

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Deconstructing Milosevic's "Sacred Rights" to Kosovo

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

The NATO, in my opinion has committed, at least three errors. First of all, it seriously underestimated the level of Milosevic's insanity and resolve. Second, the allies should have maintained the threat of ground offensive from the very beginning. Third, given the fact that public opinion in Yugoslavia is completely controlled by Milosevic, the NATO should have installed powerful radio and television transmitters in Serbo-Croat language, close to the Serbian border with a view to winning the propaganda war inside Serbia.

EVER since Slobodan Milosevic (a Serb from Montenegro) came to power in Serbia (one of the six constituent republics of former Yugoslavia) in 1989, so many intellectuals, historians, journalists and political strategists have written so much and so brilliantly on Kosovo, (which is variously described as a crisis, a problem, a fiasco etc.) that I hesitated a long time to give my opinion on this subject. I am not a historian, nor an intellectual and definitely not an expert on geo-political strategies. But I am going to examine the issue from an ordinary citizen's point of view, who has had considerable contact with the Slav people of different nationalities, including that of the United States and does not much understand leaders who take political decisions, affecting the lives of millions of human beings, in the closing years of the twentieth century, based on self-serving interpretation of medieval history and ancestral hatred.

My earliest recollection of the Slav people dates back to 1961 or 1962, when a severe earthquake destroyed towns and villages in Yugoslavia (meaning land of the South Slavs). My English mentor, Frank Harcourt-Manning, together with several British charities organised relief operations to alleviate the immediate sufferings of the earthquake victims. In that connection, he visited the country several times and came in contact with a good number of local people there, particularly in Skopje (now capital of the independent republic of Macedonia). In one of his trips to Yugoslavia, he brought back to England a student called Boshko. He came from a small town in southern Macedonia (then part of Yugoslavia), very close to Pella (part of Greek Macedonia), where Alexander, the Macedonian conqueror was born in 356 B.C.

Later we came to know other members of Boshko's family. Since we belonged to more or less the same age group, Boshko and I became good friends. It was from him that I first came to know about the ethnic, cultural and religious complexities of Yugoslavia, which was composed of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and of course, Serbia), five languages (Serbo-Croat, Macedonian, Albanian, Slovenian and Hungarian) three religions (Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Islam) and two alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin). He also told me that Yugoslavia was formed out of the remnants of two empires — Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian. Although he himself was of Macedonian Slav origin, I did not find any animosity in him against other ethnic groups. It is from him that I came to know that there were significant Muslim (close to 30 per cent of the total population of Macedonia) minorities in his area and although they lived in separate neighbourhoods, there was considerable social contact among the different communities.

All this has unfortunately changed. The Federation of Yugoslavia no longer exists. The country has been violently torn asunder by wars. Why? If we have to look for one single individual who bears the responsibility for the destabilisation of the region, then I am afraid, we must point our finger to Milosevic. While Joseph Tito (whose father was Croat and mother Slovenian) had a decentralised government, held down ethnic antagonism by autocratic means (not that I support his method) and followed a policy of national unity among ethnic diversity, Milosevic destroyed national unity by trying to impose the superiority of

Serb nationalism over everything else and thereby accentuated the ethnic differences.

When in 1989, he was elected as the President of Serbia, the first thing he did was to abolish the autonomous status of Kosovo (90 per cent of whose population is of Muslim Albanian origin) and to prohibit the use of their language. Sensing what was coming, Slovenia, which has a homogeneous population and hardly any Serbs, declared its independence in 1991 and got away with it. Croatia, which had a significant Serb minority also declared its independence in June 1991. The country was invaded by the armies of Milosevic. The idea was to retain Croatia under the domination of the Serbs and if that failed then, to wrest control of Krajina, eastern Slavonia and Baranja, which had substantial Serb minorities and make them parts of Milosevic's dreamland called Greater Serbia.

The Croats, after some initial setbacks fought back, defeated Milosevic, became independent and paid back Milosevic for the aggression by forcibly evicting more than 200,000 Serbs from their country, some of whom were sent to Kosovo by Milosevic for resettlement there. Macedonia also separated from the federation in 1991 and declared its independence. Milosevic launched a murderous campaign of ethnic cleansing (this time against the Serbo-Croat speaking Muslims and Croats) in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We all know what happened there (the mass killings in Srebrenica, the siege of Sarajevo, the deportation of two million civilians, the systematic raping of thousands of Muslim women, etc.). When the whole world looked on, (Where were the leftist demonstrators and pacifists then, who are protesting against NATO intervention today?) Milosevic's stooges committed the most heinous crimes against humanity. It was only the intervention of the United States, which stopped the killings. In any case, this is not the subject of this letter. The net result of Milosevic's grand design is that at present of the six constituent republics of Yugoslavia, there are only two left in the federation (Serbia and Montenegro) and I have serious doubts as to whether Montenegro will remain in the federation after the end of the war.

Let us go back to Kosovo and examine the validity of Milosevic's "sacred rights" to this territory. In the official propaganda coming out of Belgrade, the theory that is propagated (many Serbs unfortunately consider it as the Biblical truth) is that Kosovo is the cradle of Serb civilisation and that the Albanians are mere usurpers. Therefore, the Serbs have a divine right to that land and that authorises them to get rid of the two million or so Albanian Kosovars, who for generations have been living there. No such theory has been expounded in Europe since the Holocaust of the Jews in Nazi Germany. This is true that the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, in which the Serbian army was defeated by the invading Ottoman Turks is a landmark in the history of Serb nationalism, because it led to the subsequent conquest of the whole of Serbia by the Turks. This is also true that in the middle ages a sizeable displacement of the Serb population from Kosovo took place as a result of Ottoman imperial strategy. Three questions may be raised now: Can one adopt a policy of ethnic cleansing based on events that took place many centuries ago? How far back in history one should go to justify a current action? Is there an acceptable limit?

During the days of Tito (1945-1980), the Kosovars were

allowed to manage their affairs, speak their language and recognised as one of the eight political units (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Voivodina and Kosovo) with equal status in the Federal Government. Tito's death in 1980 changed all that. It was Milosevic who exploited the already existing anti-Albanian feelings among the Serbs to capture power. In 1989, Milosevic abolished the autonomous status of the province, put the entire region under military occupation, introduced an apartheid system, started a vigorous campaign of ethnic cleansing (with the objective of emptying Kosovo of all the inhabitants of Albanian origin) and revived the theory of Greater Serbia. We are painfully aware of what has happened since 1989 and what is happening now. I was afraid that in Kosovo, Milosevic will be allowed to get away with it again. Luckily under coaking from the United States, the NATO has reacted and started a bombing campaign in Yugoslavia.

If before the start of the bombing campaign, I watched the European reactions to the happenings in the Balkans with a sense of helplessness and dismay, now I am absolutely flabbergasted. Rarely have I been a witness to so much double talk and hypocrisy. In order not to bore the reader with too much detail, I shall deal with these topics briefly on a point by point basis.

According to many critics, the bombing is an illegal act because it has not been authorised by the United Nations. They seem to ignore that a bombing resolution would always meet with a Russian veto in the Security Council (until and unless the UN charter is amended). Does this mean to say that since no action can be taken without UN approval, world should stand by and watch how Milosevic continues with mass killings, violations and deportations? If that is so, does this not mean that the international community is indirectly supporting Milosevic's policy? "Oh, no," they reply, "what we should do is to negotiate with Milosevic". But the reality of the situation is that the western nations have negotiated long and hard without any success. No many people like war. But if it is this option, do you have any objection to fight back? Unfortunately, war is and has always been a part of the human condition. This, I am afraid, is the only language people like Milosevic understand. Actually I would go so far as to say that if the West had reacted decisively against Milosevic in 1989, there would not be so much bloodletting and suffering in the Balkans as we are witnessing today. It could also have avoided the mass killings and deportations in Croatia and Bosnia.

There have been leftist (I always thought that the left always fought for justice and human rights) demonstrations in European cities against the bombings because of civilian victims and destruction of the infrastructure in Yugoslavia. They also say that the bombings have merely provoked Milosevic to take further repressive measures against the Kosovars. I think everyone regrets civilian deaths and collateral damages. But since when has it been morally justifiable and politically correct not to take any action against a mass killer of hundreds of thousands of innocent victims (whose only "crime" was to have been born in a different ethnic group)? Because of collateral damages? To say the least this is hypocrisy. With this rationale no one should have done anything against Hitler.

There have also been a lot of criticism against the Ameri-

cans (for some it is the empire of the evil and will remain so no matter what they do). They have been accused of having ulterior motives for taking action against Milosevic. The argument runs as follows: if the Americans did not do anything in Rwanda or Guatemala or Palestine to stop the killings and deportations there, why have they all of a sudden decided to intervene in Europe? "Well," some of them say, "the answer is very simple, they want to destroy the economic recovery of Europe and the Euro. None of them stops to think that this has not been a unilateral action. The US is only one of the nineteen western nations (most of them European) of this alliance who belatedly but finally decided to do something about the Milosevic problem. Some others say, "The Americans want to interfere in European affairs to maintain their global hegemony".

These Europeans seem to forget that the Americans were invited twice before to "interfere" in the European conflicts which engulfed the whole world. Why were they welcome then and not now? Would Europe be what it is today without the very significant human and material sacrifices of the Americans in these two wars? Even if we admit that the reason behind US intervention is to maintain its world leadership position, does it really matter to the Kosovars? If their European neighbours could not take the initiative, they are only too glad that someone from across the ocean has come to save their lives. Again, what sort of argument is this that since you did not or could not come to the aid of the victims in other parts of the world you have no right to help the Kosovars?

The NATO, in my opinion, has committed, at least three errors. First of all, it seriously underestimated the level of Milosevic's insanity and resolve. Second, the allies should have maintained the threat of ground offensive from the very beginning. Third, given the fact that public opinion in Yugoslavia is completely controlled by Milosevic, the NATO should have installed powerful radio and television transmitters in Serbo-Croat language, close to the Serbian border with a view to winning the propaganda war inside Serbia. This is especially true if the NATO (for whatever reasons) is not prepared to fight a ground war in Kosovo.

There is no doubt that everyone wants an early end to the war, but not at any price. It should not be ended even in the manner the Bosnian war was ended. This time the NATO must ensure that a durable peace is achieved. We do not know if and when and under what conditions the hundreds of thousands of Kosovo refugees will be able to go back to their homes in Kosovo. But one thing is clear in my mind i.e. if Milosevic is not ousted from power and if a western democratic system is not established in Serbia, he will soon go against the people of Montenegro because of their somewhat neutral stand in this conflict, start another campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Hungarians of Voivodina and the Muslims of Sandzak. If he is allowed to get away with it, who knows what is going to happen in Macedonia, (whose role in this conflict, to put it mildly, has not been very clear), where almost thirty percent of the population is Muslim. While concluding this war, the NATO should also bear in mind that Tudjman (Croatia) is anxiously waiting for the outcome of the conflict to see whether the West gives him an opportunity to dismember Bosnia along ethnic lines.

In the *War and the Birth of Bangladesh* chapter of JN Dixit's *Liberation and Beyond*, the focus is on the broad objectives and characteristics of the India's military campaign against Pakistan, and their political and democratic dimension. The author narrates how the successful strategy to outflank, encircle and compartmentalise the Pakistani forces, thereby drastically reducing their fighting capacity led to a decisive victory for the Indian Army and led to the formal birth of Bangladesh. Also, he relates how India dealt with the foreign policy aspects as regards its vigorous support to Bangladesh's cause and manoeuvred at the United Nations to withstand persistent pressure from the major powers, except the Soviet Union, for a cease-fire and immediate political negotiations to end the conflict. The Daily Star is serialising extracts from the book through exclusive contract with University Press Limited (UPL), publisher of its Bangladesh edition.



J N DIXIT

Liberation and Beyond

War and the Birth of Bangladesh

by J N Dixit

A number of descriptive and analytical books have been written about the 1971 war between India and Pakistan which lasted just about a fortnight. These have ranged from political analyses to military descriptions. While the commander of Pakistani forces in East Pakistan on 1970-71, General Niazi, has come out with his account after a gap of nearly 27 years in 1998, his Indian counterpart, Lt. General J S Aurora, has yet to give his version of the military campaign. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the military operations, because I had no direct involvement in it. I was only an indirect witness to the higher political processes and decisions, which governed this campaign. I would, therefore, focus on the political events attendant on this third conflict between India and Pakistan, and then describe the dramatic events leading to the formal establishment of Bangladesh as an independent country.

First a summary of the broad objectives and characteristics of the military campaign as I recall them. The primary objective was to give full operational support to the freedom fighters of Bangladesh for a decisive defeat of the Pakistan army ensuring its departure from East Pakistan and the transformation of East Pakistan into a free republic of Bangladesh.

A consequential objective was to make sure that Pakistan does not take advantage of the conflict situation to intrude into Jammu and Kashmir and capture it. Another goal was to counter as decisively as feasible a possible invasion from Sindh and Punjab leading to Pakistan acquiring Indian territory in the western sector. India also proposed to take tactical and procedural political initiatives at various important world capitals and at the United Nations. This was necessary to prevent any bilateral or broad political move by the international community aimed at rendering the Indian response to Pakistan abortive. This was certain to delay the creation of Bangladesh. The higher political direction for military operations to meet these objectives was given by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with the assistance of her Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, and Chairman of the Policy Planning Committee, D. P. Dhar. Operational and detailed guidance was given by the then Chief of the Army Staff, General Manekshaw, and the Air and Navy Chiefs, Air Chief Marshal P. C. Lal and Admiral Nanda. The theatre commander in the eastern sector was Lt. General Aurora and in the western sector, Lt. General K P Candlish.

The broad strategy adopted by the Army High Command in the eastern sector was to bypass the forces which Niazi had concentrated at major urban centres all over East Pakistan. The strategy was that of outflanking, encirclement and compartmentalisation of the Pakistani forces, drastically reducing their fighting capacity. In the western sector the strategy was one of pre-emptive and aggressive self-defence.

The strategy worked and all the objectives set by India were fully achieved. The Pakistani forces in East Pakistan were decisively defeated with India taking 93,000 prisoners of war, the largest number of soldiers taken prisoner in world history, and only comparable with the Russian army capturing the entire corps of Field Marshal Von Paoli at the battle of Stalingrad. The Pakistani prisoners included all the generals serving in East Pakistan. On the western front, India pushed back the Pakistani forces from Jammu and Kashmir from the Rann of Kutch. India had captured strategic locations in Jammu and Kashmir and about 5,000 square kilometres of Pakistani territory in southern Punjab and Sindh, when it declared a unilateral ceasefire in the western sector on December 16, 1971. This is the compressed summary of the military campaign.

It is the political and diplomatic dimension of the campaign that is of more abiding interest. While the Prime Minister and Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram dealt with the situation in India the foreign policy aspects and manoeuvres at the UN were handled by India's practical and phlegmatic Foreign Minister, Sardar Swaran Singh, and Foreign Secretary TN Kaul with the assistance of the Indian Ambassador at the UN Samer Sen.

As war broke out there were urgent and insistent messages from all the major powers asking India to stop military operations and agree to a ceasefire, and proposing immediate commencement of political negotiations. The Soviet Union was only exception. While urging a cessation of the military conflict, the Soviet Union emphasised that this could be possible only after Yahya Khan had released Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and showed meaningful responsiveness to the aspirations of the people of East Pakistan. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, consideration of the developments in East Pakistan/ Bangladesh shifted from the UN General Assembly to the Security Council as soon as war broke out. Neither India nor Pakistan was a member of the Security Council in December, 1971. The Council meeting was summoned procedurally by the President of the Security Council and the Secretary General of the UN, but, basically, at the initiative of the US. The main purpose of the Security Council coming into session was to pass some sort of collective resolution mandating India and Pakistan to stop the war and begin a political discussion. In all 35 statements were made by permanent representatives of the member countries and by India and Pakistan between December 4 and 21.

Interestingly except for statements by the Polish representative, most of the statements were made by the American, British, French, Chinese and Soviet representatives. Of course, statements were also made by India's Ambassador to the UN, Samer Sen and his Pakistani counterpart, Aga Shahi. The five permanent members of the Council were represented by very distinguished individuals. For the US, it was George Bush who later be-

came the US President; France was represented by Kosciuszko Morizet, later to become Secretary General of the French Foreign Ministry; China's spokesman was Huang Hua, a future foreign minister of his country while Russia and Britain were represented by Jacob Malik and Sir Collin Crow, respectively. Aga Shahi eventually took over as Foreign Minister for Pakistan and Samar Sen, bringing history to full circle, became India's second and long serving High Commissioner to Bangladesh. The main trends in the Security Council discussions were as follows:

Pakistan accused India of deliberately creating a separatist movement in East Pakistan and giving it open military support. India's statements concentrated on the unavoidability of its support to the liberation struggle of Bangladesh, because of political and socio-economic reasons related to the influx of refugees into India. The Americans, the French and the British supported by most non-permanent members of the Security Council temporised, took an impartial stance, urged an immediate ceasefire and resumption of a political dialogue. None of these members addressed the basic cause of the crisis, namely, the non-fulfilment of the legitimate political verdict given by the people of Bangladesh. Even when suggesting a discontinuation of war and resumption of a political dialogue they were ambiguous and dilatory about what the objective of such a dialogue should be. The



Killing spree of Pakistani Army

Soviet Union and partially Poland in their statements touched upon the merits of the issue and the crux of the problem.

About 17 resolutions were introduced in the UN on the Bangladesh crisis — four in the General Assembly and 13 in the Security Council — between December 4 and 7. Thirteen more resolutions were introduced in the Security Council between December 12 and 21. The resolutions moved by the USA, the USSR and Poland were the most significant. The US consistently demanded an immediate end to all Indo-Pakistani hostilities, called for an immediate withdrawal of Indian and Pakistani forces from each other's territories, appealed to both countries to create an atmosphere conducive to the return of Bangladesh refugees to their country, and use the Secretary General's good offices for this purpose. There was not a single reference to the political aspirations of Bangladesh or the manner in which these should be fulfilled in any of the US resolutions. The Russian resolutions in contrast were brief and to the point. These called for a political settlement in East Pakistan which the USSR believed would automatically end the military hostilities, and urged Pakistan to direct its armed forces to stop all violence towards the people of East Pakistan. The draft resolution introduced by China was demanded an immediate end to all Indo-Pakistani hostilities, called for an immediate withdrawal of Indian and Pakistani forces from each other's territories, appealed to both countries to create an atmosphere conducive to the return of Bangladesh refugees to their country, and use the Secretary General's good offices for this purpose. There was not a single reference to the political aspirations of Bangladesh or the manner in which these should be fulfilled in any of the US resolutions. The Russian resolutions in contrast were brief and to the point. 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