

Turkish-Albanian alliance raises threat of Balkan war

by Konstantin George

The conclusion of a Turkish-Albanian military alliance on June 1, signed in the framework of Bush administration preparations for an "Operation Balkan Storm" military move against Serbia, marks a giant step in the direction of a Balkan war. It has reintroduced the pre-World War I system of Balkan bilateral military alliances, accompanied by the explosive reintroduction of a Turkish military presence in the Balkans.

The alliance was impossible without the blessing of Washington. It followed a visit to Albania by Assistant Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, a close associate of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

The pact is no mere "defensive" agreement. The signing of the Turkish-Albanian Pact in the Albanian capital of Tirana by Turkish Prime Minister Suleiman Demirel and Albanian President Sali Berisha was accompanied by a Turkish declaration resurrecting the military-political doctrine of the former Ottoman Empire, in which Turkey accorded to itself the "right" to militarily intervene anywhere in the Balkans or other neighboring states to protect Muslim populations.

New world order targets Greece

The Turkish-Albanian Pact has made operational the Anglo-American design of assigning to Turkey, their designated regional junior partner, a neo-Ottoman role of dominating the Balkans. This is the Balkan component of George Bush's "new world order." The pact, together with the U.S.-sponsored U.N. sanctions against Serbia, is a coherent strategic package directed against both Serbia and Greece, a nation which has attacked or threatened no one. The economic blockade of Serbia is causing havoc in Greece, which depends on transit routes through Serbia for its overland trade with the European Community (EC), of which it is a member. Some 36% of all Greek exports and 44% of all imports are

transported through Serbia. All pleas for compensation from the EC have fallen on deaf ears.

Greece is being targeted because it is the main obstacle to an Anglo-American-steered Turkish reconquest of the Balkans. Greece, through its strategic geographic position, commands the entrance to the Balkans, and its Armed Forces, after the post-communist disarray of the Bulgarian Armed Forces and the protracted war situation in former Yugoslavia, are the only effective non-Turkish military force remaining in the region. The forces of the new world order, under the cover of punishing Serbia, are striving to redraw the Balkan map. Under this scheme, Greece is slated for destabilization and dismemberment.

Greek leaders and the citizenry are aware that the country is in mortal danger. Greek Prime Minister Konstantin Mitsotakis responded on June 1 to the twin shock of the sanctions immediately followed by the Turkish-Albanian military alliance: "There are dark clouds on the horizon of our national interests. Now, we have to look ahead, because possibly our Fatherland will already soon be confronted with tragic dangers."

Will NATO intervene?

The Turkish-Albanian Pact takes on added significance as the entry point for a possible U.S.-led NATO intervention into the Balkans, because Russia, in a government statement on June 4, ruled out U.N. military actions "of any sort" as a followup to sanctions against Serbia. Russia and France have publicly questioned the validity of punishing Serbia for the continued fighting in Bosnia, most of which has been conducted by ethnic Serbian militias, in many cases outside the control of Belgrade. The Russian statement has doused American plans for military action via the U.N. or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

The Turkish-Albanian Pact overnight converted Albania into a base of operations for Turkey to intervene in the Balkans under a U.S. umbrella. Under the terms of the pact, Turkey has pledged that it will come to the aid of Albania if it were attacked, and would support Albania in a military intervention across the border in the Serbian-controlled and Albanian-inhabited region of Kosovo, should the Kosovo Albanians be attacked by Serbia. Speaking in Tirana, Demirel declared that "whatever happens in Kosovo concerns us." Demirel defined Turkey as the protector of all Muslims on the territory of Serbia and Montenegro: "If anything should happen in Kosovo or in the Sandjak Region," a Muslim minority area outside Kosovo straddling the border of Serbia and Montenegro, "we shall stand by your side, together with you."

A trap: war in Kosovo

At first glance, some of this might sound justified, given Serbia's record of aggression against Croatia and Bosnia and its oppression of the Kosovo Albanians. A closer look, however, reveals a Washington-Ankara design to ignite an armed insurrection in Kosovo, forcing the Serbian Army to attempt to crush it, and thus give Ankara the grounds to put the Turkish-Albanian Pact into practice. There is a bitter historical irony in this. The present Turkish policy is a mirror-image of the Russian imperial czarist policy of inciting Christian insurrections in the Balkan regions occupied by the Ottoman Empire, by inspiring them with the promise of Russian support. Almost invariably such ventures ended at the cost of the populations in revolt, who were savagely massacred by Ottoman forces.

U.S. policy, directed through Turkey, has the goal of shifting the epicenter of conflict in former Yugoslavia toward the south, beginning with Kosovo, and extending into the multi-ethnic Republic of Macedonia.

The present reality is that no one, including Serbia, has been thinking of attacking Albania. Serbia has its hands full deploying forces in Croatia and Bosnia, and is nervous about a U.S.-led "Balkan Storm" intervention.

Shock therapy increases risk of war

The second reality is that no outside force could do more harm to Albania than its present American-controlled government. The ruling Democratic Party has been the recipient of generous U.S. funding. The greatest threat to Albanian security is the ruthless adherence to International Monetary Fund "shock therapy" austerity policies by the Albanian regime. A "made in Washington" civil war could develop after the next round of shock therapy measures announced by the Berisha regime to take effect on July 1. Reflecting the mass closures and plundering of industrial plants and mines, 80-90% of Albania's industrial work force is unemployed, and survives through a policy of the old government that pays them 80% of their former wage. The July 1 measures will

abolish these payments, leaving the urban population penniless and hungry. The breakdown in the rural areas is equally catastrophic. Through lack of seed, at most 45% of arable land has been or will be planted this year, making the entire country dependent on foreign food aid.

Under these conditions, the Berisha regime has been tempted to engage in foreign military adventures to distract popular attention from the domestic crisis. Before June 1, tiny Albania had no capability to match such temptations. Now, backed overtly by Turkey and covertly by the United States, the situation has changed completely. This threatens a very dangerous phase change in the Kosovo situation.

Before June 1, the Kosovo Albanian leaders, wishing to prevent a needless bloodbath and mass expulsion of Albanians, were firmly against armed insurrection, with the added argument of knowing they could count on no foreign military backing. Their best leaders, as exemplified by Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, the noted writer who was recently elected President of Kosovo in informal elections held May 24 in defiance of the Serbian authorities, are against armed insurrection. "The number of radicals is increasing daily. I am still keeping the situation under control but only at great effort," Rugova said in an interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel* published June 8.

These leaders know that as long as they can prevent giving Serbia the pretext to expel the Kosovo Albanians *en masse* into Albania, Kosovo will peacefully become independent in the near future. The Kosovo region is almost exclusively Albanian in population. As long as no war erupts, Serbia, especially given its present status as international pariah and its economic isolation, can occupy Kosovo, but cannot hold it for long.

The eruption of fighting in Kosovo would start a rapid escalation toward a Balkan-wide war. First, most refugees from a Serbian expulsion of ethnic Albanians, given the economic conditions inside Albania, would go to the neighboring Republic of Macedonia, where they would expect to receive food and shelter from the republic's large (25%) Albanian minority. Macedonia, which has a one-third Muslim minority, would never tolerate a mass resettlement on its territory of Muslim Albanians. In short, a new crisis would materialize, bringing with it the application of the Turkish-Albanian Pact in "defense of Macedonian Albanians." Neither Greece nor Bulgaria could allow a Turkish military presence in former Yugoslav Macedonia, and the stage for one variant of a Balkan war would be set.

The other manner in which a Balkan war could be touched off is through the combination of a Kosovo conflict and Serbia, then faced with three war fronts plus the embargo, would decide to "go for broke," seizing former Yugoslav Macedonia, and thereby establishing a direct land link with Greece. For different reasons, neither Turkey nor Bulgaria would allow a Serbian conquest of the Republic of Macedonia, and a Balkan war would therefore ensue.

Balkan crisis fraught with danger of world war

Sergei Yastrzhembsky, spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, gave a press briefing on June 6, following a Russian delegation's fact-finding visit to Belgrade.

Yastrzhembsky expressed concern that the conflict in the Balkans could turn into a third world war. He began by stressing Russia's respect for each of the states of the former Yugoslavia, then warned that "the ethnic principle" is very dangerous. "A blind commitment to this principle may lead the situation in the Balkans to a global explosion fraught with a third world war."

Yastrzhembsky said that while the Serbians had a right to self-defense, "in Bosnia and Hercegovina, however, we see other motives for action based on hatred, ethnic intolerance, and vengeance. Such motives should be categorically denounced and rejected regardless of their source." He warned some Russian press against whipping up "extremist forces" which could "precipitate a new spiral of insanity and fractional war."

Pressed by the correspondent from the Serbian newspaper *Borba*, who claimed that Serbia was in the right and the U.N. report recommending sanctions in the wrong, Yastrzhembsky said, "I am not going to discuss semantics with you." Russia's position, he said, "is neither pro-Serbian nor pro-Croatian, nor pro-Slovenian," because Russia has "traditional links" to all the states in the Balkans.

Asked what his grounds were for saying the war in the Balkans could spread, he said: "Allowing the crisis to reach a point of no return may involve all those [religious and political] forces which are now watching developments in Bosnia and Hercegovina with restraint. . . . [They] may become involved in the conflict. It is in the context of these considerations that we are expressing the fear that, God forbid, the situation may have such an outcome."

Aleksei Nikiforov, the first deputy chairman of the Third European Department of the Foreign Ministry added his assessment at the same press briefing:

"Hostilities may spill over to the south of former Yugoslavia. . . . I think that the uncertainty regarding the legal status of the Republic of Macedonia is becoming an increasingly destabilizing factor. There are other factors indicating

that in principle the epicenter of the Yugoslavian crisis is gradually shifting southward. One of the aims of our visit was not just to contribute toward the settlement of the conflict that is raging on, contribute to the success of the U.N. peacekeeping operations, but also to prevent the emergence of new flash points."

El País, Spain, by Hermann Tertsch, June 8:

The Balkans could soon descend "into a catastrophe like that which Central Europe lived through in the Thirty Years War of the 17th century," as a result of the combination of the adventurism of Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and the inefficacy of the European systems of security. The Thirty Years War brought not only economic ruin to Europe, but also "the rule of the strongest, in a terror exercised by bands under the control of leaders without scruples."

Tertsch forecast that the kind of Serbian irregular groups' terrorism that has been seen in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, will soon move into Serbia itself, as the post-Milosevic power struggle intensifies. The most likely alternative to Milosevic in Serbia, is not something rational or democratic, but rather a dictatorship of Vojislav Seselj, head of the Chetnik militias, and the most popular politician in Serbia.

At the same time, what is now threatened, is that Albania will start imitating Serbia, and will start supporting its fellow Albanians outside Albania, in Kosovo, in Montenegro, in Macedonia, in pursuance of a "Greater Albania." This could create a "permanent conflict" with Serbia and Macedonia, and soon, possibly, with Greece as well. This is the path to the Thirty Years War model, Tertsch wrote.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, June 9:

The Islamic Conference Organization, meeting in Istanbul the third week in June, will be considering a military intervention to defend Bosnia.

According to one informed source consulted by *EIR*, the Egyptian foreign minister's declaration reflects an intent in various governments in the Islamic world, to prevent the Turks from acting alone in Bosnia against Serbia. The Saudis and others are increasingly getting involved in the Bosnian crisis.

Daily Telegraph, London, June 10:

The Turkish press is increasingly carrying calls for "Islamic volunteer brigades" to fight in Bosnia, with the Bosnians being referred to as "our kin," in recognition of the fact that it was under the Ottoman Empire that there was a mass conversion to Islam in Bosnia. The Saudis decided to become more active on the issue, after coming under increasing attack from Iran and Libya for doing nothing to help the "martyrs" in Bosnia. In Pakistan, the press is giving more and more attention to the slaughter in Bosnia, while there is talk among Muslims of shifting the base of the *jihad* fighters from Afghanistan to the Balkans.