

'Greater Serbia' gang pushes Yugoslavia toward civil war

by Konstantin George

A cabal of Serbian extremists, whose members include top figures in the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav Army and secret police, is directly responsible for the violence in the first week of May in the Serbian-inhabited regions of Croatia, which has brought Yugoslavia to the brink of civil war. This cabal wants to push the Yugoslav crisis over the brink, with the goal of immediately creating a "Greater Serbia," embracing the republic of Serbia and all districts where Serbs predominate in neighboring Croatia and Bosnia.

Croatian President Franjo Tudjman declared on television on May 4 that Croatia was "on the verge of war," and charged Serbia has not only "supported and encouraged terrorist actions and insurrection," but has even "directly organized the clashes."

What has been occurring in Croatia is not—at least not yet—mass inter-ethnic violence. The death toll ratio of four Croatian policemen killed for every Serbian "militiaman," in shootings that have produced 30-40 killed, is proof that the killings have been staged provocations by professional Army teams, and not "home guard"-style local Serbian militias. The political balance in the Army high command has been destroyed through the grave illness of the moderate defense minister, General Kadijevic, with the Army now under the operational command of the rabid Serbian nationalist, General Adzic, Chief of the General Staff.

The Army ultimatum

On May 6, Croatia made the tactical blunder of staging a mass demonstration in the Adriatic port of Split against the Yugoslav naval base there. The demonstration itself was peaceful, but it unfortunately created the opportunity for the next provocation by the Serbian extremists: Sharpshooters fired and hit two soldiers; one died instantly, and the other, though hit by all three bullets fired at him, survived.

The outrage in Split further tipped the balance in the Army command. General Adzic now had the "bloody shirt" needed to proceed with the next phase of the Serbian cabal's power play. The ailing General Kadijevic was brought from the hospital to chair a meeting of the Army command, where, under the pressure of the Adzic group, he capitulated, agree-

ing to do what he had resisted for weeks: issue an Army ultimatum to the Yugoslav collective State Presidency to proclaim a state of emergency, and to proclaim a partial mobilization of the Army.

Within hours, reservists (almost exclusively Serbs) were being called up, columns of tanks and armored vehicles began moving from bases in Serbia and Bosnia through Bosnia into Croatia, while in Croatia itself key bridges and other installations were seized by the Army. The first phase of what could soon become a Serbian military coup was under way.

In the next 24 hours, two mass killings of Serbs in the Serbian-inhabited region of Croatia were narrowly averted. In the first case, a bomb intended to demolish a café filled with Serbs misfired, and in the second, two rifle grenades, again fired at Serbian civilians, narrowly missed the mark. Again, these near-miss atrocities were the work of individual provocateurs, and not the result of mass inter-ethnic violence.

Croatian and Serbian churches intervene

On May 7, with the Army ultimatum in effect and a crisis session of the State Presidency desperately trying to fashion a reply to it, the first major break occurred in the situation, when the entire leaderships of the Catholic Church of Croatia and the Serbian Orthodox Church, headed by Croatian Cardinal Kuharic and Serbian Patriarch Pavle, appeared on Yugoslav television to issue a joint appeal for peace and harmony among Serbs and Croats.

This unique event gave public evidence of an analysis first published in *EIR* in March, when we wrote that the Serbian elite is split, and that a powerful Serbian Church-centered faction is opposed to civil war, for reasons concerning its own perception of Serbian national interests over the medium and longer term.

The joint intervention by both churches found a deep resonance in the populations of both Serbia and Croatia. Western media accounts of the Yugoslav crisis tend only to portray the phenomenon of mutually implacable hatred between the two ethnic troupes, citing the terrible and real memories of the mass slaughters committed during the Nazi occupation, the internal civil war horrors of 1941-45, by the

fascist Croatian Ustashi and by the Serbian Chetnik extremists. What these accounts fail to mention is that the very horror experienced by these peoples at the hands of cruel, merciless fanatics, has also produced another, very deep emotion in the population, both Serb and Croat, which can be expressed in this way: "As much as I can't stand them, we must never, never, again go through what we experienced from 1942 to 1945. May our children and grandchildren never, never see what we saw."

The actions of the churches may have turned the corner in time to brake the momentum toward civil war. On the morning of May 9, after three days of deliberations, the Yugoslav collective State Presidency announced that an agreement had been reached to defuse the crisis, speaking of "important concessions by Croats and Serbs." Under the announcement, Croatia agreed to disarm all paramilitary groups and demobilize Croatian police reservists who had been called up to meet the Army threat. Similarly, all armed bands of Serbs on Croatian territory are to be disarmed. Finally, the agreement provides for holding direct talks between the republics of Serbia and Croatia to settle the crisis. The disarming of paramilitary groups on both sides will be carried out by the Army.

Weeks of decision

May 19 is the date of a scheduled referendum in Croatia on the future of Yugoslavia, a referendum that will produce a resounding vote in favor of ending the current federation and replacing it with a loosely affiliated league of sovereign states, a referendum which the Serbian cabal is trying to torpedo at all costs. After May 15, the Serbian cabal's "legal" capability to continue to order Army units into Croatia will be gone. The State Presidency, and with that the political command of the Armed Forces, will pass from Borisav Jovic, a Serb, to the Croat, Stipe Mesic.

Simultaneously, Serbia's current assured five "yes" votes on the collective State Presidium, the minimum required for deploying the Army into a republic, will be reduced to four. Serbia had acquired the vital "fifth vote" through a byzantine arrangement made with the centrally located Yugoslav republic of Bosnia, a republic with a Muslim majority and a large Serbian minority. In exchange for Serbia refraining from activating its armed minority in Bosnia, Bosnia had sent an ethnic Serb as its representative to the State Presidency. But after the explosion in Croatia, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic had canceled this arrangement.

This political battle suggests that Bosnia is moving toward becoming the next theater of armed combat, a danger which Izetbegovic specifically alluded to over the May 4-5 weekend. Since then, tensions in Bosnia have been on the rise over the daily troop movements through its territory. Even should the Serb-Croat clash cool off, a major flareup in Bosnia would bring the Yugoslav situation once again to the brink of civil war.

Bangladesh cyclone disaster not 'natural'

This article was based on reporting by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan B. Maitra in New Delhi and Mary Burdman in Wiesbaden, Germany, and was written by Ron Kokinda.

As many as 500,000 people are likely to have died in a cyclone that pounded and flattened the southern coastal areas of Bangladesh on April 29. Nearly a week after the storm, the official death toll stood at 125,000. According to official sources, another 1.3 million people living in coastal areas and offshore islands remain untraceable. Former Vice President Moudid Ahmed stated that 60% of the victims were women and children. A few relief helicopters that could brave the continuing inclement weather have reported hundreds of thousands of human bodies floating in the water—all presumably dead.

In addition, because of the delay in relief efforts to survivors of the storm, "an estimated 4 million people are now at serious risk from lack of fresh drinking water and food," according to the Red Cross/Red Crescent. Cholera had already broken out in the country before the storm, and is now spreading rapidly. The May 9 London *Guardian* reported that in Chittagong, the main city of the stricken area, hospitals are "filled to overflowing." On Hatia Island, there are 2,300 reported cases alone. Diarrhea is a killer disease, especially in so hot a climate, of undernourished children and women. With clean water lacking, the spread of water-borne disease is now the gravest threat.

Addressing the nation soon after the news of devastation began to filter into the capital of Dhaka, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia told her countrymen with a broken voice: "It is a tragedy of great magnitude, surpassing all natural calamities." She appealed for international aid, including capital and technology to cope with the longer-term effects of the disaster.

Yet, in contrast to the estimated losses of \$1.5 billion, only about \$350 million in emergency aid has been pledged so far. Bangladesh has asked for 20 helicopters, 50 jeeps, and 15 ships or other sea transport for the relief operation. But pledges are "inadequate, inappropriate, and even non-existent," a Bangladeshi official told the BBC May 8.

Targeted for triage

The death toll in Bangladesh is not the result of "natural" causes. Since its inception in 1971, Bangladesh has been relegated to the "Fourth World" of nations designated for triage, as stated by the World Bank and the International