

# Danger of war intensifies through the Balkan peninsula

by Konstantin George

A sweeping Balkan crisis of a type not seen in over 75 years, led by the threat of civil war in Yugoslavia, could become reality anytime between June and October. The immediate hot spot is and will remain Yugoslavia, but during the coming months the economic-political chaos in the neighboring countries of Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria, beset by collapsed economies, mass unemployment, and the beginnings of mass fascist-chauvinist movements, will advance toward dangerous thresholds. The most unstable of these situations around Yugoslavia's periphery is Albania, where a national general strike of industry and transport, begun May 15, was still in progress as of May 23, having paralyzed the country.

This overall matrix of upheaval in southeastern Europe will tend to intensify the latest troubles inside Yugoslavia. May 15 was the inflection point. Under the present constitution, the presidency of the Yugoslav federation is supposed to rotate annually among the six presidents of the constituent republics—Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia. On May 15, by this rotation agreement, the post of State President, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, was supposed to have passed by a vote of the collective State Presidency, from the Serb Borisav Jovic to the Croat Stipe Mesic. Instead, a Serbian chauvinist cabal, grouped around Serbia's communist President, Slobodan Milosevic, his "national bolshevik" supporters, and a Serbian extremist faction in the Serbian-run military, created a constitutional crisis by blocking Mesic's election.

The election of Mesic would have paved the way for Yugoslavia to become, as demanded by four republics—Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Macedonia—a league of sovereign states, in a very loose confederation. This transformation has been blocked by a Serbian cabal which insists that either Yugoslavia remain a Serb-dominated federal state, or, under any confederation arrangement, the territories outside Serbia where Serbs live—on the territory of Croatia and Bosnia—be incorporated into a Greater Serbia.

Three sessions, May 15-17, of the collective State Presidency, consisting of eight representatives—the presidents of Yugoslavia's six republics, and of the two autonomous regions ruled by Serbia, Kosovo, and Vojvodina—failed to break a repeated 4-4 deadlock on the vote for Mesic as

President. The numerical deadlock, however, was misleading concerning the true political correlation of forces inside Yugoslavia. In reality, the vote showed that Serbia was isolated. Four of Yugoslavia's six republics, the two western republics Slovenia and Croatia, the central republic of Bosnia, and in Serbia's rear, the republic of Macedonia, lined up solidly against Serbia, leaving only Yugoslavia's smallest republic, tiny Montenegro, aligned with Serbia.

The fears expressed by many Western commentaries that the constitutional crisis would plunge Yugoslavia into a immediate Serb-Croat civil war proved unfounded. Stipe Mesic and the leadership of Croatia handled the affront with commendable statesmanship. As early as May 15, Mesic was on Yugoslav radio proclaiming that the crisis was "not an inter-ethnic conflict" but a crisis caused by "Bolshevik Serbian expansionism," and, contrary to threats he had issued prior to May 15, that should he fail to be elected, he would hold a press conference in the Croatian capital of Zagreb proclaiming Croatia's secession from Yugoslavia, nothing of the sort materialized.

Croatia's May 19 referendum, where 94% voted in favor of Croatian independence within a "league of sovereign states," was not the alleged inflammatory secessionist move portrayed in some Western media, but another example of moderation. This was shown in statements made by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, May 20: "I repeat that we want an alliance of sovereign states within the framework of Yugoslavia, if this is possible. If this is not possible, then we want complete sovereignty and complete independence." Stepan Mesic on the same day, quashing speculation that Croatia would bolt from and thus immediately break up Yugoslavia, stated: "Disassociation is a long and drawn-out process . . . of continuing negotiations with Yugoslavia's other states on the future shape of the [Yugoslav] community." Since basic agreement on this "future shape" had already been reached with everyone except Serbia, Mesic was clearly saying that Croatia still retained confidence that the crisis could be resolved through talks with Serbia.

This confidence of Mesic and other Croat leaders was not illusory. After the breakdown of the collective State Presidency, on the weekend of May 18-19, Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante

Markovic, a Croat, succeeded in creating a Coordinating Committee drawn from the federal cabinet, to run the country until the constitutional crisis was resolved. Notably, the agreement was concluded with the anti-civil war faction in the Serbian elite, and the leading Serbian cabinet members, Gen. Veljko Kadijevic, the defense minister, and Gen. Petar Gracanin, the interior minister, joined the Coordinating Committee.

At this juncture, a dangerous crisis existed and persisted, the danger of civil war had not been removed; but there was certainly hope for at least a short-term solution avoiding the ultimate horror of civil war. Then George Bush intervened.

### **Bush intervenes: back to square one**

As in past history-making Balkan crises, what could send the situation out of control is the deadly mixture of home-grown instability and consciously evil manipulation of the regional crisis by outside forces, headed by the Bush administration and its controllers in London. It is the escalation of this latter factor, and not the failure of Yugoslavia to elect a new State President and solve its constitutional crisis, as such, which threatens to make the Balkans again, as in the decade prior to World War I, the "Powder Keg of Europe."

On May 20, the U.S. State Department announced that all U.S. aid to Yugoslavia had been suspended, and that the United States would veto all International Monetary Fund loans to that Balkan country. The U.S. veto means that Yugoslavia will not get a \$1.1 billion IMF standby loan, and thus no foreign loans in 1991, as the \$3.5 billion in foreign loans that had been lined up were all contingent on the IMF first agreeing to the standby credit. This could push Yugoslavia over the edge.

State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutweiler on May 22 claimed the American move was prompted on behalf of "human rights," citing the Serbian leadership's "severe repression in the Kosovo Province." Serbia "has not conducted full, fair, and free elections, and is now acting to destabilize the Yugoslav Presidency," she said. A more than strange explanation, as Serbia has been conducting "severe repression" in Kosovo for a good three years, and the Serbian elections the State Department just discovered, were held last December. The State Department had no "explanation" to justify why all six Yugoslav republics were being subjected to U.S. economic warfare.

The effect of the U.S. policy will be to radicalize the Serbian people behind the extremist cabal, whose former popularity had waned sharply since last autumn. The media outlets controlled by Serbian extremists, such as Serbian TV—which had failed to mobilize mass support for a "crusade" against Croatia—were handed just the issue to rekindle Serbian chauvinist passions. Serbian TV on May 22 raved that the American move was a "special war" against Serbia on behalf of Croatia, to support the "radical goals" of Serbia's opponents through "force and foreign interventions."

The Croatian government of Tudjman denounced the

U.S. move for punishing "innocent republics" for "Serbian chauvinism," and federal Prime Minister Markovic warned that if Washington didn't revoke its measures, then Yugoslavia was doomed to "international isolation" and "economic catastrophe."

Could it have been a coincidence that the State Department dropped its "bombshell" during the Washington tour of Serbian Crown Prince Alexander, the claimant to the Yugoslav throne, who had arrived from his exile residence in London? It was precisely on May 20 that Alexander was addressing the National Press Club in Washington, confidently presenting his perspective of Yugoslavia's descent into total chaos, which would create the atmosphere for the restoration of the monarchy in Belgrade, i.e., a return to the pre-1941 state of affairs, of a monarchical "Greater Serbia" serving as a pawn to British interests.

In a recent issue, the German weekly *Neue Solidarität* warned that if the Balkans go up in flames, Western Europeans will have their own moral indifference to blame.

"For decades the West Europeans have stood idly by as the Yugoslavs have been subjected to the same International Monetary Fund austerity policies as those which destroyed the majority of the Third World countries. That is shown now, among other things, by the catastrophic condition of the country's infrastructure." The paper decried "shameless efforts by the Austrians to force the Yugoslavs to shut down their only nuclear power plant (a modern American model). It seems the Austrians and West Europeans only want to have a poor, backward southeastern Europe, where they can go on cheap vacations."

It went on, "If we want to stop a new European catastrophe, we must reverse this policy at once. Nothing is more apt for this than to implement the 'Productive Triangle' program" of Lyndon LaRouche. The Balkan states lie precisely in two of the most important "development corridors" expanding out from the Triangle: **The Danube Arm**, which connects the Western European industrial heartland with Southeast Europe and the Black Sea, via the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal; and **The Southeastern Arm**, with rapid rail lines for freight and passenger transport: Munich-Vienna-Ljubljana, and Zagreb-Sofia-Istanbul. This would revolutionize overland freight transport to the Mideast.

A political statement of intent to get the Productive Triangle going full-swing right away, would have a vital stabilizing effect on Yugoslavia and the entire Balkan region. "Then, money would have to start flowing and the construction get under way. There is no more time to lose."