

One Man's Freedom-fighter, Another Man's Terrorist

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Turkey is a respected and responsible member of the international community and it is expected that it would not wish to see unnecessary backlash there as a result of the trial of Ocalan.

KURDISH leader Abdullah Ocalan (49) was captured in an underground operation and was transported from Kenya to Turkey late at night (3 AM) on 16 February. Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit announced the news on the same day. The Kurdish rebel leader was desperately sought by Turkey on terrorism and treason charges in connection with the Kurdish Workers Party's (PKK) 15-year old armed struggle for Kurdish independence at Kurdish dominated south-east part of Turkey.

The Kurdish supporters of Ocalan in Europe were so enraged that they stormed Greek embassies/consulates in London, Vienna, Germany and Australia. Hostages were held in three embassies across Europe including a Greek ambassador and his wife in Vienna. Kenya's embassy in Vienna was also attacked. The Kurdish activists said that they would not leave the premises until the right to asylum for Ocalan was secured.

It is understood that Greece sheltered Ocalan at its ambassador's residence in Nairobi (Kenya) for the last 12 days. Greece claimed that Ocalan, against its advice, had left the premises on 15 February with the intention of going to Holland but vanished on the way to Nairobi airport. It is reported that the Nairobi police tricked Ocalan and handed him over to Turkish undercover agents.

It may be recalled that Ocalan had been on the run since October last year when he was forced out of Syria under Turkish pressure. He first attempted to take refuge in Russia, then Italy and finally

Holland but failed. No European country was willing to provide him refuge because of the Turkish pressure supported by the US. Another reason was the presence of Kurds refugees all over Europe and Ocalan's presence could ignite tensions between Turkish nationals and Kurdish living in that country of refuge.

It may be pointed out that the European Union (EU) was critical of Turkey's human rights record and the EU was known to be liberal in providing refugee status to Kurds on the pretext that the Kurds faced "persecution and military oppression" by the Turkish military authorities. Kurdish refugees are now scattered across Europe. About half a million Kurds live in Germany alone. Numerous Kurdish live in other European countries, namely, Italy, Holland and Austria.

The present crisis arises from the varying perceptions about the activities of Kurds rebel chief Ocalan. The Kurds consider him as their freedom-fighter while Turkey perceives him as a mass-murderer and terrorist.

The irreconcilable differing opinions about Ocalan need to be tested against international morality and justice as well as to the international community's response to the call of humanity. The pertinent questions that arise are: How do you define a terrorist? Is Ocalan a terrorist? Was Yasser Arafat or Yatzak Shamir a terrorist? Who is a terrorist? There is a view that if any person has any political motive to advance the cause on behalf of a group of separate ethnic people and fails to resolve it peacefully with the authorities and turns to and

pursues armed action, does he become a terrorist? Then one may conclude that many of the former or present heads of state or government in the developing countries would likely fall in this category.

Another debatable issue is that if Idi Amin of Uganda or Papa Doc of Dominican Republic or Mengistu of Ethiopia or General Pinochet of Chile could not yet stand trial for the crimes against humanity, then one could argue that on what moral or legal rights Ocalan could be tried in Turkey by a Turkish domestic court headed by a military personnel? Does he stand on a different footing simply because he is a follower of Marxism? All are equal before law and there is no scope of "pick and choose" of accountability in crimes.

The episode discloses a further problem. Ordinarily no person is extradited because of "political" crimes. Why? Because political crimes are allegedly committed to safeguard or advance the "superior interest" of a political organisation or to attain political independence or autonomy. These questions appear to be relevant in the case of Ocalan. Does Ocalan have political objectives?

One can argue that there is a merit in the assertion of Turkey that Ocalan is responsible for numerous terrorist activities and murders of innocent people and under his guidance his Marxist followers are estimated to have cost 30,000 precious lives. One may lend support that Ocalan may stand trial. The question is, to which court and under what laws? One may not forget that Turkey retains capital punishment in its statute books.

Where to go from here? There could be two alternatives. One is to arrive at a political solution between the Kurds and Turkey. Ocalan's life-long imprisonment or death would not eliminate this political issue advanced by Kurds. He would be seen as a martyr by his supporters and the armed struggle by the Kurds against Turkey could go on for years. As a result there would be more bloodshed and the region will remain unstable. The other course of action is Turkey's agreement to establish an international tribunal comprising of judges from neutral countries where Ocalan could face a public trial. He should be given the opportunity of engaging best lawyers to defend him at such a trial.

There are countless statements about the need to protect the human rights of a person. If there is anything that has the unanimous support of the international community it is need to ensure an impartial and public trial to be seen as fair by the international community. Under Article 10 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone "is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him" and so is Ocalan.

Turkey is a respected and responsible member of the international community and it is expected that it would not wish to see unnecessary backlash there as a result of the trial of Ocalan.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Afghanistan turns Hot for Osama

Syed Talat Hussain writes from Islamabad

The Taliban's dilemma over Osama seems to have been made more acute by a certain distancing Islamabad has introduced in its relations with them over the Osama bin Laden issue. The tone of Pakistan's advice to the Taliban on Osama has surely changed.

THE announcement on Saturday (Feb 13) evening from the Mullah Umar government in Afghanistan that the Taliban have lost contact with Osama bin Laden and that he perhaps has gone out of their country has left a big question mark on the status of the topman on the US list of global terrorists. Islamabad's diplomatic circles are full of speculation of all variety: could he still be in Afghanistan? Has he already moved out of the country, gone perhaps to Chechnya or to another refuge?

If he is dead, because the last time the Taliban feigned ignorance about the whereabouts of the Iranian diplomats, they were later discovered from the graves? The general perception is that Osama is in Afghanistan but planning to leave the country, and the Taliban have issued the statement to make sure that Washington does not launch another phase of decisive military strikes on the hideouts which are known to have been used by him. The threat of the American strikes on Afghanistan has been looming large for quite some time. Unconfirmed reports suggest that during his recently concluded talks with the Taliban and Pakistani officials, the US assistant secretary of state for South Asian Affairs, Karl Inderluth, strongly made the

point to the Taliban to extradite Osama quickly to a country where he could be brought to justice.

Although he gave no specific deadline for Osama's extradition, but his formulation of the demand suggested that Washington was keeping all its options open, including the option of further strikes. Military observers in Islamabad believe that if the Taliban failed to meet Washington's demand of Osama's extradition, ground could be levelled for imminent strikes on Afghanistan, "far more decisive and deadly than the missile attack last year."

The possibility of the attacks gained more weight when Richard Clarke from the US National Security Council issued a widely-quoted statement that Washington would use force to take out terrorists even if they are hiding in other countries. This seemed to be a message meant for the Taliban on Osama bin Laden. The Taliban's response to this build up of pressure was to show flexibility. The Afghan Islamic Press on February 10 issued a statement saying that the Taliban had imposed fresh restrictions on Osama. "Osama bin Laden has been disallowed to meet any visitors or other people" the statement said. It also mentioned a decree by the supreme leader of the Taliban, Mullah Umar, which suggested

that all facilities including his telephone and radio had been withdrawn saying that "he has no facilities any longer with him to communicate with anyone."

The Taliban also said that a special team has been set up to keep a close watch at the Saudi millionaire and to monitor his activities. Taliban spokesman also said that Osama bin Laden was free to leave but he will not be forced out. But Washington termed this measure woefully inadequate. And it was obvious why: it fell short of the demand to extradite Osama bin Laden to another country. The latest reports about Osama bin Laden's absence from Afghanistan show that the Taliban increasingly find that the man who once helped them get through difficult times and to whom they feel greatly indebted has become a national problem for them.

The Taliban's dilemma over Osama seems to have been made more acute by a certain distancing Islamabad has introduced in its relations with them over the Osama bin Laden issue. The tone of Pakistan's advice to the Taliban on Osama has surely changed. From polite requests to show "practical-mindedness" on Osama bin Laden Pakistan began to reflect anxiety over the lingering issue which, its diplomats repeatedly told the

Taliban, involved costs for Pakistan too high and too needless to pay. Pakistani policy makers apparently also signaled to successive American visitors that they did not care what happened to Osama bin Laden as long as Islamabad did not get caught in the crossfire.

This situation narrowed the options down for the Taliban to the following: a) to let Osama bin Laden stay in Afghanistan; b) to extradite him to another country; c) to wash their hands off him in such a way that do not appear to ditch him or seem to be his providers and protectors. They have opted for the third one, the best under the circumstances.

This means that the Taliban can take the position that since Osama bin Laden is not in Afghanistan there is no reason why Washington should launch strikes against him. Even if Washington does not buy what the Taliban are saying and insists that he is in Afghanistan, it will be a little hard for the US to pinpoint where he is, and even harder to launch militarily useful strikes. It gives Osama bin Laden options to consider other hide-outs and perhaps sneak out of Afghanistan whenever he has the opportunity. But he is clearly a man with decreasing options, fewer friends, and awesome odds to confront.

Is Another New World in the Offing?

by Ekram Kabir

US policy in Iraq has collapsed. Again it's in Serbia, where America is going to be challenged by the Russians. North Korea is still unmanageable. The Wye Accords between Israel and the Palestinians are coming apart at the seams. Whether Clinton survives "his" crisis is fairly irrelevant. What is apparently relevant is that the US is yet to create a foreign policy identity for itself, and has not planned for a 21st-century "world", which might be resistant to its policies.

WHAT if we enter into a world resistant to the "one" superpower? There is no second superpower, but many "powers" as such.

Indeed, international political scene implicitly indicates these powers are in the process of cobbling together an alliance that may not fully counterbalance America, but will limit its monopoly. Built around China and Russia, we can expect an increasing Asian economic integration, designed to limit effects of global economy on their insulated societies.

Just imagine that the post-cold war era has quietly ended in '98, and a "new era" has begun — an era with a fundamentally different dynamics than the previous one. Well, it may not sound "historically" right to think of this period as a pause between two eras — a more tricky atmosphere in which great powers have started to unite against the American hegemony. In '98 the US seemed worried with Serbia, Iraq and North Korea. From now on, it is likely to be much more concerned about influences of Russia, China, France and Japan.

Forces may converge to create this new world. There may be a renewed and increasing regional Russian influence, more open China, attempts by others to utilise the situation. Against this backdrop, a rough world cannot be ruled out.

Russia has begun its quest to recover the "great power" status. Because the promise of '91 has become an untenable nightmare for the Russians. The consequences have started to be felt here. Reformers in Russia have been systematically stripped of power led by a new prime minister — the former head of the KGB's international espionage apparatus.

The West, which had invested in Russia, now realises that it would never recover those investments. As a result, investment and credit have already ceased flowing into Russia and, therefore, western influence plummeted. There is now no reason for Russia to appease the West if no further money was forthcoming. It seems like an abrupt halt. Like many times before in Russian history, the pendulum seems to be moving from adoration of the West to suspicion. Russian westernisers who dominated the country for the past decade are being replaced by Slavophiles who now want to get rid of western influence.

Russian politics has searched for a centre of gravity ever since the reformists began to lose credibility. In December '98, this gravity seemed to have emerged in the form of Russian chauvinism and anti-Americanism. When the US bombed Iraq without even consulting the Russians, the lid "suddenly

came off the Russian psyche and they realised their loss of great power standing."

There is a growing consensus that Russia has been victimised both by western investors in general and by the US in particular. They are seen as having taken advantage of Russia's eagerness to please the West. According to them, the US has treated Russia as if it were a third-world country. All of this has tapped into a deep vein of Russian chauvinism.

This reminds us of the last days of Weimar Germany. Unable to provide either prosperity or national security. It was replaced by a regime that used national security issues as a means to unite Germany and revive the economy through military spending. Russia seems to have lost all credibility, failing to provide either prosperity or national security. So, while Germany focused on the Rhineland, Sudetenland and the Danzig Corridor, Russia seems to be planning to focus on the Baltics, Ukraine and Central Asia. A massive increase in defence spending, intended both to multiply Russian power and stimulate its economy, is likely.

On December 25, '98, six years after the Soviet demise, Russia signed a treaty with Belarus, essentially establishing the foundations of re-unification. That set the focus for Ukraine as well. If Ukraine follows suit, the geo-political essence of the former Soviet Union may have been recreated to an extent. Well, these could sound a wishful thinking but, if taken seriously, it bears weight.

To achieve this, Russia will have to face a lot of diplomatic hurdles. Each step of re-absorption might bring it into greater conflict with other nations. Its move back into Central Asia will bring it into direct conflict with the US, which has made huge investments in oil development there. Its move south into the Caucasus will collide with the growing interest of Iran and Turkey. But it is the move west that may be the most dangerous. Western electronic media indicate that it is not unlikely Russian troops may once again find themselves on the Polish border, now a part of NATO. If that happens, the area will become explosive.

The first confrontation is over Serbia, where Russia will increase direct aid openly, challenging US policy in Kosovo. Serbia, watching US fumbling over Iraq, and emboldened by Russian support, is clearly preparing a new challenge over Kosovo. If dangers of a US confrontation with Serbia rise, Russian nationalism may intensify.

Despite ongoing crisis, Russian ambition came clear when at a meeting on September 30

'98 with his foreign minister, Yeltsin expressed his intent to resume a global role as it emerges from the economic crisis. He said: "Everyone must understand that, in the modern world, global problems cannot be resolved unilaterally."

Again, Yeltsin stressed the need for Russia to play a more active role in the G8, which links Russia with the G7. This was already familiar to Ivanov who, following meetings with G7 leaders in New York on September 26, told the press that Russia remains "a great power" in spite of its economic difficulties.

Russia's return as a world power, however, would involve getting its own house in order. Primakov was quoted as saying to the press: "There should be no scope for some Russian regions in effect to agree not to transfer money to the federal budget and not to allow food and other goods to be taken out of their territory. This is difficult time for the country. We cannot put an end to this fiefdom thinking. Otherwise we will lose Russia as a unified state."

Primakov is taking a dramatically different approach to govern Russia than did the reformists. Faced with economic collapse, he is not turning to the West, which he, in fact, blames for the crisis. He is trying to play on Russia's strengths, with an aggressive foreign policy and a return to strong central government. Primakov is attempting to re-assert Russian international influence, at least on a regional level. Where a piecemeal attempt at privatising the economy and following the prescriptions of Harvard economists led to Russia's economic collapse, Primakov, reportedly, is handing the economy back to Gosplan, with plans to re-nationalise key industries. Belarus is already an eager partner in this plan, and Ukraine is being inexorably drawn in as well.

Russia, again, is trying to revive old alliances. A delegation headed by the Minister for Emergency Situations, Sergei Shoigu, met with Libya's Gaddafi in Tripoli on October 8, reportedly to deliver a message from President Yeltsin. On October 10, the substance of Russia's overture to Libya was made known by foreign ministry spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin, who announced that Russia sought cooperation with Libya in the oil and gas sector.

On September 14, Duma leader Gennady Seleznev met with Secretary General of the General People's Congress of Libya, Mohammed Zenatani. During the meeting, Seleznev expressed his concern over the position of the US against individual countries. He also declared that Russia deplored US allegations of Libyan support of

terrorism. "Accusations of terrorism coming from the West, especially the US, against whole countries runs counter to all the international norms," Seleznev said. Russia has also offered its assistance to help negotiate a "fair and acceptable" resolution over the Lockerbie issue and relief from the resulting UN-imposed sanctions on Libya. Cooperation with Libya may help Moscow's foreign policy agenda.

Resuming relations, with Libya gives Russia immediate access to foreign policy levers in Egypt, Sudan, Congo/Zaire, Algeria, Angola, and indirectly to Nigeria and South Africa. Russia has already reasserted its interests, and in doing so has confronted the US, with political and possibly military support to Serbia against possible NATO air-strikes in Kosovo. In addition, it has supported Iraq in its efforts to escape UN-sponsored sanctions.

There may not be a Moscow-Beijing axis in the offing. If that takes place, it will both insulate Russia and China from US political and military pressure, and create a politico-military counter-pressure on the US aimed to elicit greater economic cooperation. There are other countries: France is already clearly cooperating with China and Russia which was visible during US assault on Iraq. However, if there's an anti-American French foreign policy, the question is whether the rest of Europe will follow suit.

The political instincts of the German government reflect a profound uneasiness with America. French policy, for Germany, may be attractive, but there could be instability in the country.

The US economy as usual will continue to expand. There may be a cyclical downturn, but there won't be any significant threat to the US. In spite of the problems in Brazil, Russia and Venezuela, it is felt that the worst has already been seen and the probability of an upturn is strong. Latin America will see the strongest growth of any region in the first decade of the next century.

The economic picture in the Western Hemisphere may look rosy, but the foreign policies of the US are apparently unsettling. US policy in Iraq has collapsed. Again it's in Serbia, where America is going to be challenged by the Russians. North Korea is still unmanageable. The Wye Accords between Israel and the Palestinians are coming apart at the seams. Whether Clinton survives "his" crisis is fairly irrelevant. What is apparently relevant is that the US is yet to create a foreign policy identity for itself, and has not planned for a 21st-century "world", which might be resistant to its policies.

Belgrade's Continued Intransigence Intensifies Kosovo Crisis

by A S M Nurunnabi

Kosovo is the original homeland of the Serbs. It is the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church. But only 10 per cent of Kosovo's population is Serbian, and all of the Albanian majority wants independence. No Serb leader could dare to negotiate that away. By provoking a confrontation with NATO, and perhaps an eventual deployment of Western peace-keepers, Milosevic could claim that a hostile world forced him to surrender Kosovo.

LAST October, the US and the NATO brokered a ceasefire in Kosovo. The western leaders hoped that Serbian President Milosevic, threatened with the use of force, would agree to provide the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo some kind of autonomy. At the same time, they pressured the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to back down from its demands for complete independence, which the western alliance had refused to support.

But a quick series of events in the past two weeks jeopardised the mediation efforts made by the western leaders. First, on January 16, Milosevic's goons murdered 45 civilians in Kosovo. This incident was swiftly condemned by the NATO observers the next day. William Walker, head of the international monitoring mission in Kosovo, blamed the massacre on the Serbs.

But Milosevic remained relentless in his stand against the Albanian rebels. The Serbs blocked the entry into Kosovo of Louise Arbour, chief prosecutor of the international war crimes tribunal, and then expelled William Walker from Kosovo. NATO leaders continued to give every possible chance to the Serbs as it sent two top generals to meet Milosevic and deliver a message — withdraw the expulsion order for Walker and allow Arbour and her group to investigate the massacre of 45 civilians.

The massacre of 45 civilians and its aftermath left many people in and out of Serbia convinced that Milosevic is determined to wreck what few prospects there are in Kosovo. Milosevic proved a master of brinkmanship, pulling back in time to avoid — for the moment — the renewed threat of NATO airstrikes. Walker had flatly refused to go, and soon the Serbian authorities relented and suspended his deportation order.

Soon after last October's ceasefire in Kosovo, it became increasingly clear the Yugoslav President Milosevic never intended to fulfill the terms of the agreement. Recognising the ambivalence of the western powers and their reluctance to punish Serbia's atrocities with a military strike, Milosevic felt free to continue his aggression. The Serb forces seemed bent on carrying out ethnic cleansing operation in Kosovo.

The six-nation contact group of the International Community in the Balkan conflicts met in London lately and issued an ultimatum to both sides of the conflict in Kosovo to sit down for negotiations and come to terms on pain of threatened NATO airstrikes. The broad terms given as the agenda for negotiations include self-rule, as Kosovo used to enjoy before Milosevic, short of independence for Kosovars, control of Kosovo Albanians over local police, and withdrawal of Serb military and paramilitary forces from Kosovo. Russia, as a member of the six-nation group that has US, UK, France, Germany and Italy as other members, has thrown its weight be-

hind the ultimatum, which is designed to break the obstinacy of the Yugoslav President, who continues to refuse to withdraw his genocidal forces from Kosovo.

Both the Serbian authorities and the Kosovo Liberation Army's political leadership have been served with a short notice to send their representatives by a stipulated date in February, and then work out an agreement within a week's time. The threat of air action by NATO is contingent upon not only the failure of negotiations but also on safe withdrawal of UN monitors in Kosovo.

The instant reaction to the ultimatum has been negative from both the warring sides. But the Kosovo Albanian political leadership, in view of the intolerable hardship and losses of life and property of the Kosovo population, driven to the hills under indiscriminate attacks from genocidal Serb military and paramilitary forces, have reportedly persuaded the military wing of KLA to take part in the proposed talks. In fact, the KLA has no faith in the prospect of negotiation and no hope for an immediate settlement.

It was felt by some impartial observers that the atrocities in Kosovo didn't result from Milosevic's fault alone; his rampage in Kosovo has been encouraged by a failure of leadership and action by the Clinton administration and paralysis and cowardice within NATO. NATO has remained immobilised by divisions within its member countries. It has been seen that it routinely accepts the atrocities it claims to find "unacceptable", repeatedly warning or hinting of military reprisals, only to back down later, thereby making a mockery of its words and encouraging more defiance and violence from Milosevic.

In this situation, many US analysts and politicians believe it is time to consider an independent Kosovo as a way out of the latest Balkan crisis, officials from the White House to the Pentagon shy away from any acknowledgment of that possibility, insisting that the aim is a negotiated agreement for political autonomy for the ethnic Kosovo Albanian majority within the Yugoslav framework.

The argument which is driving the US policy is that chipping Kosovo off the already shrunken Yugoslavia could threaten even wider disintegration in the Balkans and undermine the fragile Bosnia peace deal.

Analysts concede that there is very little support in Europe for such a move and that it is not likely to be a major factor in senior level meetings of NATO and the contact group on former Yugoslavia in coming days.

US leaders stress they are trying to be evenhanded, not encouraging or helping the pro-independence struggle that is now overwhelmingly backed by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Their misery in the hands of the Serbs may continue in the coming months. The only way to free them would be to give them a statehood where they could live in peace. It is sad that the violence in Kosovo has continued for so long and claimed so many innocent lives. It is, therefore, felt that given where we stand now, supporting the independence of Kosovo is the only way to send an unequivocal message to Milosevic that the massacre of the innocent won't be tolerated.

Though the UN Security Council has thrown its support behind a demand by the US and European allies for an autonomy settlement for ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, and adopted a consensus statement welcoming the call by contact group for Serbs to sit down with ethnic Albanians to end a year of violence, things didn't seem to be moving in that direction. The question is already being asked by some keen analysts: what is Milosevic's game? He wants to give Kosovo "independence".

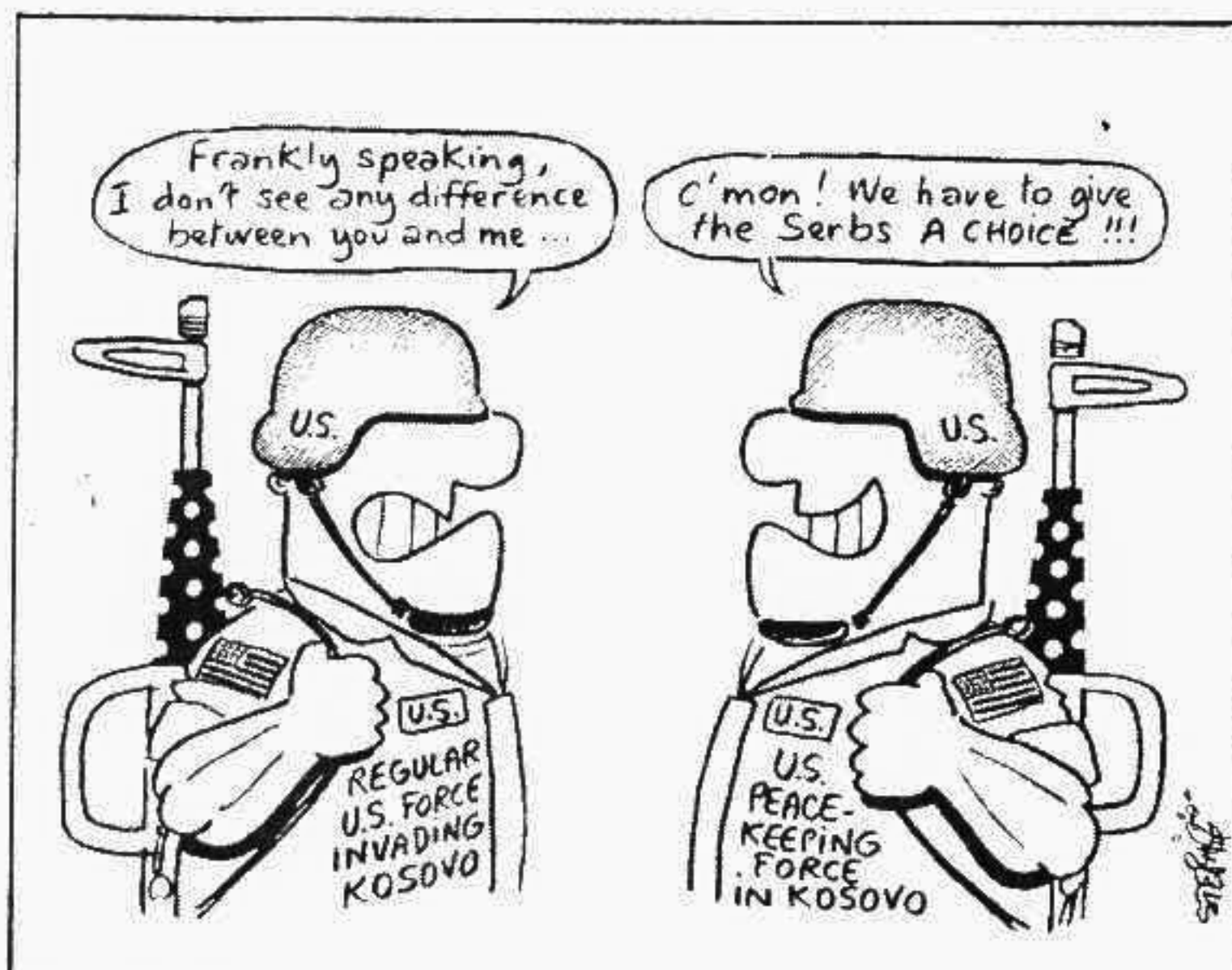
It's an albatross. As long as he holds onto Kosovo he's going to be spending huge amounts of money keeping police and military there even though he'll never be able to have control. But he can't just give it up, it has to be taken away.

However conspiratorial, this

is a view popular now with everyone from foreign academics to Kosovo's Serbian minority — and even many of Walker's 800-strong verifiers, working for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. "NATO airstrikes are oddly appealing to Milosevic," says one OSCE official. "The West is a way out of the crisis. He'll hang onto Kosovo as long as possible, and then leave when the timing is right."

It's a theory that at least on the surface flies in the face of reason. Kosovo is the original homeland of the Serbs. It is the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church. But only 10 per cent of Kosovo's population is Serbian, and all of the Albanian majority wants independence. No Serb leader could dare to negotiate that away. By provoking a confrontation with NATO, and perhaps an eventual deployment of Western peace-keepers, Milosevic could claim that a hostile world forced him to surrender Kosovo.

Milosevic really wants to shed Kosovo, he may well get his wish. Full independence for Kosovo would be risky. If the recent massacres of civilians by Serbs are any guide, the withdrawing would probably leave a trail of blood behind them. But perhaps, in Milosevic's tangled calculations, at least it wouldn't be his problem any longer.



Delhi Has Second Thoughts on Shifting Bihar Governor

PRIME Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government went through moments of indecision before announcing that the Governor of Bihar, where federal rule was imposed last week, would not be shifted.

Hours after a senior minister of the Vajpayee cabinet said the government was moving towards giving the eastern state an "apolitical administration" by shifting Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari, it was announced that there would be no change. Bhandari, a former vice-president of

the BJP, was appointed last year after the Vajpayee government assumed office.

"We have been thinking broadly in terms of giving a non-partisan and apolitical administration in Bihar. The government has broadly in mind these two aspects and some changes are being contemplated," Home (Interior) Minister Lal Krishna Advani observed in the morning while indicating the recall of Bhandari.

However, after late evening meetings, the government announced that

Bhandari would continue for the time being and would be given the necessary support to carry on with the administration of the state.

Bhandari confirmed to reporters in the Bihar capital Patna today that he had not resigned and denied that there was any pressure on him. He said he would be going to New Delhi for meetings with leaders there.

According to sources, the Vajpayee government succumbed to pressures from within the BJP in retracting its earlier decision to shift Bhandari from Bihar to another state. Some party parliamentarians had re-

portedly sent a petition to Vajpayee last night, threatening to resign from Parliament's Lower House if Bhandari was replaced.

Opposition parties were against Bhandari's appointment as Governor last year, seeing him as a Hindu hardliner.

The government of Chief Minister Rabri Devi was sacked on Friday by President Kocheril Raman Narayanan on the recommendation of the BJP-led coalition government following two him, terland massacres in three weeks in which 34 people were killed.

The killings, alleged to be the handiwork of the Ranvir

Sena, a private militia owing allegiance to the landowning class which has a running feud with the communist-led peasantry, were seen as the last straw in the state's deteriorating law and order situation.

Bihar strongman and Rabri Devi's husband Laloo Prasad Yadav maintains the massacres were part of a plot by the BJP and its ally, the Samata Party, to unseat Rabri Devi.

New Delhi has rushed 16,000 paramilitary personnel to assist the 32,000 federal forces already stationed there and the tens of thousands of state policemen to keep the peace.

While dismissing the Bihar

government, Narayanan kept the state assembly in suspended animation giving rise to speculation that other parties like the BJP or the Congress may try to form an alternative government.

But this is now being discounted mainly because of the arithmetic of the state legislature—Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal with 149 members in the 324-seat House far outnumbered the others.

According to reports, New Delhi is considering a financial package for Bihar for its speedy recovery and development and is likely to launch a campaign.

— IANS