

Spark of War Flares in Balkans

By Joseph U. Dugan

EUROPE'S powder magazine, the Balkan kingdom of Jugo-Slavia, again has been exposed to a spark, and the world waits in apprehensive suspense for a possible explosion. The double assassination at Marseilles of King Alexander I. of Jugo-Slavia and Foreign Minister Jean Louis Barthou of France was the spark. Whether it will ignite the flames of a new war is the grave concern today of every government of the civilized world. The question of continued peace or war in Europe rests on highly sensitive circumstances rooted in a complicated controversy which statesmen have been trying to settle, with only conditional success, since the World war.

At the outbreak of the war in 1914 only two of the component parts of the heterogeneous kingdom of Jugo-Slavia were independent states, Serbia and Montenegro. Most of the rest of the original divisions were provinces of Austria-Hungary. It was in one of these, in the little town of Sarajevo in Bosnia, in 1914 that Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his consort were murdered by an assassin, an event which brought on the World war. Apprehensive observers see a dangerous parallel in the recent tragedy at Marseilles. Then, as now, the nations of Europe were divided into groups bound together by secret defensive alliances. Today the set-up of groups is quite different, but alliances between the new groups have been made, and for the same purpose—defense in case of war.

In 1914 Austria-Hungary and Germany and their dependent states, with Turkey and Bulgaria composed the group known as the central powers. When Austria-Hungary delivered an ultimatum to Serbia, following the Sarajevo assassinations, the dual monarchy automatically represented every other member of the alliance. Serbia, however, could count on the powerful backing of Russia and so refused to comply with the ultimatum. Russia in turn was allied with France, later joined by Belgium and her ally, Great Britain. Italy's traditional enmity for Austria-Hungary threw her support to the Allied cause.

Post-War Groups

What a striking contrast is presented by the European alliances of today! To understand how they came about and what they mean we must consider the peace conferences at Paris in 1919 and the outcome. There are, of course, other powerful factors entering into the modern European political scene, but the seeds of a possible new war in Europe were sown in Paris at the end of the World war. The fertile ground in which those seeds have been growing again is the Balkan country, now the political entity of Jugo-Slavia.

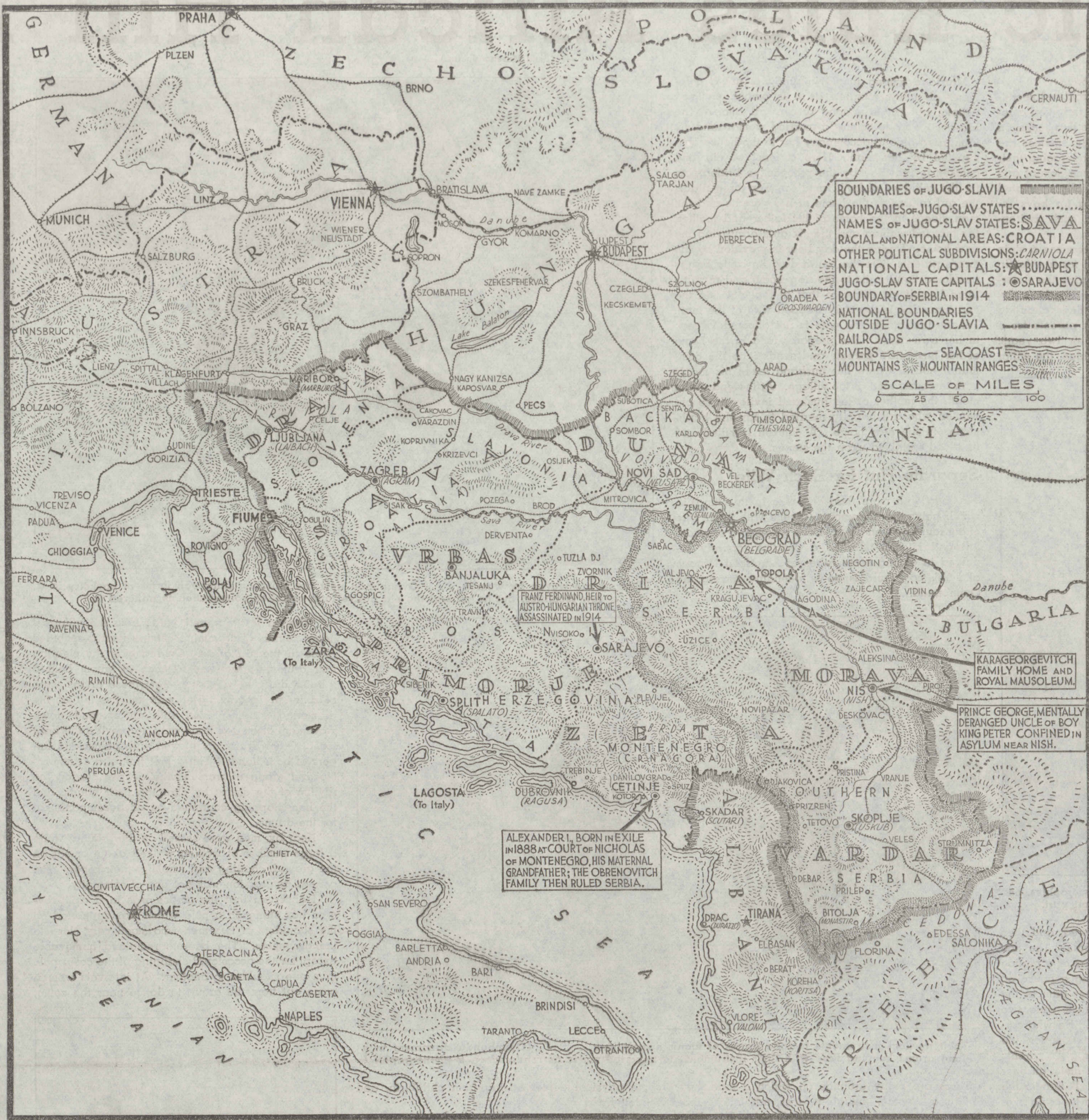
Dominating the Paris peace conference for a time was a world idealist, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States. Because he would not recognize the claims of Italy, based on secret agreements, for the hegemony of the Adriatic sea, Italy bolted the conference. Wilson's stand was based upon two of his famous fourteen points, namely:

No. 1. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

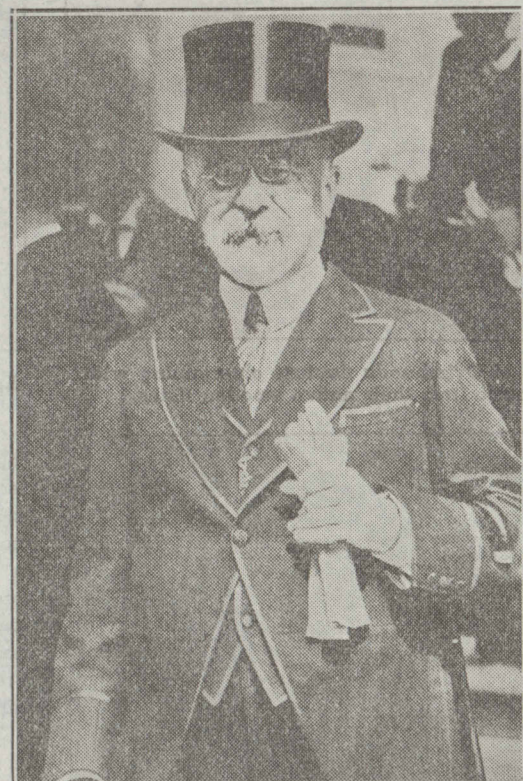
No. 11. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated, occupied territories should be restored, Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea, and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality, and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

For a time the four big powers in the conference were at a virtual deadlock over the Balkan question. Wilson refused to recognize secret agreements between Italy, France, England, and Balkan representatives. The Italian delegation withdrew from the conference and only returned when Wilson was forced into compromises which later led to his eclipse as the dominant leader of the peace negotiations. In the meantime D'Annunzio of Italy, with a force of irregulars, seized the Adriatic port of Fiume.

Most powerful representative of the Balkans at Paris was Prince Regent Alexander, commander of the Serbian army throughout the war. Shortly after the armistice Serbia and Montenegro had united. To this kingdom, through the able diplomacy of Alexander, was added most of the Balkan territory formerly controlled by Austria-Hungary to form the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The new territory included Croatia-Slavonia, Slovenia, Dalmatia, Herzegovina and several smaller units. The new political entity was an odd mixture of races. Of them the Serbs were dominant.



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(Associated Press photo.)
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(Acme photo.)
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(Associated Press photo.)
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of the country reached such a chaotic state in 1929 that King Alexander assumed the role of absolute dictator. A year later the country was reorganized into nine states and the name Jugo-Slavia was adopted for the whole kingdom.

From his heavily guarded castle in the capital city of Belgrade, Alexander ruled with a mailed fist. When Barthou of France engineered the little entente of the Balkans, composed of Rumania, Czechoslovakia, and Jugo-Slavia, Alexander was his most enthusiastic colleague. Italy had formed alliances with Austria, Bulgaria, and Albania, and there was a growing feeling in Jugo-Slavia that the Italian government was unofficially supporting the Croats and Slovenes in their opposition to the Belgrade government.

For a time some months ago it appeared that these opposing European alliances, fostered by the two great powers France and Italy, might lead to war. Such fears subsided, however, when Barthou of France and Premier Mussolini began definite overtures for maintenance of peace.

George, was later forced to renounce his succession because he was adjudged mentally unfit. He is confined in an asylum. Alexander, the second son, succeeded in line for the throne.

Alexander was only 24 when the World war broke out, but he was placed in command of the Serbian army. He was wounded and defeated, but led his forces in an orderly retreat to Salonika, where, joining Allied forces, he fought a slow but successful campaign to regain his country. At the end of the war Alexander became prince regent, and at the death of his father in 1921 he became king. He had married Princess Marie, daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Marie of Rumania. She survives today with their three sons, King Peter II. and Princes Tomislav and Andrej.

The other principal victim of the Marseilles tragedy, Jean Louis Barthou, had been an outstanding leader in French politics for nearly half a century. At the time of his death he was the greatest international statesman of his country. He was born in Oleron in the Basses-Pyrenees in 1862. At the age of 32 he became a minister of France, the youngest cabinet member in the history of the country. Almost continuously since then he had held important government posts, twice serving as premier. Last February he was called upon by Premier Doumergue to serve as foreign minister in the national truce cabinet, made necessary by disorders following the Stavisky scandal.

Fuse Is Set by Murders in France

Barthou, although he had the reputation of being a fiery antagonist and a master of strategic diplomacy, had come to be generally recognized as the one European leader possessing the influence and commanding the confidence necessary to assurance of a binding peace between the European nations. At a time when he was accused of engineering a "ring of steel" around Germany he negotiated an accord between France and the Hitler government, which eased the fear of war.

The French foreign minister recognized eastern Europe as the most likely theater of armed conflict. France, through its alliances with the little entente, found itself in direct conflict with the program of Italy. The relations between these two great powers had become strained, due chiefly to the increasing enmity between Jugo-Slavia and Italy. Barthou determined to straighten out the difficulties of the situation. He arranged first the conciliatory visit of King Alexander to King Boris of Bulgaria. It was his purpose to further act as intermediary for King Alexander in bringing Italy and Jugo-Slavia into more friendly relations. The visit of the king to France, which ended in tragedy, was a preliminary step in this direction. Bullets from an assassin's pistol suddenly halted the development of these plans for the security of peace in eastern Europe.

Fear Civil War

The immediate fear was that civil war might break out in Jugo-Slavia between the Croats and Slovenes on one side and the Serbs on the other, and that Italy might seize such an opportunity to "intervene," thus drawing other powers, notably France, into a general conflict. Such a possibility seems to be growing steadily remote. Peter, the 11-year-old son of the dead king, has been proclaimed ruler of Jugo-Slavia, the government of which has been entrusted to a regency. The overtures for more friendly relations between Italy, Jugo-Slavia, and France, from present indications, are to be resumed. It is admitted and feared, nevertheless, that an outbreak of internal conflict in Jugo-Slavia might yet bring on an international disaster.

The possibilities for such an internal explosion are inherent in the conglomerate makeup of this nation, which is a nation in name only. The strength of the regency and the loyalty of the populace to the ruling house will decide the issue. Many Jugo-Slavians who opposed the iron-fisted rule of Alexander have expressed the belief that under the regency the country may return to a more liberal form of government in which all political parties will have a voice.

It may be considered ironic that Alexander, whose family gained the crown of Serbia through an act of violence, came to his end through a similar circumstance. The Serbian royal family was founded by Kara George, who drove out the Turks in 1804. Subsequently two branches of his family, the Karageorgevitch and the Obrenovitch, have ruled the country. Alexander, a descendant of the former family, was born in exile in 1888 at the court of his maternal grandfather, King Nicholas of Montenegro.

In 1903 the Serbian king, Alexander Obrenovitch, and his queen, the notorious Draga, were shot to death in the palace at Belgrade by members of a secret society. The Karageorgevitch family, headed by Peter, were recalled from exile and Peter became king. His eldest son,