

European Allies Buck Blair, Albright On a Balkans 'October Surprise'

by Umberto Pascali

While the dramatic events in Yugoslavia following the Sept. 24 Serbian elections captured the attention of the media, a strategically more crucial development was taking place. Many of the NATO allies, and representatives of the Yugoslavian opposition, blasted the attempt by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Foreign Minister, Robin Cook, to prepare a new NATO military intervention into the Balkans using as its pretext Slobodan Milosevic's refusal to accept the victory of the opposition candidate, Vojislav Kostunica.

It is clear, of course, that Russia opposes such a new "Operation Allied Force," because Russia's status as a Eurasian power is the primary target of NATO's Balkans and Caucasus adventures. But this time, the opposition of Jacques Chirac's government in France has been the strong herald of general western European resistance. Russia and France have simultaneously taken action both against the economic sanctions crushing the Yugoslav economy and hurting those of its neighbors, and against the ten-year-old strangulation of Iraq. The French resistance, on these and other fronts, has earned Chirac an immediate, British-orchestrated scandal aimed at destabilizing the French government.

The rebellion, against a new military adventure orchestrated once again by Blair and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, has not defeated the war party for good, but has thus far prevented dispatching the bombers. But Blair, Cook, and Albright are still trying to unleash a NATO attack.

The reason for their obsession has nothing to do with the Yugoslavian situation, nor with the hypocritical calls for "democratization or death" in Serbia. Blair, Albright, et al. know they cannot preserve for long, the cancerously growing financial bubble of London and Wall Street's "globalized" world economy. Time is running out, and many of the allies are finally thinking of getting off the *Titanic*.

The effects of the economic destruction and the looting of the living standards, inside England itself, has come to roost at Blair's doorstep. At the recent Labour Party conference in Brighton, the Prime Minister was faced with a revolt by the rank and file, triggered by the miserable level of the British pensions and the rising fuel prices.

Politically, the emergence of a potential for cooperation

between some of the European allies and Vladimir Putin's Russia, is provoking nightmares. First of all, President Chirac's France (presently chairing the European Union) challenged the terrorist international arrangement that transformed the population of Iraq into a perennial killing target. For the first time, in a public and unapologetic way, France sent aid supplied by plane to Iraq, without asking or consulting either the United States or Britain. Second, it is becoming increasingly clear that this French "resistance" is coordinated with Russia. On Sept. 28, in the middle of the Yugoslavian crisis, Vladimir Putin met French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, and stated: "France is Russia's traditional most important and, to a big extent, irreplaceable partner." And his Russian counterpart, Igor Ivanov, told Védrine: "Our positions coincide on many issues, including the problems of strategic stability, solving regional conflicts on the Middle East and Iraq. Stability on the European continent and in other regions is, in many ways dependent on Russian and French cooperation."

Putin and Chirac agreed on the immediate lifting of the sanctions against devastated Yugoslavia.

It is thus no surprise that a "corruption" scandal targeting Chirac was suddenly triggered, to coincide with the Russia-France meetings. This is the British *modus operandi*, as experienced by Italy when "Operation Clean Hands" beheaded its political and economic leadership in the mid-1990s.

'NATO Intervention as in Kosovo'

It was in this context that Robin Cook tested the waters for a NATO military intervention into the Balkans, in a Sept. 26 interview with Sky Television, from the Labour Conference in Brighton, where he and his boss were feeling the increasing heat from an enraged rank and file. After launching one of his melodramatic attacks against Milosevic ("You lost; go. Your country and the world has suffered enough from you"), Cook went to the point: "We need to make sure that Milosevic understands there is a very substantial [NATO military] capacity in the region. He should not be attempting any further military venture."

Madeleine Albright, the key individual in pushing the U.S. military into last year's bombing campaign, had been ferociously trying to do it once again now. According to the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Madeleine Albright insisted, in an Aug. 29 White House meeting, on getting the green light for a military plan that called for "two or three days of bombardments as a preventive response to Belgrade's alleged attempt to destabilize the situation in Kosovo and Montenegro." The plan was presented at a meeting that reportedly included President Clinton and Pentagon and intelligence chiefs. "Pentagon generals objected emphatically to any new bombardment," *Gazeta* wrote. "So the proposal was rejected, but Albright advocated creating a special group of experts to thoroughly study the advantages and drawbacks of a new military action against Yugoslavia."

Despite all their efforts, Cook and Albright could find only one NATO ally for an intervention "against Milosevic." It was Turkey, a country that Blair and Albright have lately gutted and reduced to a docile staging ground for the most ferocious campaigns, from Iraq to the Turkic states of former Soviet Union. Speaking in Koren, Bulgaria, during Romanian-Bulgarian military exercises at the borders with Serbia, Turkish Defense Minister Sabahattin Cakmakoglu said, "If there is a crisis, there will be an intervention in the same way there was a NATO intervention in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina in defense of UN values."

Indeed, a formidable naval and ground force has been deployed in the Balkan area, coinciding with the Sept. 24 Yugoslavian elections and under the guise of military exercises. A British naval force comprising 15 warships is sailing in the Adriatic Sea near the Yugoslav coast. It is led by the aircraft carrier *H.M.S. Invincible* (which carries Harrier-type fighters), plus the destroyer *Liverpool* and an auxiliary vessel. Nearby this first deployment, the British Navy deployed a second "training" fleet, led by the amphibious assault ship *Fearless*, specialized in landing assault units, plus ten other ships. The number of planes and helicopters used in the deployment, is not known, but an official British source confirmed that 5,000 men and woman are participating in the operation. The *Times* of London let it be known that "A Royal Navy aircraft carrier has been pulled out of an exercise to be on hand in case President Milosevic launches a military operation in Montenegro."

Another flotilla sailing in the Adriatic Sea at the same time included an unreported number of U.S. and Croatian warships, which carried out an "amphibious landing exercise under live fire" on the coast just north of Montenegro. Officially, 400 U.S. sailors and 200 Marines are involved.

'Spare Us Any Counterproductive Help!'

However, the continuous attempt to trigger a military intervention was rejected by the other NATO allies. And the Yugoslavian opposition itself blasted those attempts. Kostun-

ica, also in order to capitalize on the anti-NATO feelings among the Serbs, has repeatedly attacked by name the "Western leaders" who wanted to "help." Albright was particularly targeted by Kostunica in public statements. After Sept. 24, while the opposition claimed a victory with more than 50% of the votes and the Yugoslav electoral commission put Kostunica's vote just below 49%, a test of strength ensued, with opposition-organized mass demonstrations in the streets and calls for a general strike.

Officially, the electoral commission called for a second election runoff on Oct. 8. A potentially devastating confrontation with the still strong Milosevic's police (MUP) could indeed happen. A bloody confrontation in the streets of Serbia would give the perfect pretext for a NATO intervention through the Montenegro coast, from the west (Bulgaria, Romania), the south (Kosovo), etc. Such an intervention would be a "total mess, a total catastrophe and, of course, would provoke a new aggravation of the international situation," a Russian spokesman told *EIR*. What is clear is that, in Blair's and Albright's mind, such an intervention would not have as the main target Yugoslavia, but rather the potential alliance between continental Europe and Russia, and its potential to replace the "bubble" with a New Bretton Woods financial system.

Cook's insistence on NATO intervention sparked an immediate response by Gen. Momcilo Perisic, the former Yugoslavia Chief of Staff and now a leader of the opposition coalition. "I am begging some unhinged world leader to spare us any counterproductive help, because so far they have made many promises and done many things which have only caused the suffering of our people. And I beg them to finally realize that they should not settle their accounts with Milosevic, or he with them, at the expense of the lives of our citizens."

Milosevic's Strange Bedfellows

In fact, the Anglo-American grouping has never had any intention to help the Serbian citizens rid themselves of Milosevic. Not so paradoxically, they needed Milosevic in order to justify not only the existence and expansion of NATO, but a new East-West confrontation that would keep the restless allies under control, militarily, politically and financially. And in fact, Russia has tried repeatedly to resolve the Milosevic problem, in a way to safeguard Yugoslavia as a sovereign and independent country. But the British and the United States backed Milosevic, and he remained, until it became too late for Russian and Yugoslav military moves to replace him. And the sanctions against Yugoslavia (like those against Iraq) remained in place. The British Foreign Office, even after the elections, insisted, "We are not suggesting that you do that [lift sanctions], because we do not think it would further our cause," a British official told the media in response to the French-Russian move.