

the Feb. 12 riots in Pakistan (story, page 46), which—and only then—triggered Khomeini into issuing his *fatwa*.

Soviet-Iran deals

From that standpoint, Shevardnadze's visit to Teheran was carefully prepared. Only a few days after Khomeini's *fatwa*, it came at a time when the so-called pro-Western faction around Parliamentary Speaker Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was weakened. A few weeks earlier, Deputy Foreign Minister Larijani was speaking in New York about upcoming "changes" in Iran-American relations, and it was rumored that the United States would soon agree to a decision of the International Court at The Hague in favor of unfreezing Iranian assets in the United States. Relations with Britain were just being reestablished, and the French foreign minister had just been in Teheran.

All of those developments disappeared in a puff of smoke when Khomeini ordered Rushdie's death. And yet, the main question remains why was it that Khomeini didn't take such a decision earlier? The book has been on the shelves for months. Intelligence sources report that local Muslims in France or Britain had been going to their Iranian embassies urging Iran to take action. There was no answer; the Rafsanjani group just didn't want to pick up the issue. However, the success of the Pakistani demonstrations made enough impression on Interior Minister Mohtashemi, to convince Khomeini to make his move.

Breaking with the West and turning toward Moscow was then a natural step. For months, Khomeini had been urged by radical followers to take new international initiatives to keep Islamic fundamentalism from falling into limbo. Likewise, a personal letter from Khomeini to Mikhail Gorbachov in early January contained the seeds of a radical shift.

For the Iranians, this was a radical shift, albeit perhaps more tactical than strategic. Moscow thinks otherwise. A breakthrough with Iran has been carefully prepared for years. As with other Islamic countries, Moscow understood that this could not be concretized until its final withdrawal from Afghanistan. Meanwhile, it prepared the ground. For example, one of Shevardnadze's deals signed in Teheran includes the extension of an oil pipeline into the Soviet Union and the building of a railway between the Soviet Union and the Gulf on Iran's Eastern borders with Afghanistan. Underlining Moscow's persistence and determination is the fact that procedures for the deal were first set into motion in August 1987!

However spectacular, the result of Shevardnadze's visit can only be judged by the economic negotiations between the two countries which start on March 5, and whether Moscow does deliver weapons to Iran. It has so far refused to take such a direct step, careful not to jettison its links to Iraq or endanger the ties it is slowly building with countries like Saudi Arabia. Such ties are important for Moscow's other initiatives, its peace gambit in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Meanwhile, the West is facing quite an uncomfortable situation.

Civil war threat looms in Yugoslavia

by Konstantin George

Potential war between Yugoslavia and Albania was added to the threat of civil war in Yugoslavia March 2, as Belgrade March 2 blamed Albania for ethnic protests in Yugoslavia's Kosovo province. Yugoslav State Presidency member Lazar Mojsov told Parliament, "The Kosovo counter-revolution is under the decisive influence of Albanian intelligence." He said that the Yugoslav leadership had acquired a document of an illegal group, which proved that ethnic Albanians were planning an armed revolt, and blamed federal authorities for failing to take strong measures to counter Albanian nationalism and separatism. "All our actions can be compared with the actions of firemen rushing to put out fires," he complained.

In Kosovo, which is under military occupation, police began to arrest "organizers of demonstrations," reported the Tanjug news agency. Reuters news service reported rumors that one former leader of the Kosovo Communist Party was under arrest and another had fled to Albania; both were deposed last year in a maneuver by Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic.

As Yugoslavia approaches the threshold of fragmentation along ethnic lines, the aggravation of the Balkan crisis portends sweeping changes on the European map, with Moscow standing ready to grab what it can from the chaos. As in the period 1910-14, the present-day Balkan crisis could ignite a global conflict.

The root cause of the radicalization of Serbs, Albanians, and all ethnic groups, is the economic disaster—the direct consequence of Yugoslavia's years' long submission to the cruel dictates of International Monetary Fund austerity "conditionalities." This submission, prioritizing debt repayment and collapsing living standards to the levels of the 1950s, features inflation rates over 300%; not seen in Europe since Weimar Germany, and Great Depression levels of over 20% unemployment.

Conflict between Serbia and Kosovo

The latest explosion began with the Feb. 23 miners' strike in the Albanian-inhabited autonomous region of Kosovo,

which was transformed into a general strike protesting Serbian plans to impose direct rule over Kosovo. The miners occupied the mines and began a hunger strike. From that point, events moved rapidly:

Feb. 27: After emergency meetings of the Yugoslav state and party leadership, the Army is ordered into Kosovo, and “extraordinary measures” are imposed.

Feb. 28: Emergency meetings are held by the party leaderships of each of Yugoslavia’s six republics, resulting in a split along East-West lines. The three eastern republics, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia, denounce the Kosovo general strike as a manifestation of “Albanian separatism and chauvinism,” and endorse the hard Serbian stand. The three republics comprising the western half of the country, Catholic Slovenia and Croatia, and Muslim Bosnia, announce their full support for the Kosovo Albanians and denounce Serbia’s policy.

Feb. 28: Protected by the Army, numerous rallies are staged by Kosovo’s Serbian minority. All Serb neighborhoods and communities in Kosovo are guarded by Army units, as tinderbox conditions prevail.

Feb. 28: More than 1 million Serbs demonstrate before Yugoslavia’s Parliament in Belgrade (the capital of Yugoslavia and of the Serbian republic), and demand: no delay in imposing Serbian rule over Kosovo; identifying, bringing to trial, and convicting the Albanian “ringleaders” and “string-pullers” in the Kosovo party leadership behind the general strike. The crowd is addressed by Serbian party leader and would-be Yugoslav strongman Slobodan Milosevic, who received thunderous applause as he declares: “In the name of the Serbian leadership and of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, I guarantee that the leaders and initiators [of the general strike] will be found, their names will be made public, they’ll be arrested, put on trial, and convicted.”

A point of no return

Under Milosevic’s demagogic leadership, Serbia has now passed the point of no return; if it backtracks now on imposing direct rule in Kosovo, an Albanian insurrection is certain.

Here is how the conflict of the last weeks developed.

The Kosovo general strike was triggered by a decision of the Yugoslav Federal Central Committee, which met on Feb. 23 in an extraordinary session (its third in five weeks), to allow the Republic of Serbia to change the Yugoslav Constitution, ending Kosovo’s status as a fully autonomous region of Serbia, and impose, “without delay,” direct Serbian rule over Kosovo.

The Central Committee’s green light for Serbia to change the federal Constitution, was reaffirmed by the federal party Presidium, after an emergency session Feb. 26, and again on Feb. 28. In the latter case, the Presidium’s endorsement of Serbian rule over Kosovo was read to the crowd of over 1 million swelling the streets of Belgrade.

The curious submission by the entire federal party lead-

ership, including its Slovene, Croat, and Bosnian members, to the now unstoppable Serbian-dictated constitutional change, forms the key as to why the crisis has reached the final point of no return.

By allowing Serbia to change the *federal* Yugoslav Constitution and thus legalize the Serbian seizure of Kosovo, they have granted Milosevic the very weapon he has sought—the basis for a “constitutional” Army coup. Should the federal authorities now try to prevent Serbian rule over Kosovo, he could call upon the Serbian-run Yugoslav Army to take power “legally,” under the provisions of the Yugoslav Constitution allowing military intervention to “uphold” the Constitution and the “unity” of the country. In short, a Serbian-staged military coup—the threat of which has been used very successfully to date to back Milosevic’s step-by-step power play—now has become a real, live option.

How successful the Milosevic power play has been thus far is vividly reflected in the Central Committee and Presidium decisions. Since November, the cumulative effect of Milosevic having managed the ouster of opponent leaderships in Serbia’s two autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and in the republic of Montenegro, by adding seven Milosevic allies to the Presidium, has created a majority pro-Serbian coalition in both the federal party Presidium and the Central Committee.

Given this situation, the leaderships of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia have basically staged a tactical retreat on the “Greater Serbia” question. They have submitted at the federal level on the Kosovo question, while back home in their respective republics—as we saw from the party leadership meetings of Feb. 27—they have issued the harshest condemnations to date of Serbia and Milosevic. The Croatian Writers Union, in fact, on Feb. 27 demanded the immediate resignation of Milosevic as Serbian party leader.

To summarize the point: Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia have said in effect to Milosevic, “Since we can’t stop you from attaining a Greater Serbia comprising the eastern part of Yugoslavia, you’ve got it, but the line is drawn at the Serbian-Bosnian border in central Yugoslavia. Cross that line, and civil war has begun.”

Politically, it already has. As the mood of the huge Serb gathering in Belgrade showed, the drive for “Greater Serbia” will not stop with Kosovo. The crowd included thousands of Serbs who arrived from Serbian towns in Eastern Croatia, and many tens of thousands of Serbs from the large Serbian minority in Bosnia. For them, the hour of “Greater Serbian” domination over Yugoslavia has struck, and the East-West line will be crossed.

This will create an internal Yugoslav *casus belli*, provoking the country’s dissolution and civil war. Awaiting these developments are Moscow and its Warsaw Pact allies, above all Bulgaria, who are preparing their military expansionist options, and thereby transforming the Balkans once again into Europe’s powderkeg.