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The recent violence in the Kosovo Province of Yugoslavia does not at this point represent a major threat to the stability of the Belgrade leadership, but it does serve as a reminder that economically backward Kosovo with its predominantly Albanian population remains Yugoslavia's most vulnerable point. [REDACTED]

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YUGOSLAVIA: THE KOSOVO RIOTS [REDACTED]

The swift and tough measures taken earlier this month to counter violent demonstrations in the Kosovo Province contained the first such public demonstrations in the province since some months before President Tito's death a year ago. However, the violence--which left at least nine dead and scores injured--is likely to have far-reaching repercussions. While the unrest does not represent a major threat to stability at this time, it does serve as a reminder that economically backward Kosovo--with its predominantly Albanian population, historic hatreds between local Serbs and Albanians, and a potentially irredentist Albania on its border--is probably still Yugoslavia's most vulnerable point. Yugoslavia's relations with Albania and the USSR have also been strained as a result. [REDACTED]

Reaching the Boiling Point

The immediate causes of the student unrest in Pristina, Kosovo's capital, were economic and social. They were the result of rapid economic and social change, crowded and otherwise inadequate living conditions, high unemployment among university graduates, rapid growth of the student population, and unkept official promises of faster progress to redress such problems. [REDACTED]

It was the cumulative impact of these gripes, which are socioeconomic in nature, that sparked the student demonstrations on 11 and 26 March, and 1 and 2 April. However, it is the political overtones of the disturbances that are of principal concern to the Yugoslav leadership. There is a growing ethnic Albanian consciousness in Kosovo, encouraged by the political reforms adopted since the late 1960s, and a continuing resentment over a perceived status as second-class citizens and Serb domination. There also appears to be a widespread contempt for the leaders in Kosovo who, though ethnic Albanians, are World War II Partisan veterans who attained power through accommodation with the Serbs. [REDACTED]

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The central government in Belgrade has taken some steps since the disturbances designed to improve conditions at the university and channel more funds into the province. The Executive Council of the Kosovo Assembly also met on 3 April, the day after the most recent riots, and decided to make improvements to the university facilities. It has since been announced that 313 new scholarships would be granted to university and high school students, and young workers who aspire to higher education. More economic assistance has been promised the general population in the form of milk subsidies and credits to working mothers.

Increased Ethnic Tensions

Although these measures will provide some relief, they are unlikely to have an impact on the more serious problem of deep-rooted Serb-Albanian distrust. The announcement that 28 of the demonstrators will eventually be tried was, in part, made to mollify the Serbs and other critics of the Kosovo leadership who are demanding disciplinary action. However, there is likely to be an adverse reaction from the Albanian community when those charged go on trial.

Serbian resentment over the concessions that have been made through the years in the province have been exacerbated by the recent events. In addition to the demonstrations, there have been reports of a fire, possibly set by an arsonist, that destroyed an ancient Serbian Orthodox monastery in Pec in mid-March. It is rumored that the firemen, who were Albanians, arrived at the scene early enough to save the building and its contents but deliberately failed to do so. Such tensions have resulted in a Serbian exodus from Kosovo, a phenomenon confirmed by a recent press article calling for an investigation of the root cause for the migration.

Perhaps most disturbing to Belgrade is the demand by some of the Albanian demonstrators for full republic status for Kosovo, now an autonomous province of the Serbian republic. In his press conference on 6 April, however, party Presidium member Stane Dolanc ruled out any such upgrading on the grounds that it would be "reactionary" and "unconstitutional." He noted that trust must be restored between the ethnic communities in Kosovo and that this "will not be easy." The leadership is aware that granting republic status would antagonize the Serb populations and could even

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open the door to demands by the Kosovars for either independence from the Yugoslav federation or for union with Albania. It could also raise the issue of the status of these Albanians who reside in the Macedonian and Montenegrin Republics. [REDACTED]

Relations With Moscow and Tirane

The Kosovo events have also had an adverse impact on Belgrade's relations with Albania and the Soviet Union. The leadership characterizes the disturbances as being instigated by a small group of counterrevolutionaries aided by an unspecified "external enemy" whose aim is to undermine the unity of the Yugoslav state. Although anti-Yugoslav emigre groups in Stuttgart, Brussels, and the United States have been explicitly implicated by Belgrade in the planning and execution of the Kosovo riots, Albania and the Soviet Union are implicitly in the category of "external enemies." [REDACTED]

The regime's nervousness over its vulnerability, especially in this early post-Tito period, explains its warnings against any outside interference in Yugoslavia's internal problems. One such article, in the party daily Borba, concluded that both the socialist community and the "imperialists" were using "certain forces" inside Yugoslavia to undermine and split the country. Pravda was quick to respond by denying any Soviet involvement in Kosovo and expressing resentment that the activities and goals of the NATO countries were lumped by Belgrade "in one house" with those of the "peace-loving" Warsaw Pact. Borba, in turn, warned the Soviets not to lecture Belgrade on Yugoslav foreign policy. This exchange is the first since the polemics over the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and threatens to halt, if only temporarily, the gradual improvement in bilateral relations since Tito's death. [REDACTED]

A high-level Yugoslav official has claimed [REDACTED] that Belgrade has hard evidence of Albanian Government involvement in the Kosovo demonstrations, and there is concern that the Tirane leadership will try to exploit Albanian nationalism and discontent in the province. Two articles in the official Albanian party paper Zeri i Popullit supported the demonstrators' political and

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economic demands and were critical of the allegedly heavyhanded methods used to restore order in Kosovo. This drew an angry Yugoslav reaction. Belgrade also must be apprehensive over Tirane's assertion that the census conducted in late April throughout Yugoslavia would not accurately tally the ethnic Albanian population.

This exchange introduces a new strain in relations just when a substantial improvement had been achieved over the past year; Yugoslavia, in fact, has become Albania's largest trading partner. Despite the polemic, both sides do continue to advocate a good-neighbor policy and Tirane, explicably, has strongly denied that it has any intention of interfering in Yugoslavia's internal affairs. Indeed, the delay in the publication of the Zeri i Popullit article until 8 April may have been intentionally designed to avoid adding fuel to the already explosive situation in Kosovo. Belgrade is concerned about the long-term prospects for political stability in Albania, and will avoid doing anything which might condition those who will form the new leadership there to favor closer relations with Moscow. In this connection, both Belgrade and Tirane know that their own national independence depends to a large degree upon stability in the other country.

Leadership Repercussions

Although there have been no personnel shakeups in the Kosovo leadership to date, there have been rumblings in Belgrade of dissatisfaction with the way in which the disturbances were handled and calls for a further investigation of the incident. Although Mahmut Bakali, the leader of the Kosovo party, might be the most prominent scapegoat, dismissals are more likely at lower levels, particularly in the organizations of territorial defense and social self-protection. Interior Minister Herljevic's visit to Pristina on 12 April was presumably part of an investigation into why the local security forces did not detect the planning for the demonstration and were then unable to control them.

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The Yugoslav leaders have probably delayed any personnel shakeup in the province in order to project an image of stability in the face of their first major crisis. Indeed, the lack of any really significant measures suggests that there may be a split in leadership over how to further deal with the situation. The first authoritative statement on the disturbances came from a reputed liberal, Stane Dolanc, and most media commentary has emphasized the need for a thorough investigation to determine the causes of the problem. [REDACTED]

Conservatives in the leadership and society have also made their views known. As early as 4 April, one leading hardliner, Dusan Dragosavac, commented on the Kosovo events at a meeting of Yugoslav newspaper editors. He outlined the "correct" approach to media coverage of the situation, calling for "qualitative Marxist criticism" rather than "generalized" criticism. [REDACTED]

Yugoslav prosecutors, meeting in the town of Nis on 21 April, called for tougher policies to deal with political crimes in the harshest statement on the subject since the riots. Chief federal prosecutor General Gocetic argued that political criminals have not been made to account adequately for their crimes, and that "transitory political considerations"--such as concern over potential adverse foreign reaction to trials of dissidents--have hampered law enforcement. This hard line probably reflects frustration over interference by "politicians" in the prosecutors' business and demonstrates that it is these politicians who are to blame for the laxity that led to the Kosovo events. [REDACTED]

There are signs, however, that the more moderate members of the leadership are not buckling under to such conservative criticism. The most convincing evidence is the outcry of resentment at the way news of the Kosovo demonstrations was spoon fed, in delayed

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and limited fashion, to the public. The debate on the extent to which a public dialogue should be allowed on such issues predates the Kosovo events which have now stimulated it. It appears that hardliners in the leadership who would like to use the affair as an excuse to impose stricter controls on the media have not won out, at least as of now. [REDACTED]

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