

Answer to Question

The Kosovo Events and their Repercussions on Europe

(Translated)

Question:

Violent demonstrations have erupted in northern Kosovo by the Serbs of the province against the police and NATO forces in the region. Serbia has put its forces on alert for the possibility of entering the province in defence of the Serb minority. A report published by the National Interest website and quoted by Al-Jazeera warned that the next European war might start in Kosovo. The report stated (that there are remarkable similarities between the situation in Kosovo and the current conflict in Ukraine calling on Western policy makers to pay attention to this matter. He said that the recent crisis in northern Kosovo reminded the world that “the brutal war in Ukraine may be the greatest threat to European stability today, but it is by no means the only one.” (Source: Al Jazeera and National Interest, 10/6/2023)

What is behind these events? Are they dangerous, according to what is heard from the international officials' statements, that it might explode the Balkans and preoccupy European countries with a second war in addition to the war in Ukraine?

Answer:

To clarify the dimensions of the tensions taking place today in the northern Kosovo region, we review the following:

First: The historical background:

1- After the Ottoman Islamic conquests of the Balkans during the fifteenth century CE, Islam began to make its way in a region that the Roman state had made into a purely Christian region. So, the Albanians embraced Islam, they are the people of Albania today and the Kosovo region. The Bosnians converted to Islam after that, they are the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which became independent from Yugoslavia in 1992, after which a war of genocide broke out, in which thousands of Muslims were killed.

2- Kosovo remained part of the Ottoman State until it left in 1912 in the context of the separatist nationalist tendencies raised by Britain throughout the Balkans. Then many kingdoms joined forces to rule Kosovo such as Serbia and Montenegro, and Italian colonialism, which annexed it for its influence within the Kingdom of Albania, which it was colonizing. Then, in 1946, Tito, President of Yugoslavia, annexed it to his country in the framework of post-World War II settlements and gave it autonomy, and it remained within Yugoslavia until the latter disintegrated in the early 1990s, Kosovo found itself with Serbia, that is, with the last remaining Yugoslavia, and in order not to become independent, the notorious Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic ruled it with iron and fire and abolished its self-rule status. Many unrests erupted in it after the referendum on its independence in 1990, and the unrest, violence and killing continued there until 1999... As a result of international circumstances, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened and bombed Serbia until it forced it to leave Kosovo. Since that date, NATO forces in Kosovo are the military force that guarantees peace in the region.

3- In 2008, Kosovo officially declared its independence from Serbia and was recognized by many countries of the world, led by America and most European countries. Russia and Serbia strongly opposed independence, and Russia and China prevented Kosovo from joining many international organizations. Then finally, on 19/3/2023, and within the framework of the temptations to join the European Union (EU) and to oppose Russia after its war on Ukraine, the EU announced an agreement between Serbia and Kosovo to normalize relations between them that does not

mean Serbia's recognition of Kosovo's independence, and this agreement meant opening the door to both Serbia and Kosovo to join the European Union.

Second: What preceded the current events in terms of local and international conditions:

1- Serbia is Russia's last centre of influence in Eastern Europe, as it supported it throughout the years of its conflict with NATO. Indeed, NATO's intervention in 1999 to split Kosovo from Serbia was a severe blow to Russia's last influence in the Balkans, as it showed its weakness and inability to support its followers. However, Russia continued to show strong support for Serbia, and it provides it with weapons and political support in international organizations and strongly declares its opposition to the independence of Kosovo, and announces the establishment of economic projects to support the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It consolidated the relationship between the churches of the two countries and established a large media centre for Sputnik agency in Belgrade, which became a centre for fuelling tension and showing Russian support for the Serbs. The Serbian leaders are keen to take pictures with Russian President Putin to gain popularity in Serbia ahead of the elections in Serbia. Overall, Russia has great influence inside Serbia and among the Serbs in Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2- After Russia ignited the war in Ukraine and saw Western powers united in rallying against it, the West has increased its courtship with Serbia, including sponsoring the agreement between it and Kosovo to normalize relations (March 2023) and opening the way for Serbia to join the European Union, and perhaps NATO in the future, and this is like the annexation of Sweden and Finland joined NATO in order to increase Russia's international losses due to its war in Ukraine. A great rapprochement emerged between Serbia and the West, and in June 2022 European countries prevented Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov from crossing their airspace to visit Serbia. This was provoking to Serbia, the Serbian Interior Minister said: "Serbia is the only one in Europe that did not impose sanctions on Russia, and did not join the anti-Russian hysteria." (Al-Youm Al-Sabi', 22/8/2022).

This statement reflects the heaviness that Serbia feels because of its relations with Russia, especially since the horizons of Western countries are opening up for it. Indeed, putting Serbia on the track of the West may have achieved results beyond that, as Sky News Arabia published on 4/3/2023: (On Thursday, Russia demanded an official explanation from its ally, Serbia, regarding reports that the country located in the Balkans, has delivered thousands of missiles to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova expressed "grave concern" about the reports, which were first reported in Russian pro-government media last month.) Despite Serbia's denial of its involvement in the conflict in Ukraine, these positions highlight that Serbia has begun to make its way away from Russia, even if the road still has gaps and even obstacles.

3- In the face of this new reality of relations between Russia and Serbia after the war in Ukraine, Russia, which has wide influence inside Serbia, has begun to use its influence tools locally with the Serbs to stir up tension and try to stop the process of stripping Serbia of its international influence. (The President of Kosovo accused Russia of having "destructive interest" in the region, including attacking Kosovo, Bosnia and Montenegro. (The Independent Arabia, 22/12/2022)). According to the same source, (The Washington Post wrote that the Russian war on Ukraine has raised wider tensions in the region, and quoted analysts that Russia's national discourse found acceptance among some leaders, including Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, an ultra-nationalist who was an ally of former President Slobodan Milosevic. Wall Street Journal reported at the time that NATO and the European Union were quick to calm the tension between Kosovo and Serbia after the recent escalation, amid fears that Russia will use the conflict between the two countries to destabilize Europe).

4- Ivana Stradner of the American Project Institute for Public Policy Research had warned before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine that Russia was set on creating chaos in the Balkans, and she said in an article entitled "Russia is playing with fire in the Balkans" published by Foreign

Affairs Magazine and quoted by the Independent Arabia, 20/4/2023. (I do not rule out that the Balkans will turn into a new theater in which Russia will challenge the European Union and NATO, in order to prove that they are two fake giants. (Independent Arabia, 20/2/2022)). Therefore, it is more likely that Russia is the one which stirs up the conflict in Kosovo in order to divert attention from its weakness, which was shown by the war in Ukraine, and in order to occupy the European countries hostile to it with another war in Europe, as well as in order to stop the process of removing Serbia from its influence.

Third: The reality of recent events:

1- The Serbs inside Kosovo number no more than 120,000 out of nearly 2 million people who are the population of the region, and a third of the Serbs are concentrated in four border towns with Serbia, the center of the recent conflict. In these four towns (50,000 people) of which the Serbs make up 90% of its population, the state authority of Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, has been weakened further. The police cannot deal with crime, arrest criminals for ethnic reasons, and accuse them of targeting Serbs. The Serbs in these towns carried out riots on an ethnic basis and demanded accession to Serbia, this imposed consequences on the other side of the border in front of its people to defend the Serbs in Kosovo.

2- In order to impose its control over those towns, the Kosovo government issued in August 2022 laws to impose carrying its identity and car plates in northern Kosovo. This led to mass resignations of mayors and police of Serb origin in November 2022, and protests spread in the north of the country, then the Kosovo government held local elections in April 2023, which the Serbs refused to participate in, which announced the victory of the Muslim candidates in it, so the Serbs revolted in these towns because they did not want their mayors to be Albanian Muslims (Kosovans), and riots spread from closing the roads until the Kosovo government found itself forced to impose security. The police provided security for the inauguration of new mayors, the Serbs wanted to occupy the buildings and found the Kosovo police standing by to prevent them from occupying the municipal buildings. Shortly before that, the President of Serbia had put his country's army on alert in reference to the possibility of military intervention.

3- As for Russia, it was pouring oil on the fire and showing great support for the Serbs. Before the outbreak of the demonstrations on 29/5/2023, its spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "Russia decisively condemns Kosovo's provocative steps that brought the situation to the brink of a "hot phase," adding that the responsibility for the provocation against Serbia is the responsibility of the United States and the European Union (Al-Youm Al-Sabi', 28/5/2023). After the demonstrations (Sergey Lavrov said that the escalating tensions in Kosovo could lead to a "huge explosion" in the heart of Europe. The Russian Foreign Minister told reporters on Monday that the situation was "alarming" and warned of a major eruption in the Balkans. (Sout Al-Khaleej, 30/5/2023)). Likewise, (Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov confirmed that "the Serbs are fighting for their rights in northern Kosovo," explaining that the army is on alert and "the decision will be taken by the Serbian president." (The Independent Arabia, 30/5/2023)).

4- As for America, its position is hardly different from the European position. A joint statement was issued, signed by America, Britain, France, Germany and Italy, to take immediate measures to stop the escalation in the north of the region. (British government website, 26/5/2023). Britain was keen, within the framework of NATO, to have the command of the largest central sector in the capital region, Pristina, after NATO's intervention in 1999, and it was the first country in NATO to appoint an ambassador for it in Pristina after declaring independence (Radio Sawa website, 21/2/2008). Then America appointed an ambassador five months later (Al-Youm Al-Sabi', 19/7/2008). Blinken considered that the decision of Pristina authorities used force to ensure the arrival of mayors in the north of the region to administrative headquarters ("which led to a sharp and unjustified escalation of tension." (RT, 31/5/2023)). Also, (US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken urged the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo to reduce tension, warning that they threaten

hopes of joining Europe. Blinken said - to reporters during the NATO talks in Oslo yesterday, Thursday - "We call on the governments of Kosovo and Serbia to take immediate measures to de-escalate tension." (Al-Jazeera Net, 2/6/2023)

5- Because of these Western positions, it is likely that the situation is moving towards cooling. After the rigid positions expressed by the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, he began to show softness. (Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said that he seeks to defend all Kosovo Serbs, stressing that they have the right to make their voices heard through peaceful means, and he added that power in Kosovo can be obtained through elections, not through violence. Kurti suggested holding new elections for mayors in an attempt to stop the recent outbreak of violence in the north of the country. (Al Jazeera Net, 2/6/2023)). At the same time French President Macron and the Chancellor of Germany, Scholz, pressed on the President of Kosovo during a summit in Moldova to hold a meeting with the President of Serbia to ease tension.

6- With all this, it is clear that Russia, in addition to using its influence in Serbia, is actually able to stir up tension in the Kosovo region and has many tools in Serbia and among the Serbs of the region. It wants to create a hotbed of tension that hides its apparent weakness in the Ukraine war and wants to stop the stripping of Serbia from its influence. The statements of its officials by showing strong support for the Serbs were pouring oil on the fire to fuel the war in Kosovo, but the European countries, along with America, were working to extinguish the fire as soon as it broke out, so America, along with the countries of the European Union, was very keen to quickly put out the fire.

Fourth: The conclusion is that Russia is not far from the tensions in Kosovo caused by Kosovo's Serbs and thus moving Serbia. Russia hoped from these tensions that the West would be preoccupied with them, given that NATO is in Kosovo, and then these fires ignite between the Serbs and Kosovo. Thus, the West and NATO will be in the middle of it. Russia was expecting this to mitigate the continuation of America and NATO in escalating the fires of war between Russia and Ukraine. It seems that America and the West realized this issue, so they made every effort to calm things down between the Serbs and Kosovo, and hinted to them the possibility of including them in the European Union and after that in NATO on condition of cooperating in quelling these tensions. It seems that America and the West had succeeded in that, as we have shown from the statements of officials, especially from America and Kosovo.

This is what we think is correct regarding the backgrounds, course and results of these events, as we have shown above.

Finally, Kosovo, as we mentioned, was within the Ottoman State, so its people became Muslim long ago, and had it not been for the fact that Muslims lack the Khilafah (Caliphate) State that protects them from the evils of the colonial kuffar, the reality of the course of affairs would not have been in the hands of those colonial kaffir states that control the country after the banner of Islam was flying over the Balkans and Kosovo.

And we ask Allah (swt) to relieve the Islamic Ummah off the crisis and to make it return to the source of its glory by re-establishing the Khilafah.

﴿وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ * بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ يَنْصُرُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

“And that day the believers will rejoice * In the victory of Allāh.¹ He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful” [Ar-Rum: 4-5]

22 Dhul Qi'dah 1444 AH

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