

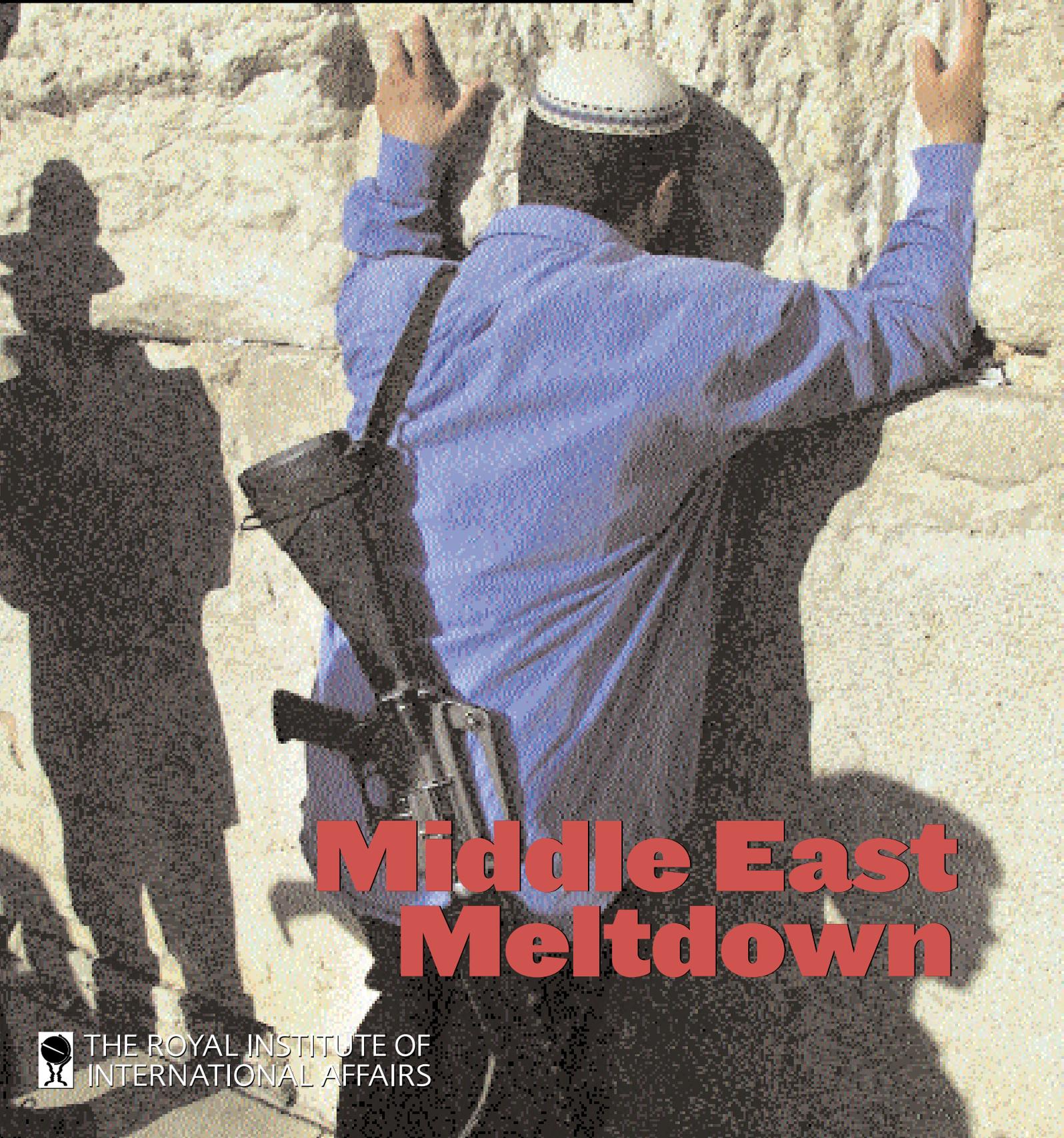
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**SMALL
ARMS
BONFIRE**

**SAVING
WHALES**



**Middle East
Meltdown**



THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

BALKANS

James Pettifer



AP/Stringer

THE THREAT OF A GREATER Serbia hung over the region for many years, and critics of Albanian nationalism have claimed that there is now a new project – to substantially extend the boundaries of the current Albanian state, making a ‘Greater Albania.’ Are these fears justified, or are the conflicts merely an Albanian dimension to the wider regional crisis caused by the lack of a stable ‘Yugoslavia’ after Milosevic?

BACK TO WAR

War has now returned to the Balkans, with a prolonged local conflict between Serb troops and a new Albanian military force in the extreme southeast Presheve valley of Serbia, called Kosova Lindore (Eastern Kosovo) by Albanians. Widespread violence by ethnic Albanian rebels in northern and western Macedonia may produce a full scale civil war there too. And there is tension over the Greek minority areas in southern Albania, and the Cameria issue – involving lost Albanian lands in northwest Greece – has re-emerged.

Ethnic Albanians in Montenegro are a compact group in the south making up just eight percent of the population. Opponents of independence from the remainder of

Yugoslavia fear that Montenegro might fragment under Albanian pressure. In Macedonia meanwhile, Albanians are seen by some diplomats as wanting secession and union with Albania itself.

The different conflicts involving Albanians have a variety of causes. In all those with current military activity, the protagonists on the Albanian side have been either condemned by the Socialist-dominated coalition in Albania’s capital Tirana – as in the case of the Macedonian rebels – or neglected and ignored, as with the Kosova Lindore movement.

Discussion of these problems is heavily influenced by pro-Serb assumptions. It is, for instance, unremarked in the west that the southeast borders of Kosovo were changed by Tito, and the basis of the current conflict created, in order to remove the Presheve valley from Kosovo to serve Yugoslav communism. After World War Two the fledgling ‘Macedonian’ state to the south needed a secure road link with Serbia that did not run through Muslim Albanian areas in Kosovo known for their nationalist feeling, and brave resistance between 1944 and 1948 to Titoist communist dictatorship.

Albania has not supported these military actions in any way. The only recent government initiative on any of these issues with neighbouring states has been over

compensation for victims of alleged British/Greek ethnic cleansing of Cameria – Threspotia, in Greek terminology – in 1943-44, where thousand of ethnic Albanians lost their historic lands in north west Greece. The Greek government has refused to discuss the matter.

A serious effort has been made to demilitarise the internal political culture in Albania with a government crackdown on the large supplies of small arms held by the population since the uprising in 1997. In return, considerable sums of money have been promised for achieving weapons collection targets.

The Albanian government has shown no irresponsible interest in national expansionist ideologies and their military expression, and has been a model administration from an international point of view. Yet very little promised aid and development money has materialised as a result of these efforts, apart from some small British-led weapons for aid schemes in central Albania which have achieved worthwhile results.

As is usual with events in the Balkans, the grandiose promises of European Union (EU) leaders made at the Sarajevo donors conference of July 1999 have come to virtually nothing. The Stability Pact is widely regarded in the Balkans as a talking shop that has no real clout or finance behind it.

'Greater Albania'

After the end of the Kosovo war in 1999, an atmosphere of uncertainty hung over the southern Balkans. This was closely linked to the central problem of indecision about the political future of Kosovo. But last year the situation was apparently transformed. With the fall of Milosevic, Serbia became the favoured Balkan partner for the European Union, and pro-western forces in Albania and Montenegro were downgraded. As a result, many Albanians and Montenegrins resent the fickleness of the international community. In the absence of proper regional security arrangements, Albanians believe their country is surrounded by unfriendly states, particularly Serbia and Greece.

The Albanian government has been criticised by internal commentators and the parliamentary opposition of Dr Sali Berisha for neglecting national defence, and as being naïve in the extreme in succumbing to EU pressure to open diplomatic relations with Kosturnica's Serbia.

There has been virtually no progress for Albania in the last year on wider integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. In contrast neighbours such as Macedonia, with much lower economic growth rates, appalling ethnic relations, and only recently attempting reforms such as land privatisation, have been granted privileged positions by the European Union. Thus, in terms of key international relationships, the Socialist government in Tirana has seen very few rewards for virtue. A climate of cynicism towards international institutions, particularly European ones, has developed amongst the Albanian political elite.

Many of the same processes affect Kosovo, where former Kosovo Liberation Army leaders who have complied fully with demilitarisation agreements continue to be regarded by KFOR as a security threat, rather than necessary partners in political development. The United States, with NATO, is seen as the only power Albanians can trust to any significant extent. Even

here, NATO has yet to make good some of its wartime promises, even on mundane matters such as the repair of roads damaged by military convoys.

MASSIVE PRIVILEGE

At the same time, elsewhere in the region, Vojislav Kosturnica's government in Serbia has been granted massive privilege. The Bush administration stated soon after it was elected that it wished to see Belgrade resume its position as the 'regional leader'. With the arrest of Milosevic a major aid programme was released and a massive, well-financed and continuing western media offensive was launched from Belgrade.

Enormous western effort went into opposing Montenegrin independence in the recent elections. This could be seen as attempted interference in the affairs of a democratic state, particularly the open threats by some EU countries to cut off economic relationships with an independent Montenegro, and covert western financial aid to the anti-Djukanovic coalition.

There are some similarities in the position of Montenegro and Albania. Desirable pro-market economic and democratic progress in both countries that was strongly supported by the west while

Milosevic was in power is now seen as a threat by some EU politicians. The Contact Group, with its built in Russian policy veto has been reviving as a Balkan forum.

The government and political elite in Albania feel increasingly marginalised and threatened internationally. Positive internal developments in Albania and Kosovo are evaluated on the basis of a pro-Serb double standard. Long standing human rights violations against Macedonian Albanians were only taken seriously by the international community when an Albanian paramilitary group appeared.

Elsewhere, particularly in Bosnia, the revival of Croatian nationalism and separatism are part of the same pattern of fear and insecurity caused by the passionate and irrational embrace of Kosturnica's Serbia as the future dominant power. It should rather be seen as a country with a massive and probably protracted task in coming to terms with its past, let alone a commitment to fully change national direction. The 'spin' on the results of last December's election in Serbia was an important issue. The rather modest achievements of the ruling coalition were disguised by presentation and the partial release of electoral data.

PROPAGANDA

By contrast, positive developments in Kosovan Albanian life have been overlooked. Small business growth has been dynamic, local elections were successfully held towards the end of last year, agriculture has partly revived, and there has been a substantial inflow of domestic property reconstruction funds from the diaspora.

The international community's legitimate concerns about organised crime and the negative and dysfunctional side of life in Kosovo and Albania have been used by pro-Serb forces for propaganda. It has been claimed for example that the

James Pettifer's most recent book is *The New Macedonian Question*, Palgrave 2001.

Albanian parts of the Balkans have a unique propensity for organised crime. There is no evidence to support this extreme view, with much to show that organised

crime involving heroin, arms, and people smuggling has a strong hold in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and elsewhere. Many heroin laboratories – the most profitable stage of the drug cycle – are actually in Turkey, a favoured western ally.

But the stereotyping of Albanians as uniquely criminal has been accepted by many in the western police and security services which have little detailed knowledge of the region and its politics. Albanians make a convenient scapegoat for the well-financed anti-organised crime bureaucracies in the west, which often have close links to local right-wing authoritarian political forces, as in Italy. For instance, few outside Italy would believe that organised crime in the traditionally Mafia-ridden south was a new product of Albanian immigration, but statements of this kind are now common in the Italian media.

In fact, Italian crime statistics published in January indicate that the murder rate among immigrants was lower than in the Italian community as a whole, and that most victims were other immigrants. But the racial and religious stereotyping of Albanians as ‘dangerous, Muslim and criminal’, and Serbs as ‘democratic, Christian and European’ continues, with very negative consequences for European Union political decisions.

AVOIDING OFFENCE

Europeans’ objections to holding promised national elections in Kosovo are one aspect of this. Legitimate local ambitions to democratise Kosovo are being held hostage by diplomats who wish

to avoid ‘offending Belgrade’. This policy has continued despite the lack of any tangible progress in Belgrade on a wide range of reform issues. It also implies EU support for a Kosovo future within what remains of Yugoslavia. In reality, the same people are in charge of its army as in the time of Milosevic; the Kosturnica government has concluded an important economic agreement to help Republika Serbska nationalists that even Milosevic held back from; hundreds of Albanians jailed illegally in the Kosovo crisis remain in appalling conditions in Serb prisons, and wanted war criminals like Ratko Mladic still live openly in Belgrade.

From the Albanian viewpoint, the issue is not national expansion. No significant Albanian political party has called for a Greater Albania since democracy was established in 1991-2. There is rather a wish to retain the modest gains in international position that were achieved in the Kosovo war period and which now appear to be seriously threatened by the uncritical EU approval of the post-Milosevic regime in Belgrade.

CORNERED

In these insecure circumstances, there is a climate of widespread suspicion in Albania. Isolationism has appeared again, particularly in the older generation educated under communism. Draconian regulations protecting military secrecy are in force. The former head of the UN mission in Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, said last November that Albanians

felt ‘cornered’ and that there was a danger that ‘they would fight their way out’. In the light of recent events in Macedonia, he was very perceptive.

For although Tirana itself is physically secure, and there has been a genuine rejection of militarism and the wartime partisan tradition, the opposite is the case in the border regions of the Albanian world. Here Albanians and Slavs interact, in conditions of deepening political instability – except in Montenegro, where inter-ethnic relations are generally good. Albanians feel they must rely on their own resources, rather than international diplomatic support.

The political paralysis in Kosovo and the more or less open support of some sections of KFOR for the Serbs, has led to a widespread view in Macedonia and Kosovo that the only responsible security option open to Albanians there is to build regional military capacity. This aims particularly to deter the return of the Yugoslav army to any part of Kosovo. The recent agreement to readmit it to the Preshevo border zone has deepened these fears, however irrational, as has the removal of much KFOR heavy armour from the Kosovo border.

The fact that the Albanian government has actually complied so faithfully and responsibly with western demilitarisation demands gives many Albanians a sense of almost total insecurity. Thus the government is seen by many in northern and eastern Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo as the creature of foreign powers, much as King Zog’s interwar government was a satrap of fascist Italy.

At the end of communism the Albanian army was a pathetic organisation and it has disintegrated in the last ten years, particularly in the 1997 uprising. There is no legitimate national force to defend the borders. The Kosovo Protection Corps is not allowed weapons.

At the same time, the Yugoslav army has published a re-equipment shopping list including tanks, missiles, and artillery weapons. Belgrade is anxious for more contacts with western military institutions, membership of the Partnership for Peace and even eventual NATO membership.

Thus, the bogus threat of a Greater Albania is actually a myth that is being used in the European Union to obscure an attempted revival of regional Serbian dominance. This means that EU leverage over current conflicts is fast disappearing, with the Union seen in much of the Balkan world as essentially pro-Serb. **WT**

Chatham House Events

JULY 3

The Chilean Transition to Democracy *Mario Fernandez, Defence Minister*

JULY 4

Yugoslavia after Milosevic *Ambassador Vladeta Jankovic*

JULY 5

Farouk Al-Shara’ Minister of Foreign Affairs, Syria

JULY 12

Inside the Pariah State: the Taliban’s Afghanistan *Saira Shah*

JULY 13

President Khatami’s Second Term in Iran *Baqer Moin*

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