

WRITTEN BY EXPERTS, READ BY EXPERTS

The WORLD TODAY

Volume 56 Number 1 JANUARY 2000 £2.50 \$4.50

Can we defend ourselves against missiles launched by rogue states?

PAGE 4

**FRAGILE
FUTURE
FOR IRAQ**

**THE PRICE OF
APPEASING
SERBIA**



THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



The Price of Appeasement

The downfall of the Milosevic regime in Belgrade was widely expected after the arrival of NATO troops in Kosovo last June. Optimistic scenarios depicted an angry and disillusioned Serbian population removing the President. It was widely believed that military defeat would be enough to bring demonstrators onto the streets, and that the Together opposition coalition, under Vuk Draskovic and Zoran Djindjic, that dominated events in the winter of 1996-1997 could be reassembled with Western help. In America especially, analysts predicted a pattern of events closely modelled on the 1989 fall of the Romanian dictator Ceausescu. This failed to materialise, and instead, President Milosevic is busy rebuilding his power, largely at the expense of the states that opposed him.

OPPPOSITION DEMONSTRATIONS CERTAINLY have taken place throughout Serbia, and in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo defeat there was widespread anger and disillusionment with President Slobodan Milosevic. But divisions in the opposition remain deep and with the arrival of winter, the mass movement has largely petered out.

A mood of fatalism affects many people, perhaps best summed up in a headline in the Belgrade press in August, suggesting that the devil had taken over the country and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

COHERENT FORCE

In these circumstances, the political elite around Milosevic has remained a coherent force. The neo-fascist Radical Party of Vojislav Seselj has not joined the opposition. The anticipated post-war economic crisis has been so far successfully controlled by the maintenance of the war economy, with no return to the wild hyperinflation of 1993-1995. There has been some resumption of production in industrial facilities damaged by NATO bombing, and a reasonable harvest.

There have been no open signs of major disaffection in the military and the more numerous paramilitary and police remain, as ever, loyal to Milosevic.

The genuine humanitarian crisis facing many decent ordinary Serbian people and the sad exodus of Serbs from Kosovo has enabled many countries with only a weak commitment to political change in Serbia to be swayed by sentimental political arguments. However justified humanitarian aid to Serbia is in moral terms, there is little doubt that it assists the stabilisation of the regime.

Attempts by the European Union to channel aid to opposition controlled towns have had little success, and given the omnipresence of the Milosevic security services, it was naive to suppose such schemes could work.

In adjacent countries, like Austria, Hungary and Germany, popular fears about a tidal flood of Serbian

refugees, in the event of civil conflict accompanying the attempted overthrow of Milosevic, present governments with real problems.

Mass support for anti-immigration policies in these countries, evident in electoral successes such as that of the Freedom Party of Joerg Haider in Austria, is becoming a significant factor in Balkan policy. Central Europe's New Right is a political force of considerable assistance to Milosevic.

SAFEGUARDING BOSNIA

In the middle of last year, the preferred Western scenario made an intimate link between democratising Serbia and the reintegration of Kosovo with Yugoslavia under non-Kosovo Liberation Army political leadership. There has been little progress at all in this direction.

In Kosovo itself, the predominant Albanian political forces have no immediate interest in making political deals to ease the democratisation of Serbia. The continuation of Milosevic, or another repressive Belgrade government, is the best guarantee of a rapid separation from Yugoslavia. It is very difficult, probably impossible, for any Albanian political leader, whether in the Ibrahim Rugova or Kosovo Liberation Army camp, to put forward a policy in future Kosovo elections based on autonomy within Yugoslavia. Thus most 'yugoslavist' Western diplomatic initiatives are stymied from the start.

The Kosovo Liberation Army has followed an intelligent post-war policy and has complied with demilitarisation directives, while building up a growing political presence. The United Nations head in Pristina, Bernard Kouchner, is widely seen as pro-Serb, and the UN has yet to establish much influence outside the capital.

The Kosovo logjam has caused a particular crisis within American diplomacy. The Holbrooke-Hill-Talbot faction in the State Department has been reasserting itself. They have always favoured accommodation with Milosevic as the guarantor of what the Clinton administration sees as its crowning Balkan achievement – the Dayton Accords – the 1995 Bosnian peace settlement.

The Rubin-Albright, pro-military action, pro-NATO group has been in some difficulty since the war, given the protracted air campaign and the irreversible departure of Serbs from Kosovo. The Holbrooke-Hill faction is now predominant, symbolised by Hill's appointment as Clinton's special Balkan envoy to the National Security Council, a development Milosevic may welcome. Safeguarding Dayton remains the key to the thinking of this group.

James Pettifer

is a Visiting Professor in the Institute of Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, and contributes to the *Sunday Times* and the *Scotsman* newspapers.