

New Suez crisis over U.S. moves in Balkans

by Katharine L. Kanter

The cat is out of the bag. When, on Nov. 12, the United States made effective at midnight the President's decision to stop monitoring breaches of the arms embargo which had been imposed upon Bosnia and Croatia in 1992, London and Paris erupted in vitriolic spite.

Three supposed partners of a single military treaty alliance, NATO, are actually fighting on opposite sides of a major war on the European continent: England and France alongside Serbia, the United States alongside Bosnia.

The events of the last weeks, marked by increasingly open U.S. support to the Bosnian war effort, are being frankly discussed as the "beginning of the end of NATO" by military analysts such as Jacques Amalric in Paris, who have their ear firmly pressed to the keyhole of the gods. England, wrote Amalric, is "the European country most conscious of the [end of NATO] and the one where the most interesting and the most disingenuous advocacy for a common European defense can be heard." Both French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé and his British colleague Douglas Hurd, made similar statements.

Although every effort is being made to write off Clinton's move as nothing but a sop thrown to Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and the new Republican majority in Congress, the reality is that neither the French nor the British were forewarned of what was about to take place in the Adriatic on Nov. 12, and they are spitting with rage.

By the weekend, the Paris "newspapers of record" were running headlines such as "The U.S.A. Dumps Europe" and "A Dirty Trick Pulled by the U.S.A." Ants swarmed out of official anthills such as the Inter-Army Operational Center (COIA) in the French Defense Ministry, and broke anthill rules by speaking, albeit under cover of anonymity, to the press: "We were not informed in any way beforehand of the U.S. decision . . . the United States is showing a complete lack of solidarity with the allies. The decision was taken without the slightest discussion of analysis about the effect this will have on . . . the terrain, but also especially, on the chains of command."

The American "contribution" to the arms embargo involved two frigates in the Adriatic, 8 of the 11 AWACS planes (the others being British and French), as well as satellite information and intelligence from special operations. What is critical here, is that Clinton has decided *not* to share intelligence with England. The so-called Anglo-American

chain of command, which notably does include secret intelligence, and from which the French, as junior partners, have been benefitting, has been broken. Is Clinton naive in intelligence matters? Is he just "muddling through," as the British claim? At a background briefing to the American press to announce the decision, a "senior defense official" commented on the relevant provision of the Nunn-Mitchell Amendment, namely, that the United States will no longer pass intelligence to other NATO countries about arms shipments bound for Bosnia, as follows: "If we inspect the cargo and find the ship is exclusively carrying . . . arms for Bosnia, we are not allowed to report on the issue of what the cargo was. We must remain silent. That's the key word—we must remain silent on that point."

This briefing, which found its way into the *New York Times*, is the means by which England and France found out about the U.S. decision—*after* the *Times* came out. So we can probably exclude "naiveté" and "muddling through" from the American move, which has implications far beyond the war in Bosnia. These, Douglas Hurd doubtless did not fail to draw to the attention of U.S. Ambassador to London Adm. William Crowe, when he scuttled over to the U.S. Embassy on Nov. 11. Hurd emerged, sputtering something about how the admiral had been "most unclear about the instructions which had in fact been given to the American NATO contingent in the Adriatic."

On Nov. 18, at Chartres, France, the Franco-British summit opened. Although the British side has since tried to downplay the thing since press leaks in *Le Monde* caused considerable embarrassment, military cooperation of the most far-reaching kind in "areas of mutual concern" such as Africa, not to speak of the Balkans, were top on the agenda. An agreement had already been signed for joint Special Forces deployments, and there was talk of a joint Air Force, of joint nuclear patrols, and even, of the "germ of a joint General Staff." But Clinton gave them plenty more to discuss. The French permanent representative to the Western European Union, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, told the press that the Western European Union "can no longer be a body subordinate to NATO. Defense means a political project. Logically, the WEU should become the armed hand of the [European] Union."

Hastily dropping the pretense of a split between Serbia and the so-called Bosnian Serb regime in Pale, the British and the French have reacted and regrouped their forces—i.e., the Serbians. By Nov. 13, seven thousand additional JNA (Yugoslav Army) soldiers were being rushed over the northern corridor to the Bihac front, to join a three-pronged offensive on the city from the north and the east, which forces include the Bosnian renegade militia of Fikret Abdic, and from the south-southwest out of Serbian-occupied Croatia.

Bihac is a Unprofor "security zone" upon which howitzer, tank, and mortar fire has been raining for a week, as of mid-November, out of the Krajina in Serbian-occupied

Croatia. Fighter bombers have taken off from the Krajina and bombed Bihac. Unprofor Command has claimed that they are "unable" to disarm the Serbian forces inside Croatia, and that they are "unable" to enforce the air interdict against Serbia, because its planes take off from occupied Croatia, which is not subject to the interdict! By refusing to force its food convoys through, Unprofor has ensured that since June, only 630 tons in total of food has gotten through to the 300,000 people in the Bihac area. This amounts to one kilo (2.2 pounds) of food per person in five months.

Thanks to this, and other aid of the most-secret variety, from the British and the French, the Serbians, who now have the Bosnian 5th Army Corps outnumbered almost 3 to 1 in the Bihac pocket, have retaken perhaps 200 of the 250 square kilometers which the 5th Corps took back in October at the cost of great sacrifices. That this offensive by Serbia has also the aim of "showing the Americans what's what," was stated baldly by a French officer from the Unprofor General Staff to *Libération*. Gloating at the discomfiture of a nation of 3.5 million people, the officer said: "The Bosnian Army is doped up by its recent successes and the U.S. move, even turning arrogant! But Unprofor will not clear out so fast! The weight of the U.S. gesture will be measured tit for tat by the Serbian response. . . . The Serbians were caught off guard by the Bosnian offensive, but, when they started to bomb Bihac on Thursday, you could see that they are well back on the attack."

President Clinton's decision has come none too soon. According to reports finally made public in mid-November by the German Institute for Russian Studies (ISO), Russia has, over the last few months, quite emptied its arsenal withdrawn from East Germany, into the Serbian war effort. It is believed to have sent in, on 4,000 rail cars, an unknown number of ultra-modern missile launchers (15 km range), 300 BMP 2 armored vehicles, and 50 self-guided missiles, *inter alia*. Officially, however, there has been little said in Russia concerning Clinton's move, save that it is "worrying."

Over the week of Nov. 14, while attempting to defend Bihac and the Gremec Plateau in the West, the Bosnian Army moved on occupied Donji Vakuf; the aim has been to break through toward Jajce and the Bihac-Kljuc-Jajce road, which would allow the 5th and 7th Bosnian Corps to cut off the supply lines to Serbian-occupied Croatia. A state of emergency has been declared in Mostar—another area supposedly under European Union administration—due to heavy Serbian attacks. All schools in Mostar have been closed and street gatherings forbidden.

Lamentably, the government of Franjo Tudjman in the Croatian capital Zagreb has done little save grunt, faced with the Serbian offensive upon Bihac which has been mounted out of Serbian-occupied *Croatian* territory. Without a full-scale military commitment by Zagreb to reconquer its own occupied territories and to succor the Bosnian Army on its border, both Bosnia and Croatia will lose the war.

Algeria plunges into civil war

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

On the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the war of liberation against colonialist France, Algeria is plunging into a civil war with the full backing of certain sectors of the French elite. Although from a strictly military point of view it is an illusion to think that the state forces can wipe out an opposition which has vast popular support, the government and military are gambling precisely on a quick, bloody victory.

Algerian President Liamine Zeroual announced on Nov. 1 in a televised speech commemorating the anniversary of the liberation war, that the dialogue with the Islamic Salvation front (FIS) had been aborted. Zeroual blamed one of the two FIS leaders released from jail, but under house arrest, Ali Benhadj, for the decision, charging that Benhadj had incited the Armed Islamist Group militants to pursue armed struggle. Abassi Madani, the older of the two FIS leaders, dispatched a letter to Zeroual the following day, urging him "to demonstrate his wisdom, to remain the man of the solution and not to lead his people to the same impasse as his predecessors had done." That day, however, the Interior Ministry issued a declaration that it was "determined to annihilate" those responsible for terrorism and violence.

What prepared public opinion for the escalation was an atrocity of unprecedented brutality. During the Nov. 1 commemorations of the liberation war against France, at the cemetery of Mostaganem, a bomb exploded, killing five children who were honoring the national heroes. Television crews on the scene flashed the images across the nation's TV sets, and the government seized on the deaths, immediately attributed to the Islamists, to justify its crackdown.

The FIS responded in an unusual manner, denouncing the assassination, and directly implicating the government in the bloody deed. In a declaration circulated in Europe, the FIS executive abroad characterized it as a "massacre which had targeted the tombs of freedom fighters and had killed innocent children in an ignoble manner." The release also referred to passages in Zeroual's speech, given the evening before the bombings, which allegedly "alluded to acts leading to assaults on the graves of freedom fighters, although"—the communiqué explains—"no such acts have been registered in the past two and a half years." Rather, the allusion recalled desecrations of cemeteries in the period prior to the Algerian elections (1992), which the FIS was poised to win. The FIS communiqué expressed "shock which surprised and frightened us" when the news of the bombings in the cemetery was made