

New push for 'Greater Serbia' backed by United Nations

by Umberto Pascali

On Oct. 31, a meeting of Serbian Chetnik leaders in the Serbian-occupied Bosnian town of Prijedor, announced the unification of all the occupied areas in Bosnia and Croatia and the establishment of a common currency and a common militia. The Chetniks have occupied—and ethnically “cleansed”—70% of Bosnian territory and a sizable part of Croatia. At that meeting, the president of the so-called Serbian republic of Bosnia, Radovan Karadzic, threatened to withdraw from the U.N.-sponsored peace talks in Geneva, “until the actual existence of the republic [the occupied areas] and the nation’s right to self-determination is taken as the basis for the talks”—i.e., either the U.N. recognizes and accepts the conquest and the genocide of the non-Serbians, or they will sabotage the peace talks.

On Oct. 29, the Serbian forces captured the Bosnian city of Jajce. There followed a three-day procession of civilian Croats and Muslims who escaped on foot, the victims of terrorism perpetrated by the Chetnik gangs.

But the genocide is not an issue for the U.N., which is focused on making sure that the flow of victims takes place without trouble. The reaction of the U.N. peacekeeping forces has been to ask Croatia to accept more refugees, victims of ethnic cleansing. Croatia, badly damaged from the war, is incapable of taking in more than the 700,000 refugees it has already accepted.

Some are outraged

This attitude of the U.N., and its acceptance of Serbian genocide, provoked a strong reaction from the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Cornelio Sommaruga. In former Yugoslavia, he said on Nov. 3 from Tunis, “what the governments should have done was to prevent attacks on the population. How can such ethnic elimination

have been perpetrated without any intervention from the governments? . . . Yes, I am criticizing.”

Sommaruga indirectly attacked U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, by defending Mohamed Sahnoun, an Algerian diplomat who resigned in late October as representative of the U.N. relief program in Somalia after a violent row with Boutros-Ghali. “I send him publicly my solidarity,” Sommaruga said, criticizing those who use humanitarian activities to “pursue political interests.”

Formerly paying lip service to the peace negotiations, Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic is now giving his support to the pan-Serbian state in the occupied areas. Milosevic is, in this way, repudiating the agreement signed with the U.N. at the beginning of this year. That agreement states that the Croatian territory occupied by force remains part of the internationally recognized Republic of Croatia.

The Yugoslavian Army master plan

“What we are seeing now is the final implementation of the secret master plan prepared by the Yugoslavian Army many years ago,” said Maurizio Blondet, correspondent for the Italian Catholic daily *Avvenire* and one of the top experts on the conflict. Blondet has personally followed the war; he has been shot at, his hotel room in Sarajevo has been bombed, and he has been arrested by the Chetniks in Dalmatia.

“This plan is known,” he said. “The Slovenian authorities say they have the original documents proving it. The plan is the following: In case of a third world war or in case of an international crisis that threatened the federal state, the Yugoslav Red Army would be deployed to annex, by force, large parts of the territories of the non-Serbian republics. And this is what they are realizing under the eyes of the world, without meeting any resistance, using genocidal means.

"It took so long because the Serbian Army, contrary to the propaganda, besides having very bad soldiers—cruel, but cowardly—also has very bad generals. It is not capable of deploying on two different operations at the same time. And this despite the incredible abundance of weapons and war matériel. At the beginning of the war, for example, the Federal Army had more war planes than France. What you see there is the realization of the Greater Serbia, and the United Nations and the West did not really move a finger against it. Possibly what Serbia is preparing to do—with the complicity of the international community—is to call one day for a referendum in the occupied areas. The Serbians will be, of course, the majority, or, rather, the only inhabitants, because Bosnians and Croats have been killed or expelled."

Opposition undermined

The Serbian population is not unified under the insane leadership of Milosevic. There is a large potential for resistance, but it does not receive any support from the West. Says Blondet: "Already in 1990, the leaders of the student movement in Belgrade told me: Europe will be shocked by the bloodbath that is going to happen! They were desperate. They were ready to do anything to stop a war that they considered unjust. Many refused to fight for Milosevic; the level of desertion is very high. It is high especially among the most educated members of the military. For example, though the Federal Army can count on 400 planes, in reality only a few can be used to bomb the population, fortunately. They are flown by 60-year-old colonels, old communists. The majority of the pilots have refused to bomb civilians."

"All this shows a strong potential for internal dissent, which the West has refused to help or to use. The gang leaders, the ultra-fascist groups used by the army, like the infamous Seselj, also terrorize the Serbian population. These gangs hold as hostage a large part of the Serbian population, especially in the large urban centers. Large parts of the Serbian population oppose this war and the hysteria of 'Greater Serbia,' but it has been abandoned to itself, and maybe now it's too late."

Blondet recalls with evident frustration the many times that he saw the U.N. "taking the wrong side." "Last July, I went from Zagreb to the war zone along the river Sava between Bosanski Brod and Slavoski Brod in Slavonia. A big battle was going on. Croats and Bosnians were fighting against 30,000 Serbians with hundreds of tanks. On the bridge, bombed by the Serbians, between the two cities, tens of thousands of Bosnian refugees were fleeing to Croatia. The only U.N. checkpoint I found, was a few tens of miles from Zagreb. The only thing they were worried about was that I wouldn't transport weapons to the Croats in my car. The Croats were the only ones checked. I don't know of any such controls for the Serbians. The Serbians were allowed to take with them, undisturbed, not only guns, but also heavy weapons, like the deadly Katyusha, to be used against

unarmed civilians. But the U.N. was only interested in preventing Croats from getting weapons."

'Greater Serbians' make their move

Milosevic's decision to make a push to consolidate a Greater Serbia has begun to sink in, even among diplomats. On Nov. 4, one of the U.N.'s Geneva officials confided to reporters: "There is a growing feeling that Serbs across former Yugoslavia have decided that the time has come to create their 'Greater Serbia' and to hell with what the world thinks."

"Milosevic," explains Blondet, "has toyed with international opinion, or maybe there was a division of labor. He needed to gain time to let his troops implement the plan; all the rest was a means to guarantee that goal. As shown by the case of Milan Panic, who now has been brutally put in his place. Panic has been the best alibi for the crimes of Milosevic. Now the alibi is no longer needed."

Panic is the nominal prime minister of the so-called Yugoslav Republic, i.e., Serbia, Montenegro, and the captive Kosovo region. Panic, a California millionaire, arrived in Belgrade with the praises of the U.S. State Department to be appointed prime minister, in one of the biggest media stunts of the war. Panic, who got his position thanks to Milosevic, boasted from the beginning that he would stop the aggression and establish a democratic Serbia based on the U.S. Constitution. In the meantime, having covered the public relations flank, Milosevic was free to continue with his plan.

Recently, Panic opposed the ethnic "cleansing" and the creation of a state in the occupied territories. And suddenly, on Nov. 2, in a 93-24 vote of no-confidence against him in the lower house of parliament, Panic's political life was almost ended. Many parliamentarians stood up to label Panic as "an American spy" or "a madman." "I accuse him in advance of being the likely culprit for a civil war in Serbia," screamed a close crony of Milosevic, the socialist deputy Brana Zrnec. Panic was spared the day after in the Senate by a single vote—18-17. It is nevertheless clear that not even a cosmetic opposition is allowed any longer.

"The existence of the Republic of Serbia" on the territory of Bosnia and Croatia, said Milosevic subordinate Gen. Ratko Mladic at the meeting of Chetnik leaders, "is indisputable. . . . Whether others recognize it or not is their affair. But the existence of the Serbian Army is a reality that cannot be denied by anything."

What will be the next step of the Greater Serbians? "I would watch carefully what is happening in the south of the former Yugoslavia: in Macedonia and Kosovo," says Blondet. "If the real strategy of Milosevic is to conquer and to expand the war, he will not stop now. He sees that the more he pushes, the more the West backs down. It is also possible that there is an agreement between Greece and Serbia to split Macedonia. . . . If Milosevic has been able to conduct genocide in the middle of Europe without any serious reaction, why shouldn't he go further?"