

Yugoslavia on the verge of a Serbian coup and civil war

by Konstantin George

A Balkan time-bomb is about to explode on the European continent, with an international crisis and war potential matching that of the pre-World War I period, when the Balkans were called the “powderkeg of Europe.”

The Balkan crisis will be triggered by Yugoslavia, which is sliding rapidly toward a Serbian military coup, civil war, and fragmentation along ethnic lines.

A devastating economic crisis, caused by the Yugoslav government’s capitulation to the conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund in meeting usurious debt repayments to Western creditors, has produced a modern-day version of Weimar Germany. The Belgrade regime has implemented IMF demands that have included a wage freeze, “market-based” price increases, and scrapping of “loss-making” enterprises. The result, in a nutshell:

- A 250% per annum level of hyperinflation, coupled with minimal or no wage increases, leading to a collapse of living standards to 1950s levels;
- 1.2 million unemployed, more than 15% of the workforce, which will soon rise to 20%.

The economic situation, long out of control, has created the present out-of-control political crisis, in which the Yugoslav federation of six republics and two autonomous regions is unraveling along ethnic lines. For Yugoslavia, and for the Balkans, the end of an era has come. The postwar Yugoslav system, the “house that Tito built,” is finished. The question now is, what will replace it.

The ‘Greater Serbia’ coup

The Yugoslav crisis, combining Great Depression unemployment and a Weimar-style hyperinflation, has created a rebirth of Great Serbian chauvinism with all its trappings.

Serbs comprise 40% of the 20 million Yugoslavians, and control the nation’s military and police. The Greater Serbia movement has a demagogue-leader, Serbian party chief Slobodan Milosevic. Throughout August, September, and into October, Milosevic and the Serbian party leadership have launched an unending wave of mass demonstrations in Serbia proper and the two autonomous regions with Serbian minorities—the Albanian-inhabited region of Kosovo, and the mixed Hungarian-Serbian region of Vojvodina.

The Serbian demands at the demonstrations, which involved hundreds of thousands, were a well-crafted mix:

- Emergency measures to alleviate the economic crisis.
- The placing of Kosovo and Vojvodina under Serbian rule, ending their autonomy.
- Changing the Yugoslav constitution to end the independence of the non-Serbian republics, such as the western republics of Slovenia and Croatia, so that Yugoslavia would become de facto a “Greater Serbia”;
- Last but not least, that Milosevic, “the second Tito,” become Yugoslav dictator.

Now, Milosevic will make his big move. The Serbian party leader will attempt a legal coup to seize power at the Central Committee Plenum of the Yugoslav League of Communists, which opens Oct. 17 in Belgrade. Whether he succeeds or fails in that showdown, Yugoslavia is heading toward either a military coup, civil war, or both. Should Milosevic win, the country will be on the brink of civil war and dismemberment. Should he fail, the machinery will go into motion for a Serb military coup and the threat of civil war.

According to reports from the London *Guardian*’s correspondent, Barney Petrovic, special security measures have been introduced for the first time since President Tito’s death. Civilian defense units have been put on standby and are being trained in the use of firearms. Emergency measures also include night guard duties at offices, schools, hospitals, clinics, and industries, and special passes have been issued for all people employed in vital services, such as the state-run radio and television, postal system and communications, and the main newspapers.

Regional leaderships purged

The wave of Serbian mass demonstrations has not only set the mood for the Milosevic coup attempt at the Plenum, but has formed the basis for pre-Plenum leadership changes at the regional level. By these means, Milosevic is on the verge of gaining a majority on the 23-member Presidium of the party, which meets before the Plenum.

The mass Serbian demonstrations in Kosovo and the Vojvodina have called for the resignation of these regions’ party leaderships. In the Vojvodina, this has already happened. On Sept. 24, a new, pro-Milosevic leadership was installed. The same is expected to occur at the Oct. 13 Kosovo regional party plenum. In federal party terms, this adds up to 11 “solid” Presidium votes for Milosevic; 3 from Ser-

bia, 3 from Macedonia (which, with its own problem of ethnic Albanian unrest, has united with Serbia), 2 each from the Vojvodina and Kosovo, and the 1 Army vote on the Presidium. With the Slovenian, Croatian, and Bosnian republics having 3 votes each, and all solidly opposed to him, Milosevic must get Montenegro's 3 Presidium seats to gain a majority for his "legal" coup.

This is why, during October, the center of the mass demonstrations calling for the regional party leaderships to resign has occurred in Montenegro, where the regional party plenum and a vote of confidence in the present leadership is set for Friday, Oct. 14.

The Serbian Central Committee Plenum was held Oct. 11. The leadership under Milosevic declared that they will demand "mass purges" at the forthcoming federal Central Committee Plenum, and denounced all "recent statements" which had attacked "Serbian nationalism," thus in effect declaring war on the party leaderships of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, all of whom had just issued strong condemnations of the "Greater Serbia" threat.

The leadership of Slovenia has accused Serbia of orchestrating the wave of demonstrations and through "the pressures of the mob . . . endangering the constitutional order of Yugoslavia."

Serbia is already acting as if it were Yugoslavia. From Oct. 8 onwards, each of the almost daily emergency meetings held by the federal party Presidium to try to prevent the coming explosion has been contemptuously boycotted by Milosevic and the Serbian Presidium members.

As the showdown approaches, the Serbian military coup threat has been activated. Timed with the Serbian Central Committee Plenum, General Visnic, the Serbian commander of the Ljubljana Military District (Slovenia), announced that the Army is "prepared to prevent any attempt to split the country," a direct warning against secessionist moves by Slovenia or Croatia should Milosevic gain power.

This followed a declaration by the Serbian Party Presidium on Oct. 10, charging the Slovenian leadership with "using the events in Montenegro to launch their own attacks on Serbia." These statements, however, have only cemented the already dominant view in Slovenia and Croatia that secession and civil war are the only answers to an unacceptable "Greater Serbia" coup.

The pre-civil war mood was shown by the statements of support for the embattled Montenegrin leadership, sent on Oct. 11-12 by the party leaderships of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia. Typical of them was the Slovenian declaration, which said that the Slovenian Party Presidium "extends its decisive support in the struggle against the pressure emanating on the part of Serbian Nationalism to nullify the national integrity of the Montenegrin people."

A Yugoslav civil war looms, and with it, the Balkan "powder keg" has again appeared on the historical scene, with unpredictable consequences for Europe and the world.

Riots end in Algeria, but crisis continues

by Omar al Montasser

It took less than a week for the Algerian regime of President Chadli Benjedid to quell the riots which started on Oct. 4 in Algiers and hit all major urban centers of the country; yet no one is claiming victory. Indeed, the Algerian crisis threatens to lead to a broader destabilization of northern Africa generally.

With extreme violence used on both sides, it is estimated that least 500 people were killed. During the peak of the riots in Algiers on Oct. 9, the Army was deployed with machine guns and heavy weapons, shooting to death scores of demonstrators, while the previous day, policemen were killed in the coastal city of Oran.

Addressing the nation on Oct. 10, President Benjedid announced a general program of political and constitutional reforms. A day later, the Algerian leadership announced that a national referendum would be held on Nov. 3 to decide on some major electoral and other reforms. Though the government has not been precise about what it intends to do, it is believed that the reforms will include a general program of democratization, including a move toward the establishment of a multi-party system, replacing the one-party rule of the National Liberation Front (FLN) which has existed since Algeria won its independence in 1962.

President Benjedid and the Algerian leadership know that cosmetic changes will not be enough, and that the present return to normalcy, evidenced by the lifting of the state of martial law imposed on Oct. 5, could be only temporary, if real changes are not made soon, especially in Algeria's economic and social balance.

Economic disaster

At the roots of the present crisis are those "objective" conditions which Algeria unfortunately shares with most developing countries. In Algeria's specific case, this has involved a decrease of no less than 50% in its export income—95% of which comes from its oil and gas sales—from \$12 billion in 1985 to \$7 billion this year. And while the crisis could be kept at bay in 1986 and 1987 because of a good