

Background to the crisis: the Serbian-Russian connection

by EIR staff

The role of Serbia in the current crisis in Yugoslavia can only be understood from the standpoint of the cultural-historical roots of that erstwhile kingdom. Our review here comes from a series of analyses published in the weekly newspaper *New Federalist* back in the spring of 1989, authored by Allen Douglas and Rachel Douglas.

While Serbia was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1389 into the nineteenth century, its cultural parameters are determined by the phenomenon of "pan-Slavism" and Russian Orthodoxy. The Balkans as a whole were the playground of the Venetians and the Russian imperialist faction. But the areas now encompassed by Croatia and Slovenia were evangelized by Western Christianity starting in the time of Charlemagne, while the rest was left to the East. This reality continues to be reflected in the languages of what is called Yugoslavia. The Croats use Western script to write their Serbo-Croatian, while the Serbians use Russian-style Cyrillic script.

It is most notable, however, that the cultural affinity between Russia and Serbia consistently led to Russian intervention in defense of the Serbs. In the fall of 1988, when Yugoslavia entered a period of Serbian-instigated turmoil, U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche warned that the Serbian leadership, which remains linked to Moscow through its communist chiefs in the military and political administration, might again call the Russians into the Balkans. That question could still validly be raised today.

The Bogomil cult

The Balkans were the center of a gnostic perversion of Christianity called Bogomilism, which grew up in the tenth through fifteenth centuries. The Bogomils, centered in Bulgaria, believed in a radical separation between matter and spirit, resulting in a proscription of eating meat, drinking wine, and sex for procreation. Instead, sodomy was actually encouraged, and it is from the word Bogomil ("beloved of God") that the word "bugger" and its cognates came into European languages.

Under the influence of Bogomilism, the Orthodox Christian church in the Balkans pioneered a school of monastic practice

called hesychasm, which called for radical retreat from the "dirty" real world, into ascetism (and sometimes total silence). The monks who practiced hesychasm claimed to be the center of a new Rome, the Third Rome—a claim that was later shifted to their allies in Moscow. This shift was facilitated by the fact that there was a major migration of Balkan monks into Russia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The Orthodox monks had formed a pillar of the king of Serbia in its golden age (1331-55), Stephen Dushan. Dushan had assumed the title of Tsar, Autocrat, and Emperor of the Romans, and sought to establish a new Slavic-Greek empire. The Serbian kingdom in fact sought to be the Third Rome, replacing Rome and Constantinople. After Dushan's empire collapsed following the Turkish conquest in 1389, many of the monks migrated to Russia. A prominent example is Hesychast Sergius Radonezh, the St. Sergius who is even today the patron saint of Russia.

The Balkan wars of 1875-78

From this "brotherhood" of Russia and Serbia came a continuing pattern of collaboration, particularly as the Russian Empire sought to challenge the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. A good excuse for the Russian expansion was the need to save "brother Slavs" in Serbia and Bulgaria from the Ottomans. The campaign to this effect was led by the old, landed Russian aristocracy, which opposed modernization of Russia under Alexander II and Peter the Great.

Russian Count N.P. Ignatyev was the major architect of the first Russian military adventure in the Balkans. His means was the fomenting of insurrections in numerous of the Balkan states against the Turks, insurrections which were geared toward bringing the Russians in. Ignatyev's aims for Russia included territorial gains, command of Constantinople and the Straits of the Bosphorus, and common pan-Slavic action with the Slavs in the Balkans.

The uprisings began first in Crete, and then with the deployment of Montenegrins, one of the Balkan peoples, to slaughter some Turks. Then on June 18, 1876, Serbia declared war on Turkey, followed by Montenegro doing the same. This action followed by one month the arrival of Rus-

sian General Chernyayev who took command of the Serbian army. The Balkan wars brought hundreds of recruits from Russia, and ultimately did end with the collapse of the Turkish forces. Much to the chagrin of the pan-Slavs, Russia failed to get Constantinople as a result of the Conference of Berlin in 1878. But Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro gained independence.

From Balkan wars to World War I

From the time of the Balkan wars of the 1870s, the Russians maintained and expanded their intelligence apparatus in the Balkans, including the Okhrana, or secret police. The Balkans was the largest area targeted for investment of money and manpower by Russian intelligence in the pre-World War I period. Ultimately, the alliance between these Russians (who were not always represented in official Russian policy) and the Serbians led to the detonation of World War I.

One of the key players in this collaboration was N.G. Hartvig, the Russian ambassador to Belgrade, who was appointed in 1909. Hartvig was one of the most wild-eyed pan-Slavic expansionists, and, according to students of the period, in many respects the actual ruler of Serbia between that year and 1914.

Another was Colonel Apis, an advocate of Serbian Orthodoxy and the founder of a secret society called the Black Hand. The purpose of the Black Hand was "in order to achieve the ideal of unification of Serbdom; all Serbs, regardless of sex, religions, or place of birth, can become members, and anyone else who is prepared to serve this ideal faithfully."

The third crucial figure was Russian military attaché in Belgrade, Viktor Artamonov. Artamonov came to Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, in 1912. He himself reports a discussion with Serbian heir-apparent Alexander, in which Alexander asks him what Russia would do in the event of a war of the Balkan states against Turkey. Artamonov remarks, "I allowed myself to be guided in my answer to His Highness by my sentiments as a Slav."

A new set of Balkan wars began in 1912, after a series of alliances were concluded by Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, and Montenegro had declared war on Turkey on Oct. 8, 1912. The Serbian Army then moved into northern Albania. Then the alliance was disrupted when a further territorial dispute erupted between Bulgaria, and Serbia and Greece. The latter two allies were victorious.

The upshot of this first phase of wars was a significant weakening of the Austro-Hungarian position in the Balkans. In addition, Serbia gained prestige as "leader of the Slavs," a status Serbia had not had since the fourteenth century. Serbia was also encouraged to assert itself against Austria by Venetian Count Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata.

By 1914 members of the Black Hand were ready to take matters into their own hands. A retrial of the alleged assas-

sins, held in 1953, brought to light a confession from Black Hand leader Apis. Apis claimed that the removal of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand, the heir-apparent to the throne, would reduce the danger of Austria declaring war on Serbia. He therefore engaged two men to kill Ferdinand at Sarajevo in August 1914.

The confession reads: "I decided this definitely only after Artamonov gave me assurance that Russia would not leave us without protection if Austria attacked us. To Mr. Artamonov on this occasion I did not impart any information on my plans regarding the assassination. To make my demand for his opinion as to the attitude of Russia well founded, I pretended that our intelligence activities might be detected, so that this also might be made to serve as an excuse for Austria to attack us. Malobabic completed the mission I assigned to him. He organized and carried out the assassination. His principal aides were in my service. They had a small honorarium which I was sending them through Malobabic. Some of their signed receipts are in Russian hands, since I was receiving the money I needed for this work from Artamonov."

In other words, the financial and political backing of the Russian General Staff was essential to the planned assassination that kicked off World War I. Whatever other agencies were involved, the Serbian nationalist Apis would not have taken on the job without knowledge of full Russian backup.

When Austria-Hungary moved in retaliation for the assassination of its archduke, Serbia refused to meet any of its demands to ensure that the crime was punished, and ultimately Russia came in on its side. World War I, the bloodiest war ever seen up to that point, had begun. During the course of the war, the federation of republics known as Yugoslavia was formed, later to be "confirmed" by the Treaty of Versailles.

The Serbs today

The Serbian connection to the Soviet Army today is well known, but it would be a mistake to ascribe this sympathy simply to shared communism. There continues to be a close cultural bond of "pan-Slavism," which expresses itself in a way similar to the chauvinism of Apis's Black Hand. This view is shared by a significant number of Serbian leaders, rather than the general population; but the growing desperation of the masses, aggravated by unemployment and impoverishment which has been caused by International Monetary Fund conditionalities, makes it increasingly possible for these leaders to fire up the general population of Serbs.

As the situation heated up toward the present military onslaught being carried out by the Serbian-dominated army against Croatia, it was reported that the Serbian Orthodox primate held a special meeting with all the political parties in the republic. The solemn occasion reportedly included his call for an oath of allegiance from all, for the "defense" of the Serbian nationality. The fact that such a "defense" is a cover for annexing Serbian-populated areas of other republics, is an open secret.