova's authority, have provided the context for London to move in with hard-core terrorist operations.

### Strategic stakes for Washington

The Clinton administration is aware of the strategic stakes, should the situation go out of control, and judging from its extremely tough and commendable statements, is providing, thus far, the one ray of hope in this nightmarish situation.

On March 3, U.S. Special Envoy for the Balkans Robert Gelbard issued an unmistakable warning to Belgrade: "President Milosevic is well aware that the United States will not tolerate violence, and violence will be met by the most dire consequences imaginable. That will be the end of his [Milosevic's] government without any question."

The end of U.S. patience with Milosevic is not hard to understand. It was clear that the massacre was a cold-blooded, planned operation, merely awaiting a suitable pretext. Weeks earlier, Serbian paramilitary forces of Bosnian war infamy, under criminals such as Zeljko "Arkan" Raznotovic and arch-chauvinist Seselje, had entered Kosova.

The Milosevic escalation in Kosova came only weeks after he had, by feigning "good behavior," secured U.S. agreement to relax the international sanctions against Serbia, followed by a similar move by Germany. Milosevic believed, or was led by London to believe, that Washington was "weakening" in its stance. This perception was buttressed by the U.S. military buildup and commitment to the Persian Gulf, which stripped down U.S. air and sea assets elsewhere, including from the carrier task force in the Mediterranean. Milosevic calculated that he could move now to impose his solution on Kosova: i.e., through raw terror, force a mass exodus of Kosova Albanians into Albania, Macedonia, and western Europe, without fear of American retaliation.

Milosevic knows, and the experience of the first war in the early 1990s has proven, that if America does not act, no one else will. It didn't take long for this point to be reconfirmed. While Washington was issuing warnings to try and stop a Balkan war, London and its tools in the European Union, behind protests about as tough as a cream puff, were

engaged in business as usual with Milosevic.

The contrast with Gelbard's statement was stark. On March 3, the EU, under its British presidency, condemned the Serbian security forces involved in the massacre, while markedly failing to issue even a *pro forma* warning. What the EU did, namely, approving a visit on behalf of the EU by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook to Belgrade (arrival set for March 5) to meet with Milosevic, was worse than nothing. Then, the EU insisted that EU policy be coordinated with the UN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Russia, and the United States. Since EU policy is, effectively, under the British EU presidency, British policy, this amounted to call for a consensus between Britain and Washington on the Balkans.

Cook's mischief in the region started on March 4, when he arrived in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, for talks with the Bosnian leadership. He went on to Banja Luka, in the Serbian-held part of Bosnia, the Republika Srpska, for talks with its leadership, and with the commander of the British NATO forces in former Yugoslavia, on the military situation there.

### Potential tinderbox for war

This clash between "Greater Serbia" and "Greater Albania" forces, both of which London controls, has the potential to spill over onto the territory of Albania and Macedonia, leading to a broader Balkans war. The victims of such a war would be all the peoples of the southern Balkans: Kosova's Albanians, the Albanians of Albania and Macedonia, Macedonia's Slav majority, Bulgarians, Greeks, Turks, and Serbs, too.

However, the main victim would be the United States. A full-scale war would cripple American influence in the region. It would likely mean war between America's two most important allies in the region, Greece and Turkey, a project that London is working on from at least two angles: via the Balkans crisis, or a renewed Cyprus crisis. War would also smash whatever limited success the United States has achieved in former Yugoslavia through the heavily flawed Dayton Accords.

A new Balkan war, or near-war situation, would also sabotage a U.S.-led effort to create a new international monetary system. As London well knows, a Balkan war could easily be used to manipulate new adversarial relationships among the larger powers, pitting the United States, Russia, Germany, and France against one another in various permutations, thus wrecking even the possibility for Washington and leading Eurasian powers to work together to replace the bankrupt International Monetary Fund-dominated world financial system.

The United States, through the Gelbard warning, has taken a first step to prevent this panoply of horrors from unfolding. This stance must be backed by U.S. military strength, including, if necessary, the dispatch of U.S. ground forces to supervise a solution to the Kosova crisis. The cost would be nothing, compared to the price of allowing a Balkan war to be unleashed.