

Albania's plunge into civil war could re-ignite Balkans

by Konstantin George

Thanks to the financial destruction of hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom lost all their possessions through International Monetary Fund-approved pyramid schemes that went bankrupt, the nation of Albania is at the brink of civil war. A large part of southern Albania has fallen under the control of armed rebels, and the regime of President Sali Berisha has mobilized forces from the country's north, including paid mercenary units, and sent them south. As of March 6, Berisha's forces were poised outside several key rebel-held towns, and the crisis is threatening to spill over into a new Balkan war.

The blame for this horror belongs squarely on the IMF and its British Empire controllers. Until early this year, the IMF had hailed Albania as its "model pupil" and "showcase." Since 1992, Albania has been ruled by Berisha, who came to power in an election campaign co-funded by the British Tory Party, and with the aid of a Project Democracy-organized "cultural revolution." The latter was a mass rampage during the winter of 1991-92, in which most of the existing industry was plundered in a peacetime orgy of unparalleled destruction.

"Model pupil" Berisha never missed a chance to show his fidelity to the British monarchy and to former U.S. President George Bush. He awarded Bush with Albania's highest honor, the Skanderbeg Medal, after Bush had left the White House. On a 1994 visit to London, he presented Queen Elizabeth II, British Prime Minister John Major, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, and Agricultural Secretary Douglas Hogg, with treasures stolen from Albanian museums.

The regime of Thatcher-Bush crony Berisha has destroyed Albania, and provides an example of where eastern Europe will find itself, so long as IMF policies are in control.

Berisha's folly

Since the start of the current Albanian crisis, Berisha and his government have committed one miscalculation after another. They underestimated the depth of popular rage among the hundreds of thousands who lost most or all of their possessions. The only possibility of avoiding a plunge into armed revolt, was to reach an agreement offered by the opposition, to appoint a non-party, or all-party, transitional government, leading to early parliamentary elections, and thus provide a ballot box vent for the people's rage.

Berisha not only rejected this approach but, in late February, reaffirmed that the Parliament, brought to power in the fraudulent elections of May 1996, would vote, on schedule on March 3, to re-elect him to a second five-year term in office. The timing was an outright provocation; his first term does not expire until April. In response, mass protests became armed revolt on Feb. 28. On March 3, martial law was imposed throughout Albania, and Parliament duly voted a second term for Berisha. As a result, the revolt escalated out of control.

The most fatal miscalculation that might occur—unless there is concerted international pressure, led by the United States to stop it—would be for Berisha to order his forces to storm the towns under rebel control. The far south of Albania contains a large ethnic Greek minority, about 250,000 people; and three of the towns in rebel hands—Saranda, Gjirokaster, and Delvino—have substantial Greek populations. So far, the Greek minority has stayed out of the fray, trying to avoid antagonizing either the regime in Tirana, or the rebels. This prudent course is not surprising. Taking sides in a situation where the outcome is up in the air, could end in disaster for the Greek minority: If it were to join the rebellion in an organized manner, and should Berisha win, it would become the scape-

goat of the subsequent repression. By the same token, the Greek minority cannot antagonize the rebels, who after all, are its next-door neighbors.

A Balkan war nightmare

The looming nightmare is, should Berisha's forces enter these towns and begin an indiscriminate slaughter of the population, including the Greek minority, there would be a Balkan-wide tragedy and possibly a new Balkan war. Short of the Greek minority, or sections of it, being massacred, Greece would not militarily intervene, regardless of any hot-head proclivities among certain of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in the Constantine Simitis government. The reason lies in the Turkish-Albanian defense pact of 1993, which provides for Turkey to come to Albania's assistance if there is a foreign attack. The great majority of Greeks recognize that Greece, which is (relatively) the only prosperous country in the region, has nothing to gain and everything to lose from a new Balkan war. Besides, if Athens wanted to destroy Albania, it would merely have to expel its 400,000 Albanian guest workers from Greece; their places could easily be filled by starving Bulgarians.

However, there are other players in the Balkans. The Serbian fascist regime of Slobodan Milosevic, for example, has a compelling need for a "patriotic" distraction, to deflect the Serbian mass strike movement against him. For Milosevic, even without the threat of a Greek-Albanian conflict, the unravelling of Albania through civil war, would be his cue to launch a massive slaughter and expulsion of the ethnic Albanians of Kosova province. That, in turn, would automatically spill over into ethnic conflicts in the Republic of Macedonia, where tensions are already high between its Slavic majority and one-third ethnic Albanian minority. Any eruption in Macedonia, would then spread into neighboring Bulgaria, a nation teetering on the brink of mass starvation, because of the imposition of IMF dictates.

By March 5, Albania's neighbors began taking the first preparatory military measures. Greece put on alert its Eighth Division, based in the Greek province of Epirus bordering Albania. It also imposed tight border controls on March 3, in fear of a mass exodus of Albanians. The Republic of Macedonia also placed its Army on high alert March 5, fearing an influx of Albanian refugees into the western part of the Republic, where its large Albanian minority is concentrated.

The Italian Armed Forces have been on alert since March 4. Italian vessels are patrolling the Straits of Otranto, between Italy and Albania, in the expectation of a mass exodus by boat to Italy, from port towns like Vlora. On March 5, Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini went so far as not to rule out an Italian military intervention into Albania, in his words, to prevent criminals from taking advantage of the chaos.

The pattern of preparatory military measures by Albania's neighbors, coincided with Berisha's rejection of a hastily prepared attempt by the European Union and the Organization

for Security and Cooperation in Europe to mediate the crisis. Both groups had authorized former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky to head such a mission. Similarly, Berisha had failed to respond to urgent demands from the United States to avoid a civil war and seek a political solution with the opposition, leading to early elections.

'Pyramiding' toward civil war

The current Albanian crisis was triggered in January, when the chain-reaction bankruptcy of the notorious pyramid scheme funds vaporized the savings of hundreds of thousands of Albanians. The first phase of the crisis featured mass protests throughout the southern half of Albania, the region hit by the bankruptcies. That the south was hit, was no coincidence. Nearly all of the nearly 500,000 Albanians working abroad—including up to 400,000 in Greece, and tens of thousands in Italy—stem from the southern half of the country. The remittances sent back to their families in southern Albania, are what provided most of the money that flowed into these funds.

In January, when the pyramid schemes went bankrupt, about \$1 billion in deposits went up in smoke. Hundreds of thousands, who had moved from having nothing for decades, to a "decent" living standard—measured by Albanian standards—were reduced overnight to again having nothing. At that point, a popular revolt began sweeping the south.

Then, beginning on Feb. 28, the protests escalated into armed insurrections, sweeping town after town in southern Albania. By March 5, the Berisha regime—as even Foreign Minister Tritan Shehu, was forced to admit in telephone discussions that day with his Italian counterpart Lamberto Dini—had lost control over substantial sections of the south. Shehu admitted then that armed rebels were in control of the southern Albanian towns of Vlora, Saranda, and Delvino. But Shehu's admissions were already outdated. The southern town of Gjirokaster had been in rebel hands since March 2, and the town of Tepelene, to the north of Gjirokaster, was taken over by armed rebels on March 5. In south central Albania, rebels are at least partially in control of Fier, and definitely command the support of the population in the towns of Lushnje and Berat.

Nothing better illustrates the regime's loss of control than the seizure by the rebels of several bases of the Albanian Army and Navy in the south. The rebels plundered the stores of weapons, seizing more than 11,000 weapons by March 3, and meeting no resistance from the garrisons. Added to this was the booty from the Tepelene garrison on March 5, which included sixty 120-mm cannon.

The physical presence of the Albanian Army in the south no longer exists—units have dissolved, and the soldiers have gone home. For the regime, ironical as it seems, these events have been seen as the lesser of two evils: Most of the troops were young recruits, predominantly from the south and predominantly peasants, and their families were among the hundreds of thousands who lost everything after the collapse of the various pyramid schemes. For the regime it was better to

have the recruits go home to their villages, and not linger at the bases, situated just outside the towns that have become centers of the rebellion.

The dissolution and disaffection in the Army was at the center of the fight between Berisha and his Chief of General Staff Gen. SHEME Kosovo, who is also the Army chief, whom Berisha fired on the evening of March 3, after the state of emergency was proclaimed. It is a sign that Berisha's troubles with the Army are not over, that he was forced to go outside the normal Army leadership, to find a replacement for General Kosovo. On March 4, Berisha appointed Gen. Adem Copani, who had been Berisha's personal military adviser. Further signs that Berisha has lost control over large parts of the Army, include the curious fact that the announcement that General Copani was replacing General Kosovo, was made not by the Albanian Defense Ministry, but by the Interior Ministry.

Also, when the state of emergency was declared on March 3, Berisha placed his close crony, Bashkim Gaveideda, boss of the Shik, or secret police, in charge of the emergency. Most of the forces sent south to crush the revolts, are special units from the Shik, the Interior Ministry, and armed mercenary units recruited from the north of Albania, through funds disbursed by Shik and the Interior Ministry.

This makes it clear why the regime hopes that most of the Army in the south disperses. What happens when the military does not go home, but instead stays and joins the rebellion, can be seen in the southern coastal town of Saranda. By the afternoon of March 4, six patrol boats from the Saranda naval base, were functioning as a technically competent manned unit on the side of the rebels. Similarly, on March 4, two Albanian MiG-15 pilots, ordered to strafe a convoy of civilian cars in the south, instead flew their planes to Italy and asked for political asylum.

The most critical days of the crisis are approaching. The danger of a Balkan war grows through two routes: The first, massacres against the Greek minority, and/or an outrage against the Albanian population of Kosova launched by Serbia's British-controlled fascist Milosevic. The second route, already advanced, is the process of fragmentation in Albania. This process has gone beyond the "north-south" divide. There is no coherent, or centrally coordinated rebellion in the south, but rather, numerous simultaneous, local rebellions, each with its own command, and each operating more or less independent of the others. Under conditions of such fragmentation, each local entity will seek out a special relationship with neighbors of Albania, which would redraw the Balkan map, threatening in the near future, a new Balkan war.

The Albanian case now proves the warnings of Lyndon LaRouche and *EIR* over the years, that the continuation of IMF policies and the existence of sovereign nations are not compatible, that IMF policies will lead to the literal destruction of nations. Today, the horror is wrecking Albania. Unless the IMF is stopped, tomorrow it will be all the Balkans, and beyond.

Clinton defies British on U.S.-Mexico clash

by Valerie Rush

President Clinton withstood intense pressure from British assets and their dupes inside the U.S. Congress and media networks, and resolved Feb. 28 to certify Mexico as a good-faith ally in the war on drugs. At the same time, he informed Colombian President Ernesto Samper Pizano for the second year in a row that his country will be denied such certification as long as the narcotics cartels continue to pull the strings of the Colombian Presidency.

Close collaboration between the U.S. and Mexican governments against the drug cartels and their political protectors, would not only put the brakes on the murderous narcotics trade, but would help expose the rot of a financial system addicted to the multibillion-dollar profits of that trade. That is just what the opium-tainted City of London, and the likes of Sir George Bush and Carlos Salinas de Gortari, want to prevent.

In the weeks leading into Clinton's Feb. 28 decision, the drumbeat for decertifying Mexico began among Bush Republicans, fed by revelations in the *New York Times* and elsewhere of widespread "narco-corruption" within Mexican political circles. Some even began to scream for shutting the U.S.-Mexican border, to "punish Mexico" for its supposed lack of cooperation. Stampeded by the media barrage, Democrats, led by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (Calif.), joined Republicans in demanding that Clinton de-certify Mexico. The announcement on Feb. 18 that Mexico's newly appointed drug czar Gen. Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo had been arrested on charges of running protection for the head of the Juárez drug cartel, was presented by U.S. certification opponents, not as confirmation that the Zedillo government was prepared to act, but as proof of government corruption.

That such corruption exists is not news, either to the U.S. or the Mexican governments. In fact, narco-corruption was fostered throughout the political and financial systems of Mexico, under the *direct joint collaboration* of the previous Salinas and Bush Presidencies. What is news is that the current administration in Mexico is now moving to root out that corruption, and that the Clinton administration is undoing some of the damage done by Bush's pro-drug policies. In the Feb. 28 press conference on certification, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright described the Mexican government's arrest of Gutiérrez Rebollo as "an act of political courage of the highest order." It is precisely that political courage which convinced President Clinton to certify Mexico.