

Has Serbia Lost Kosovo? Why President Hashim Thaçi Needs Another Conflict with Serbia

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Global Research, June 10, 2019

zvezdaweekly.ru

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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*On May 27th the president of Serbia **Aleksandr Vucic** urged to face the truth and to recognize that Serbia lost Kosovo. On May 28th units of the Kosovar police intruded into Serb districts in the north of Kosovo and arrested about two-dozen people, including Kosovo police officers of Serbian nationality and also one Russian employee of the UN Mission in Kosovo.*

As a result Vucic was forced to put the Serbian army and police special forces on full alert. The crisis hasn't yet gained further development. However we once again were shown that peace in the Balkans is extremely fragile and can explode into a new war at any moment.

A provocation in the conditions of capitulation

There is a logical question: why did the president of the self-proclaimed Kosovo **Hashim Thaçi** choose to organise this provocation precisely at the moment when the leadership of Serbia was the closest it has ever been to capitulation in relation to the Kosovo question.

After all, the actions of the Albanian police not only excited Serbian radicals, but gave them a fine argument against the capitulatory politics of the government. Aleksandr Vucic, who hasn't received unambiguous support in relation to the Kosovo question neither from his own party nor from Serbian society, is forced to take a harder line. Moreover, if on this occasion everything ended in a military demonstration, next time bringing the army to full combat readiness may not be enough to calm Serbian society, and a military conflict will erupt despite the politicians' lack of desire to kindle one.

However, when we speak about the lack of desire to start a war, we are speaking about Serbian politicians. In Belgrade pro-West politicians and also the moderate nationalists from the Serbian Progressive Party of Vucic, who distanced themselves in the past from the irreconcilable Serbian Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj, still keep the country on the course towards integration into the EU. 

However, the illusoriness of prospects of accession to the European Union and the provocative actions of the Albanian authorities of Kosovo undermines the positions of conciliators, clearing the road for radicals to come to power.

Why does Hashim Thaçi need another conflict with Serbia? After all, Kosovo is under his control, and the West recognised the independence of the self-proclaimed state and, like the current Serbian authorities, seeks to solve the crisis, even at the price of maximum

concessions, actually on Albanian conditions.

Hashim Thaçi knows very well that Vucic, since the moment he was inaugurated as the president of Serbia on June 1st 2017, started to implement the pro-European course, which stipulates Serbia's recognition of Kosovo's independence. Moreover, Thaçi, after a meeting with Vucic on July 3rd 2017, radiated optimism and said that he believes in the possibility of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians "for the benefit of Kosovo, Serbia, and all the region". Thaçi also knows very well that the internal political problems facing Vucic in connection with his intention to accept the conditions of Pristina for solving the Kosovo question.

Succeeding to gain a foothold before the West becomes completely weak

Let's not multiply essence needlessly. If such an inveterate politician as Thaçi, obviously provokes a conflict, in conditions when, seemingly, he can achieve his objectives peacefully, it means that he needs a conflict. Otherwise he would not start to disrupt the peace initiative of Vucic, organising a terrorist raid of the Albanian police in the Serb regions of Kosovo. Even a child could calculate the consequences of such a step.

But if we came to the conclusion that Hashim Thaçi deliberately provokes the conflict, then the question "why does he do it?" still demands an answer.

I think that we will not be mistaken if we say that the general weakening of the West is the main reason for the provocative behaviour of the Albanian leaders of Kosovo. One should not forget that only thanks to the Americans, who unleashed military operations against Yugoslavia and involved their NATO allies in them, Kosovo was pulled away from the control of the Yugoslavian authorities.

And it is also Washington that organized the recognition by the West of the self-proclaimed independence of Kosovo. Therefore, the current Kosovo authorities can feel more or less assured only while standing behind the West.



But if the West weakens, it may not have enough forces (or desire) to provide military-political cover for the Kosovar regime. In several years there can be a situation in which nobody will be able to prevent Serbia from performing an operation aimed at restoring the constitutional order in Kosovo.

Albania is not eager to fraternize with Kosovo criminals

Its inclusion into the structure of Albania could become one of the ways of retaining control over the region.

But neither the president of Albania Ilir Meta, nor the Prime Minister Edi Rama, nor the ruling Socialist Party of Albania are eager to introduce drug dealers, human traffickers, and war criminals like Hashim Thaçi or his Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj into Albanian politics. And the Albanian democrats, who are in opposition to the government of socialists, do not at all seek a potential union with Kosovo radicals.

Not only and perhaps also not so much because persons who are too picturesque gathered

in the Kosovar leadership, but because they are afraid that if Kosovo integrates into Albania, the leaders of militants will gain too much authority among voters, and in addition to this they will be able to use their (specific) methods of conducting a political fight and will simply force the current Albanian leaders out to the periphery of big-time politics, having secured the leading posts. Something similar occurred in the past in Armenia, where the so-called Karabakh clan (politicians who originate from the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic) came to power in 1998 and held on until 2018.



In general Albania, which endured an internal political crisis while being on the verge of civil war in January-March 1997, and which managed to overcome it only thanks to the introduction of a UN military contingent into the country, obviously does not intend to receive, together with the integration of Kosovo, ambitious radical politicians who will lay claims to power not in Pristina any more, but in Tirana.

Thaçi hurries to finish the ethnic cleaning of Kosovo Serbs

If the Albanian scenario does not play out, Hashim Thaçi has only one opportunity to be prepared for that moment when the West will not be able to ensure the security of the Kosovar regime. Taking into account the number of war crimes committed by its leaders, as soon as Serbia has an opportunity to deal with Kosovo without being afraid of the West's intervention, a legitimate reason to return the Serbian army to the region will be found.

But if completely to force out of Kosovo the Serbs who now remain only in several areas, bordering with Serbia, in the north, then Belgrade formally will have nobody to defend. On the contrary, it will be possible to present the conflict to the international community as the genocide of the Albanian population of the region. After all, in order to return Serbs to Kosovo it will be necessary to expel the Albanians who occupied their homes.

Hashim Thaçi is in a hurry to finish the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, to turn the region into a monoethnic Albanian formation in order to prevent Serbia from laying down any claims to return in the long term.

In the present situation if Serbia tries to impede the actions of Pristina through armed force, Thaçi can count on the military support of the West. Serbia can resist the West only by leaning on Russia. But then, the Serbian euro-integrators who are in power will be forced to abandon their goal - the entry of Serbia into the European Union. I.e., aggravating the crisis over Kosovo is today unprofitable to the government in Belgrade, because even if the conflict is resolved, even in a way that is victorious for Serbia, it will lead to the reformatting of all the Serbian political landscape.

The moves are calculated, there is one, very essential "but"

As we see, Thaçi's actions are rather well calculated and directed towards the creation of a situation whereby overthrowing the power of the Albanian radicals in Kosovo would become impossible. He risks a conflict with Serbia, which Kosovo will certainly lose if the Belgrade politicians risk to completely and unconditionally turn towards a union with Russia. But this risk is not so high as it seems at first sight, because Aleksandr Vucic firmly toes the European integration line, which a victorious conflict with Kosovo will ruin. Thaçi expects that in order to not lose euro-integration prospects, the Serbian leaders will close their eyes to the completion of the ethnic cleansing of the Serbs in Kosovo, and that his demarches,

like bringing the army to combat readiness, will never pass into the practical plane.



As a last resort he hopes to have the military support of the West, which cannot allow the liquidation of independent Kosovo – its own project – without a catastrophic loss of face.

The only non-calculated factor is Serbian society's reaction to the provocations of Thaçi. It is rather strongly overheated by the fight between nationalists and euro-integrators, and the idea of a return match in Kosovo is nearly the most popular in the most different segments of the population. At some point the situation in Serbia can exit the control of politicians and then a military conflict will become unavoidable.

Moreover, the progressing weakening of the West leads to the same consequences. Not only are the traditional clients of Washington in Kosovo fussing, trying to strengthen their position while America can still cover them, but also the Serbian leaders gradually come to understand the hopelessness of European integration and reorientate towards Russia.

Thus, Moscow and Washington were already indirectly drawn into the Balkan crisis on different sides of the barricades.

At the same time, the US gradually loses control over their clients from Pristina, who start to act by the principle “the tail wags a dog”, trying to create situations in which America will be obliged to involve itself in an unnecessary-to-it confrontation in their interests.

Time plays on the side of Russia and Serbia, which after a while will be able to dominate in the Balkans without an unnecessary and dangerous military confrontation. That's why Thaçi is in a hurry, provoking a crisis now, while he still has hope for a favourable outcome.

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