

The Balkan Tragedy: Independent Kosovo is the Answer

by Dr M A Bari

Power deceives people. Tyrants and brutes do not learn from the past and end up in ignominy and destruction. Like a rotating wheel history has its ups and downs. If human retribution fails to take revenge, divine one comes in.

In the closing days of the 20th century when the world is looking for a new millennium Europe is once again being haunted by the spectre of holocaust. But this time it is termed as ethnic cleansing. As the Bosnians, and now Albanians, are predominantly Muslims, although white, 'Muslim cleansing' would probably be an appropriate terminology. The systematic eviction of a nation from their homeland is reminiscent of the savagery carried out by Hitler and Stalin in the 1930's and 40's. In the wake of Hitler's experiment with 'inferior races' the world woke up and defended the victims from annihilation. The Second World War, of course, paved in a new world with the shackles of colonialism torn apart in the four corners of the globe.

But the world created by the victors could not guarantee peace as it was not based on justice and equality. In the shadow of the cold war inhuman atrocities were being recreated in many parts of the world, e.g., Soviet Union, Palestine, Cambodia. Cold war was characterised by a 'cold peace'. With the fall of Berlin Wall the world lost whatever balance it had. Wars erupted like wild fire in many places. The extinction of one million Tutsi by extremist Hutu militia men failed to move the so called leaders of the world. The destruction, killing and rape in Bosnia by the Serb hyenas in the gaze of world media shocked the world, but the western appeasement of Milosevic was matched by dismal inaction of the Muslim regimes. The blood bath in Srebrenica, the so-called UN 'safe haven', was a disgrace to the UN powers who decided not to act because of 'inhospitable terrain' of Balkan and the fear of 'bloodshed'. The reason was, of course, well understood by over one billion Muslims.

Now the West has come out from its 'wait and see' policy. Since the Bosnian crisis the UN and NATO had one and only tactics, i.e., clear evasion from their responsibility as the victims were born Muslims, although of European stock. This encouraged Milosevic to continue his barbaric cruelty. What has now clicked the West to start a 'strategic' bombing campaign on Milosevic's army? What course the Balkan conflagration will take? To understand the present crisis we need to look at Kosovan history.

The Background
Kosova, a land of 4,203 sq

miles with a population of two million is the powder-keg of Balkans. It is rich with mineral resources, but deliberately kept poor by the Yugoslav authority over the decades. Ethnic Albanians, most of whom are Muslims, are absolute majority (90%). Kosovo is different from Serbia. Albanians speak in the Indo-European language which is far removed from Serbo-Croatian. Albanian culture has roots that differ from those of the Slavic people. It has central importance for the three types — the Serbs, the Albanians and the West. The Ottoman victory over the Serbs in the famous battle of Kosovo in 1389 was a watershed in the Balkan history. Following another Ottoman victory over the Crusade army at Varna in 1444 the fate of Kosovo was once and for all sealed, as ethnic Albanians accepted Islam in droves. But the Serbs never accepted the reality and had always tried to pass on their hatred against the Muslims to their descendants. Kosovo remained Ottoman for many centuries.

As Ottoman Khilafah became weak, the European powers secured the independence of Serbia at the Berlin Congress of 1878 after almost 500 years of Ottoman supremacy. Kosovo was not part of Serbia then. Later on, the European powers' acceptance of the Serbian occupation of Kosovo (or Kosovo) and their deliberate lack of understanding of the aspirations of the Albanian population created today's Kosovo problem. Historian Noel Malcolm's 1998 book 'Kosovo, a short history', (p. 266) mentions that Kosovo, according to international law, is not part of Serbia, but rather a part of Yugoslavia according to the Ankara Treaty of 1925. Even within Yugoslavia, the Serbs never considered Kosovo Albanians as equal. As a result Kosovans did not obtain their own Republic in the Yugoslav Federation after World War II, whereas minority people such as the Montenegrins, the Macedonians and the Slovenes did.

The earliest Albanian resistance against the Serbian military took place in 1918-19 and resulted in their massacre by the Serbs. Nearly a quarter million ethnic Albanians were driven from Kosovo between the two world wars and another

quarter million emigrated to Turkey following World War II. Former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and current President Süleyman Demirel of Turkey are descendants of Albanian immigrants. During the 1970's, the situation of the Kosovo-Albanians gradually improved a bit. An Albanian university was established in Pristina in 1970, and the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974 gave Kosovo a level of autonomy nearly equal to that of the Yugoslav Republics — but without the right of a Republic to secede from the Yugoslav Federation.

The Present Genocide

In the late 1980's, after the death of Marshall Tito, Serbia rescinded its autonomy and took direct control of it. In 1989, current Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic annulled the autonomy of Kosovo in violation of the Yugoslav Constitution. He sent in Serbian police forces and closed the university of Pristina to Albanian students. Being desperate, the Kosovan Albanians voted overwhelmingly in 1992 to secede from Yugoslavia. The Serbian dominated government of Yugoslavia tightened its control and sent occupation army in response. Under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova, the 'Gandhi of Kosovo', the population managed to remain calm until 1998, in spite of the ever-increasing Serbian oppression. The people of Kosovo have formed their own cultural and social institutions, including a university which is housed in private homes. Instead of softening Milosevic, this Gandhi-style peace policy encouraged further Serb atrocity.

After their scorched-earth campaign in Bosnia, when the Milosevic army smelled blood of Muslims, they decided to lynch Kosovo in 1998. They systematically attacked and destroyed village after village on the pretext of destroying a small armed resistance group, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The continuous evasive policy of the western powers led to a nightmare scenario. The unashamed Russian support for Serbia today is due to the feeling of solidarity with the culture, language and orthodox beliefs of the Serbs.

The fanatic nationalists of Serbia consider Kosovo as the

'centre of their world', a 'frame of reference', a holy place 'holier than Jerusalem to the Jews' and 'cradle of their civilisation because of its rich heritage of orthodox monasteries'. These ultra-nationalistic feelings have created a myth in the Serb psyche that the Muslims are outsiders. The Serb paranoia for Kosovo has resulted in their policy of extermination of the Muslim majority. Milosevic's sadistic regime has created record in broken promises and has brought disgrace to the whole Slav race. The hysteria surrounding Kosovo has also muzzled conscientious voice in the Slav world. The policy of hate against anything linked with Muslims has isolated Serbia and made her a pariah state in the world community. At the same time Russia, with her vain glory, has lost all her credibility by allying herself with the Serb genocide.

By the time this article is written, more than half a million people, one third of the entire Kosovo Albanians, have been uprooted from their homes by the Serb military machine within a space of few days, according to UNHCR. They are systematically stripped of everything — nationality, citizenship, homes, possessions, money, valuables, and every scrap of paper that gave them human status. They are too many to count, too many to take in, too many to understand. They are a sea of humanity who have been terrorised from their homes. These are just couple of quotes from two senior western journalists who are telling the tales of the world's worst human catastrophe after the second world war. Kosovo Albanian intellectuals and senior leaders are also being hounded and eliminated by the Serb militia men. This is unimaginable, mentioned one senior western politician. But in a continent which offered humanity with two catastrophic world wars, nothing is impossible.

What is for Kosovo Now?

What is going to happen to Kosovo and its Albanian people? Some prophets of doom are already spreading the fatalism that Kosovo would 'probably' be divided with disproportionate

amount of land for 10 per cent Serbians, the rest for the Albanians under a NATO or UN 'protection'. Nobody yet knows what is in NATO's sleeve. But if another flagrant injustice is done in the Balkans, on the hidden pretext that the victims are born Muslims, the seed of unprecedented backlash will definitely grow further in Europe.

Peace and stability of Balkans and, for that matter, whole of Europe depends on whether Kosovo gets its basic right of self-determination. It is unfortunate that many western politicians, even after this continuous dehumanisation of Kosovo Albanians, refuse to accept their universal demand to form their independent state on the pretext that Kosovo cannot sustain her independence. These people forget that there are many independent countries in the world which are smaller and less resourceful than Kosovo. They probably are fearful that an independent Kosovo could unite all the ethnic Albanians of the Republic of Macedonia and the Albanian Republic to form a 'Greater Albania'. A bigger Muslim state in Europe! Some of them are quite open in their expression of intolerance with Islam.

The NATO intention is marred with ambiguity. One KLA commander has already accused NATO of deceiving Kosovo Albanians by asking them not to mobilise themselves on the understanding that NATO would protect Kosovo. Even if cynicism about NATO action is put aside, the effect of 'strategic bombing' on Milosevic's military capability has proved disastrous to the Kosovo Albanians. This has in effect strengthened the Serb intention of creating an Albanian-free Kosovo. The civilised world is once again witnessing a re-creation of another Palestine in Europe as a result of brute force by one rogue country and political intrigue by the western powers. Many military and strategic experts, like Zbigniew Brzezinski, are voicing their dismay at NATO's apparent 'no risk' enterprise and asking for clear and well defined objectives.

The Kosovo Albanians are an ancient race who know how to survive. They are tough and ingenious. The table can be

turned on the Serbians if the Kosovo Albanians are given the opportunity to fight back. The following are the only options left to save Kosovo and also to retain NATO credibility: 1) arming KLA with armour and heavy artillery to defend their land, 2) tactical bombing on the Serb military machine to reduce their capability so that they lose the stomach to commit crime and, if necessary, 3) putting NATO ground troops in Kosovo to deny the Serbs of their appetite for an absolute military victory over innocent people.

The third action can easily be avoided if the first two actions are taken seriously and quickly. They will be more effective and less troublesome for the NATO governments as well. As the Kosovo Albanians are facing the prospect of total extinction they will make better soldiers than their NATO counterparts. Patriotism and knowledge of the land are determining factors in any war which the NATO ground troops will definitely lack. Moreover, they can be done quicker than the effective mobilisation of NATO forces.

Arming KLA is now an international obligation. Only then a replay of Srebrenica on a larger scale can be avoided. Once the humanitarian catastrophe is thwarted and the Kosovo Albanians return to their ruined homes, the mechanism to create an independent Kosovo should be devised. Massive international help will be required to rebuild the country. It will be farcical to think of dividing Kosovo or handing it over to Serbia again. Historically, rationally and morally Serbia does not have any legitimacy over Kosovo. The clock can not be turned backward. International community must accept the reality and go for a lasting solution based on justice.

Every Injustice has its End

Power deceives people. Tyrants and brutes do not learn from the past and end up in ignominy and destruction. Like a rotating wheel history has its ups and downs. If human retribution fails to take revenge, divine one comes in. Some of those who found pleasure in crucifying weaker communities were mummified as learning resources, for people to come. In the Balkans victims of genocide will also have their day.

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Protecting the Kosovars

by Edward Said

There should have been a straight-out and clearly stated willingness to accept self-determination for Kosovo as well as a safeguarding of rights for the Serbian minority there. None of this was done. And neither were the consequences thought through, i.e., the certainty that the Serb forces would respond to NATO bombardment by intensifying their attacks against Albanian civilians, more ethnic cleansing, more refugees, more trouble for the future.

will affect the US's image in the eyes of other, especially other competitive countries. Henry Kissinger made that point a central concern of his Indo-Chinese policy when he undertook the secret bombing of Laos: your enemies will learn that there are no limits to what you are prepared to do, even to the point of appearing totally irrational.

Thus the exercise of massive destructiveness wholly disproportionate to the goal, say, of stopping an opponent from advancing further, is a central aim of this policy, as it has been of Israel's policy in southern Lebanon, where massive raids on civilian encampments do absolutely nothing to affect Israel's main enemies, the Hizbullah guerrillas. Punishment is its own goal, bombing as a display of NATO authority in its own satisfaction, especially when there is little chance of retaliation from the enemy. That is one consideration behind the current bombing of Yugoslavia. Another is the misguided and totally hopeless goal of hum-

bling, and perhaps even destroying, Milosevic's regime. This, as has been the case in Iraq, is illusory. No nation, no matter how badly attacked from the air is going to rally to the attackers. If anything, Milosevic's regime is now strengthened. All Serbs feel that their country is attacked unjustly, and that the cowardly war from the air has made them feel persecuted. Besides, not even the Kosovo Albanians believe that the air campaign is about independence for Kosovo or about saving Albanian lives: that is a total illusion.

What transpired before the bombing was that the US seems to have persuaded the Kosovars that if they went along with the "peace plan" Kosovo would get its independence; this was never said, but only implied, leading the Kosovars to expect NATO help. But, as usual, the US has never stated unequivocally that it is for full self-determination for all the peoples of former Yugoslavia. There should have been a

straight-out and clearly stated willingness to accept self-determination for Kosovo as well as a safeguarding of rights for the Serbian minority there. None of this was done. And neither were the consequences thought through, i.e., the certainty that the Serb forces would respond to NATO bombardment by intensifying their attacks against Albanian civilians, more ethnic cleansing, more trouble for the future. There is now talk of 200,000 ground troops (mostly American) to enter the battle and expand the war, with the attendant problems of prolonged occupation, guerrilla warfare, greater devastation, black refugees, and so on. A lot of this comes from the delusion that the US is the world's policeman. In the meantime, its genocidal policy against Iraq continues, and its sanctions policy against other Islamic or Arab countries also continues.

Nothing of what the US or NATO does now has anything really to do with protecting the Kosovars or bringing them in-

dependence: it is rather a display of military might whose long-range effect is disastrous, just as is a similar policy in the Middle East. In 1994 when a US intervention might have averted genocide in Rwanda, there was no action. The stakes were not high enough, and black people not worth the effort. Therefore it seems to me imperative that the NATO bombing should stop, and a multi-party conference of all the peoples of former Yugoslavia be called to settle differences between them on the basis of self-determination for all, not just for some, nor for some at the expense of others. This is the same principle that has been violated by US-sponsored peace processes elsewhere, notably in the Middle East.

There is nothing about the current policy of bombing Serbian forces that will either guarantee democracy for Serbia or protect the Albanians who are still being treated horribly by Milosevic's forces. In its arrogance and ill-considered military deployment the US has

forced NATO to go along with it, whereas it is quite clear that there is increasing disunity within the NATO ranks, not just Greece and Italy and Turkey, but also France and Germany.

The greatest danger of all is that more people will be displaced, more lives lost, and more fragmentation will occur in places like Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. All this for the US to assert its will and to show the world who is boss. The humanitarian concerns expressed are the merest hypocrisy since what really counts is the expression of US power.

What I find most distressing is the destruction is being wrought from the air, with a fastidiousness articulated about the loss of American life that is positively revolting. Clinton knows well that Americans will not tolerate the loss of life for Americans. Yet he can destroy Yugoslavian lives with impunity from the safety of the ultimate in modern technology and airpower, with American pilots and bombers sanitizing their horror with the illusion of safety and distance. When will the smaller, lesser, weaker peoples realize that this America is to be resisted at all costs, not pandered or given in to naively?

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

Kosovo Crisis: No Alternative to Action

by Rt Hon Robin Cook MP

As I write, Serb security forces and paramilitaries are conducting the most brutal campaign of terror against the Kosovo Albanians. Men are being separated from their wives and children and then executed. Whole villages are being burnt. Hundreds of thousands are being forced to flee their homes.

In the last war Europe paid the price of despotism and ethnic hatred. After the war we said "never again". Yet some of the Serbian tactics are all too reminiscent of those dark days. President Milosevic's forces are conducting a systematic campaign of violence against a group of civilians purely on the basis of their ethnic identity. They are making a concerted attempt to rid a country of an entire community.

The actions of President Milosevic are a gross abuse of human rights. They are causing human suffering on a colossal scale. And they are an affront to everything that the modern Europe stands for.

I come from a generation that was scarred by the evil of apartheid in Africa. Its dismantling was one of the great victories of recent years. We will not tolerate its re-emergence on our own doorstep. That is why we are acting in Kosovo. That is why we will see it through.

Milosevic's campaign of violent repression is nothing new. It did not start when NATO action began. Over the past year, long before the first NATO bombs dropped, Milosevic's forces had driven almost four hundred thousand people from their towns and villages. The latest round of brutality has swelled those numbers even further. It has become a tale of suffering on an unimaginable scale.

These grim statistics tell a terrible story. But every one represents a life uprooted, a home lost, a childhood shattered, a livelihood abandoned. Every one represents a gross violation of human rights. Every one is a stain on our continent, a reminder of the worst days of our past.

Some people are saying that our action has made things worse. This could not be more wrong. We have known for some time that Milosevic was planning a Spring campaign against the people of Kosovo. That is why we — and our partners in the Contact Group — did everything we could to keep the peace process alive. It is why we repeatedly offered Milosevic the hand of peace, each time to have it rejected.

It is all too clear that he was never negotiating in good faith.

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Indicators of Genocide in Kosovo

by David Pitts

THERE are "indicators of genocide unfolding in Kosovo," David Scheffer, the State Department's ambassador-at-large for war crimes, told journalists April 5 in briefing at USIA's Foreign Press Centre.

Killings are occurring on "a systematic and widespread basis," he said. Scheffer — who just returned from a visit to the border region between Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where he personally interviewed ethnic Albanian refugees — said he was unable to assess precisely who gave the orders in the chain of command.

"We will leave that to the [war crimes] tribunal," he said, but added that it is clear that political responsibility "reaches back to Belgrade." Scheffer said his visit to the region had three objectives: — to obtain "an immediate account of the humanitarian crisis as it was unfolding." He described what he saw as a "horrible sight," hordes of refugees arriving in FYR Macedonia "like a stream of water," stripped of all belongings.

— to seek "interviews from as many refugees as possible." He said he conducted about 15 hours of interviews with some 200 refugees. He stressed that he did not disclose his full identity to them, describing himself only as an American.

— to organize "a continuing interview process" using US personnel remaining in the field. He said the State Department wants "continuing reporting for the foreseeable future." The stories told by the refugees were remarkably similar. Scheffer noted. Typically, Serb forces would enter a civilian area in Kosovo, approach each house, give the occupants minutes to leave with the in-

struction "either you leave or you die," and rob those who chose to leave. He said he was told snipers shot those who didn't follow orders after they left their homes.

As far as NATO airstrikes are concerned, Scheffer said that "no one knew of anyone killed by the bombing," but he was told by refugees that, in some cases, civilian buildings close to an airstrike were torched by Serb forces, and pictures were shown on Belgrade television depicting the destruction as caused by NATO.

Asked if the refugees told accounts of massacres, Scheffer said, "Several refugees said they heard about massacres, but none said they saw them." Most of the "murders he heard described were of individual killings. But he said "You hear a lot more on the Albanian-Kosovo border of reports of massacres." He also said there were "disturbing reports" from other sources. One reporter wanted to know whether the United States now regards Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a war criminal. Scheffer replied that must be determined by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, since it is a judicial judgement.

On the remaining ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, Scheffer said the United States does not know what Milosevic's intentions are — whether expulsions will continue or whether the Yugoslav government is just seeking to reduce the number of ethnic Albanians in the Serb province.

But he emphasized that there is "still a very large number of internally displaced people in Kosovo" whose fate is unknown.

— USIA/USIS

WITH the completion of the twenty eighth year of our independence, one cannot help wonder at our achievements. Questions like, "Is this what our freedom fighters fought for?" are heard often as many sigh and mourn about how the country is going downhill in all respects.

There is the environmental factor that definitely leaves a lot of room for improvement. One of the main reasons that people tend to move away from their roots is unhealthy atmosphere which, in our respect, reduces life expectancy considerably. The young parents of today worry that their children would not be able to survive here and always seek opportunities to emigrate. And who can

blame them? One trip from Dhanmondi to Gulshan, and a life time of smoking is made up for. The lead, carbon and smog in the air lead people to live in an unhygienic, unfriendly environment. Lead has hazardous effects on the human mind and retards mental growth among children. This cause people to be aggravated, disturbed and frustrated all the time. It is this that makes the Bangladeshi people, once known for their hospitality, kindness and warmth, unfeeling, hard and indifferent.

The love and patriotism that was seen during the war and post war period only seem to exist in the memories of those who witnessed the war. This appears to be the general idea

among the elders of the society. What actually is the situation is that for the youngsters the negative aspects hide the love and respect for the country. What they see right in front of their eyes is how dirty their country is. They see how rude people are on the roads. They see girls being the victims of rape and acid attack. They see torture and violence in safe custody. They see obstruction of justice. Under such situations it is very difficult to love the people around. Yet, they do.

Especially those who live away from home, realize what their country means to them. They may complain about how hot it is here, what a high level

of pollution prevails, how dirty and dusty everything is, but when away, most feel that the polluted, smelly, hot and dirty, good of Bangladesh is the best place in the world. Maybe people have grown more indifferent towards one another, but still, love is one of our strong points. The Bangladeshi people know how to love and care about people. And it is the people that make Bangladesh so special.

Whatever the present generation knows about our Independence Day is what they have been taught. The feelings this day evokes in them vary according to what their families, schools and textbooks taught them. The youth of today

are no less further away from the controversies the political leaders have created regarding this day than the leaders themselves.

Their thoughts and beliefs are shaped along the lines of their parents. In such a circumstance, if it is said that the young do not care, then it is simply because their parents have not been able to teach him the value of his motherland. There are many who have left this country, never to return again. They have decided that this is not the place for them. However, what they do not realize is that they will never be accepted as one of 'them', wherever they go. They will always remain the outsiders. They will understand, only too late, that

they have no identity, no roots to go back to, nothing called home. Here, one cannot blame the person who has gone astray, but those who told him that was the better choice to make. The parents are the ones who take such decisions rather than the child. Children are the best judges of love and devotion. They are the ones who realize, sooner than anyone else, that the people here love them with all their heart. The many hearts that gift this country make up for the hazards living here entails. Just because something is dirty and polluted, it does not mean that it cannot be loved. Just because they do not show it, it does not mean that today's people do not love their country.

