

# 'Ron Brown II' mission to Bosnia: a chance to defeat the British

by Umberto Pascali

The Boeing 707 that, in November 1963, flew President John Kennedy to Dallas and then carried his body back to Washington after he was assassinated, landed in the airport of Dubrovnik, Croatia on the morning of July 11. The plane carried U.S. Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor and a delegation of business executives representing 16 U.S. companies, including Boeing, Bechtel, Riggs Bank, Northrop Grumman, United Technologies, and Enron Development. The mission's aim: to contribute to the reconstruction of Croatia and Bosnia. The team visited Croatia and Bosnia for three days, concluding several economic deals and opening the way to a potential strategy of real investment in economic reconstruction.

The Boeing 707, U.S. officials announced, will be retired in 1998 and displayed at the U.S. Air Force Museum at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, where the accord that ended the most bloody part of the war of aggression against Bosnia was initialled last year. Nobody offered an explanation of how the decision was made to use President Kennedy's plane for this mission, but everybody involved linked this last historical flight of the assassinated President's plane, to the crash that, on April 3, killed Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and the 34 members of the delegation of executives who were flying with him. The crash was followed by a quick investigation that did little to clarify the causes of the crash.

At the time of the crash, President Clinton made clear that a similar delegation, including representatives of every corporation that had participated in the first mission, would go back to Dubrovnik to accomplish Brown's mission. Speaking in July to the convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Clinton again emphasized the continuity of policy: "The last thing I did before I got in the helicopter to come here, was to meet with Mickey Kantor and Michael Brown, Ron Brown's son, and the delegation leaving today to finish the mission that Ron Brown started."

Kantor, as soon as he landed, underlined that the sacrifice made by Ron Brown would not be forgotten. "Ron Brown and 34 other wonderful people gave their lives," he said, "so that the threat of war would be trivial, when compared to the promise of opportunity."

Kantor surprised many analysts who knew him as a champion of unbridled free trade, by his statements on the need for building up the physical economy, long-term investments in infrastructure, and collaboration between the government and the private sector, in which the government would provide a general framework for private investments. At least from the public speeches, the "Ron Brown II" mission was a breath of fresh air, in sharp contrast with the usual trend of *laissez-faire*.

## Clash with British policy

Kantor's clear intention, declared in every speech, to make the reconstruction of Bosnia possible, clashed with the British determination to carry on "genocide through financial means." A verbal confrontation took place in Sarajevo on July 13, after Kantor had visited with President Alija Izetbegovic and other leaders. Kantor was mobbed by journalists who asked how could he talk about economic opportunities in Bosnia, when British businessmen—notably the chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board who had visited Bosnia a few days before—had emphasized the "problems" that stand in the way of foreign investment. Kantor reacted with what the British news agency Reuter labeled spitefully as "the usual American boosterism that goes with his job." The commerce secretary said: "We Americans think there are more opportunities than problems. That's what distinguishes us from our competitors." He further explained that the difference was that "we see opportunities, but they're long-term"—a slap in the face to the British cult of monetarism.

The official Commerce Department press release emphasizes such a long-term perspective: "Secretary Kantor's mission initiates the implementation of the Clinton administration's comprehensive commercial and investment development strategy for Bosnia and Croatia. . . . This commercial strategy is the next step following the Dayton Accords, underscoring America's long-term commitment to the region through *both* our private sector resources and those of our government" (emphasis in the original).

Kantor also stressed an expression that had been used by Secretary Brown and by President Clinton, in his first comment after Brown's death. "Secretary Brown was committed to helping sustain the peace," Kantor said. "I am dedi-

cated to continuing that work—focussing the *power of trade and commerce* to generate opportunities and development throughout the region. This trip will be a tangible demonstration of the Clinton administration's unwavering support to ensuring a lasting peace and economic prosperity and improving the lives of all the region's citizens. . . . This mission is not an isolated event. Rather it is an integral part of the President's strategy to sustain the peace process."

Immediately before leaving for his mission, Kantor underlined the point: "You can't have peace if people don't have jobs. We have to undergird this peace process with private sector and public sector building of these economies. For instance, in Bosnia today, 75-80% of the people are unemployed. Roads, bridges, gas lines, generators are all gone or destroyed. Industries have been completely obliterated. There needs to be a *complete rebuilding process*. . . . It is going to be a concrete and demonstrable presence of U.S. and private business working with government resources as well as private resources, in Bosnia."

### **Save Bosnia, and save the United States**

The missions of Kantor and Brown are stages in the battle to save Bosnia from the "genocide through financial means" which is being pushed by the British oligarchs and their appendices from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But more than that, the battle for Bosnia is a "battle for the United States"—to save America from the same British free-trade lunacy, which is destroying industries and human lives. The verbal confrontation between Kantor and the British journalist is a signal of something much deeper than mere "competition." Bosnia could become the place where the best of the American tradition can find the courage to successfully challenge the British system.

"There were three main points in the world where Clinton's America had challenged what you call the British," a Bosnian source told *EIR*. "The points are the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and Bosnia. In the first two, the 'British' are winning. Through the use of the weapon of terrorism, they have potentially pushed them back to their worst moment. In Bosnia—that was supposed to be the weak point—the British did not succeed. Will Kantor's words about real reconstruction and investments become a reality? Will this supply the U.S. government with the momentum to go for the final confrontation with this horrible system? It must be clear that when and if the U.S. fights the evil veto of Bosnia's reconstruction, when and if they fight in Bosnia the insanity of privatization, when and if they fight the geopolitical dogma, whenever the U.S. does that, they are fighting forces that have planted deep roots inside its own society. Will they be able to recognize it?"

This contradiction is dramatic at this point. While Kantor stresses the need for a comprehensive intervention of government and the private sector to rebuild Bosnia, the British "businessman" Martin Laing calls for privatization. And the

World Bank's Michel Noel gave his ultimatum to the Bosnian government just three days before the arrival of the U.S. mission: "The state and its entities must disengage itself very rapidly from any direct role in the productive sphere of the economy."

Inside the United States itself, the task of pushing "reconstruction" is being handed to an assortment of monetarists, usurers, and fast-buck artists. A U.S. expert with experience in Bosnia told *EIR* that this may be happening because the administration cannot find anybody who knows how the real, productive economy works.

A typical example was a high-level, semi-confidential conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. on July 17, titled "Bosnian Reconstruction: Challenges and Opportunities." Executives from some of the biggest U.S. corporations were present. But the word "reconstruction" became, in the main speech and in the ensuing debate, a synonym for "quick and easy money," a pretext for an infantile attack against "public intervention," and a celebration of the magic of privatization.

Bosnian leaders are becoming increasingly outspoken about this problem. On July 17, three months after the government of Sarajevo was forced to swallow the ferocious austerity conditionalities of the World Bank, Bosnian Prime Minister Hasan Muratovic criticized the World Bank publicly for the first time, at a press conference in Washington while on an official visit. Knowing the kind of deadly pressure that the World Bank can exercise, Muratovic's words reveal a conflict that is on the verge of exploding. He stressed that, besides some small projects of reconstruction, the rebuilding of the big industrial centers in Bosnia cannot be achieved "without either big money or new investments." "Lately, we have problems with the World Bank," he said. "The World Bank is posing conditions which are very difficult to reach. And I must say that for the time being, we have been taking credits from the World Bank that are part of our agreement for reconstruction of our previous debts and new loans"—a reference to the fact that the "credits" Bosnia is receiving from the World Bank were *already paid by Bosnia to the World Bank* in the form of payments on the debt of former Yugoslavia.

The situation risks going out of control for the British. This is why, over recent weeks, there has been a constant attempt to re-ignite a Balkan conflict. On July 19, Richard Holbrooke, the former U.S. "trouble-shooter," was recalled to active diplomatic duty, to try to deal with the situation. He succeeded in pushing Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, the war criminal who has not yet been arrested, out of public office.

Karadzic's public announcement will probably make it possible to go ahead with the plan to hold elections in Bosnia on Sept. 14. But the situation will not be stabilized, until an alternative to the British-World Bank financial genocide is found.