

# Albanians fire on rescue helicopters

FROM TOM RHODES IN WASHINGTON

AMERICAN, Italian and German rescue helicopters came under fire in Albania yesterday and the United States was considering the despatch of Marines for a beachhead rescue. A European envoy said that foreign intervention was vital to end the anarchy.

Gunmen fired a missile at US helicopters evacuating Americans and the Pentagon suspended its helicopter missions when two US Marine Cobra helicopter pilots separately reported that they had drawn fire from the ground. German helicopter-borne rescue missions were also halted after German troops had to fire back at Albanian secret servicemen.

US officials were contemplating various options to

ferry some 2,000 American citizens to safety, including moving people closer to beaches and taking them out in boats. A battalion of 2,000 Marines, specially trained for emergency rescue operations, was standing by on US naval ships in the Adriatic.

Other possibilities were the forced re-opening of Tirana airport, an increased American military presence on the ground and the deployment of more gunships and Harrier jumpjets to protect the helicopter missions. The American Ambassador and 17 key staff were staying in Tirana.

Escaping Britons were due to arrive in the Italian port of Brindisi last night.

**Britons flee, pages 18, 19**

Western refugees evacuated to Italy after terrifying car journey through rebel roadblocks to port

## British aid worker tells of escape from armed Tirana mob

By STEPHEN FARRELL AND RICHARD OWEN IN BRINDISI

AN AID worker who stood up to an armed Albanian mob breaking into his supply warehouse was among 120 Britons evacuated by boat from Durres yesterday.

Sean Robinson, 29, a Seventh Day Adventist minister working for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (Adra), hid the charity's two four-wheel-drive vehicles before opening the doors. He then fled and was spirited to the British Embassy by friendly locals as the mob stripped the warehouse clean.

Mr Robinson, from Kenilworth, Warwickshire, told his fiancée Catherine Korzynowski, 21, of his ordeal by mobile phone from the embassy compound. His father Brian, also a minister, later recognised him from a picture of evacuees in *The Times*.

Mr Robinson, 54, said last night that his son told him: "At 10.45am a mob came to the [Tirana] compound and ripped the gates off the compound wall, waving their guns. Sean had the presence of mind to go out and tell them they didn't have to tear the place apart because he had opened the warehouse doors. They went in and stripped the place bare. However, he had already salted away a lot of the more valuable stuff. He called

us from the embassy and again on the way to Durres, where he spent hours sitting on the beach overnight waiting for the Italian boats to come in and get him." The warehouse had held about £150,000 of food and materials.

The British refugees' journey to Durres was hair-raising as the convoy of their cars was repeatedly held up before reaching the port, where the vehicles were immediately stolen. The refugees, who include

‘A mob came and ripped the gates off the compound wall, waving their guns’

ed 11 Commonwealth citizens (including Australians and Canadians) as well as three Irish nationals, were forced to spend Thursday night on the beach in bitterly cold conditions as gunfire resounded from the port area where hundreds of armed Albanians tried to storm the last Italian

ferry leaving for Brindisi and Bari. British consul officials said British refugees boarded the Italian warship *San Giusto* by landing craft at dawn yesterday. The *San Giusto*, an 8,000 ton anti-submarine vessel, headed for Brindisi carrying nearly 1,000 passengers, including Italians and Albanians as well as the British and Commonwealth party.

About 50 British citizens in Albania failed to make the deadline for the evacuation. British military officials said the destroyer *HMS Birmingham* was now moored off Durres to help with a second evacuation operation. *HMS Exeter* is also nearby in Adriatic waters, and three RAF Hercules are on standby at the military airfield of Gioia del Colle in southern Italy. There were unconfirmed reports yesterday that American forces were making an attempt to secure Tirana airport so that transport planes and helicopters could fly in to help with further evacuations.

At the port of Brindisi yesterday Italian military helicopters and US Chinooks were kept busy ferrying some of the 2,000 American evacuees from Tirana off the *USS Nassau*. The vessel had evacuated Americans from the Albanian coast in an operation similar to that mounted by the *San Giusto*.

Captain Angelo Aghiatu, the port commander, said "half the Albanian Navy" had arrived in Brindisi in the past 48 hours. Among them were a patrol boat, four launches, two minesweepers, several torpedo boats and two rusting and battered corvettes, with their guns covered in tarpaulin. In addition to the vessels, he said 100 Albanian military personnel had defected in helicopters.

Among the Albanians who fled to Italy yesterday was General Safet Zhulali, a former Defence Minister. He travelled across the Adriatic with his family on a merchant ship.



A rusting naval gunboat with scores of Albanians fleeing the turmoil arrives in the Italian port of Brindisi

## Berisha's fall vital to end the anarchy

By JAMES POTTIFER

IF TODAY'S events in Tirana were part of a play, President Berisha should soon disappear, or fall on his sword. His children have fled, his allies from overseas have deserted him and the mob is at the gates.

But as at the end of Hamlet, the tough Fortinbras-type ex-generals and colonels in their southern mountain towns are watching and waiting. Once everything movable has been stolen, someone sooner or later, has to restore order, and the southern generals look the most likely candidates.

Neither that, nor any other solution, can happen while Mr Berisha is in situ, and anarchy will reign. The message has to get through that he is now the main obstacle to a reasonably peaceful resolution.

The President is the only factor uniting the opposition. Without Mr Berisha, they are likely to lose momentum and political and clan differences will emerge. If he goes, after the inevitable wild and dangerous party to celebrate, everyone will have to go home.

For this is a classic Balkan spring rising, it cannot continue indefinitely: the fields have to be cultivated and jobs in Greece or Italy have to be found to get families through the next winter.

A sensible Western policy would be to accept this highly imperfect reality, engineer a dignified removal for Mr Berisha before it is too late, let his entourage disappear as best they can and hope everyone gets tired quickly. There are signs of this already in some southern towns such as Sarande.

□ **Rome:** Italy was embarrassed yesterday that the country had awarded its highest honour to President Berisha (John Phillips writes).

The Knight of the Grand Cross with the Decoration of the Great Cord was awarded by President Scalfaro last April when he went on a state visit to Tirana. Red tape had held up the award, which was only officially conferred on Mr Berisha yesterday.

## 'King' ready to return

Johannesburg: King Leka of Albania is poised to return to his troubled homeland from his South African exile in an attempt to end the civil unrest (Inigo Gilmore writes).

The 57-year-old pretender to the throne left his Johannesburg home on Thursday for a European destination where he says he will await a call from his people. Encouraged by news that President Berisha had agreed to call early elections, the self-styled king, who was two days old when his father, King Zog, fled into exile, says he is the only person able to unify Albania.



King Leka awaits call from Albanian people



Frenzy of looting and gunfire as desperate civilians 'take back what the Government has stolen'

## Foreigners flee vision of Dante in shattered capital

AS IT closed its doors to the world, ungovernable Albania yesterday melted into a frenzy of shooting, looting and inexplicable motorcades.

Most Westerners had already had their fill, and chose to board what amounted to a military shuttle helicopter service between Tirana and a US warship, *USS Nassau*, in the Adriatic.

Italians and Americans left in twin-rotor Chinook helicopters from the national stadium behind a presidential palace that might or might not have contained a President. The British and Greeks took their nationals out by road and boat, running the gauntlet of roadblocks and edgy policemen with an alarming habit of simultaneously gesticulating and shooting.

As more than 120 non-essential American Embassy staff took to the skies, the American Ambassador, Marisa Lino, assured Albanians on state television that they were not being abandoned.

Durres, the port of departure for those fleeing Albania's social catastrophe, was a vision from Dante. A people not noted for their industry descended on the quayside government warehouses en masse, and picked them bare. Lories, donkeys, horses, bicy-



Tom Walker in Durres watches a sky filled with helicopters ferrying terrified foreigners out of Albania

cles, mopeds, wheelbarrows: no mode of transport was ignored in a frenzy of looting. The kings of the rampage were the truck gangs, comprising Kalashnikov-toting youths in bandanas and balaclavas, letting off warning volleys as they marked out their territories for pillage. The pitted road alongside the derricks and smashed security fences was clogged with the young and the old, men, women and children alike. They carted, cycled and humped away iron rods, sacks of cement, furniture, books, lamps, tools, batteries, webbing — anything not anchored to the ground or walls went amid the rising dust and din of gunfire.

"It is a bad situation," admitted Dash Jarvet, 53, a school director, his bicycle burdened with five carrier bags full of books. "But the Government stole from the people and now the people are stealing back." In his hand he clutched *Vitet e Zemerimit* —

the Albanian translation of *The Grapes of Wrath*. "We have taken those that we think are good," he explained. "My school needs all these things." Others preferred to stay indoors, well away from the Balkan macho displays of firepower.

"It is terrible, they are shooting all night and all day," said Doriana Nikolla, 20. "We don't have anything to eat — all the shops are closed and the ones that open are immediately looted by armed men." Her cousin, Genti Robja, a physics teacher from Elbasan, pleaded with visiting journalists to stay. "Please do not go, foreigners are like gods to us here. If only Nato would intervene for two days everything would be under control and the people would give the guns back."

Silhouetted against the horizon, too far to be of much comfort, were the warships of the Italian Navy, where Albania's future was being discussed by members of a new



An Albanian family hoping to be evacuated runs towards a French Army helicopter about to take off from Durres with French nationals on board

Government impotent to end the chaos onshore. Despite the heat, many Albanians in Durres wore jackets and coats, insisting they would jump aboard any ship that came into port.

The road from the port, past the summer palace of King Zog, was littered with spilled merchandise, broken lorries and dead donkeys and dogs. The looting epidemic was less frenzied in the capital, but a half-built private housing es-

tate on the edge of Tirana provided rich pickings. A billboard described it as "The Prime Neighbourhood with Comfort," but by the end of the afternoon there was little left.

Most of Tirana's shops were hastily emptied of their contents by worried owners and shuttered.

"We want to save our heads and what we own," said Alfred Maloska as he loaded handbags into a trailer behind his Mercedes. Further clouding

the confused issue of authority in the capital, a motorcade of armoured personnel carriers, Mercedes and Romanian Jeeps crawled around the city centre in the late afternoon.

Plainclothes thugs popped out of turrets and sunroofs, firing deafening rounds of automatic fire over the international hotels and the television station.

Hospitals in the capital reported at least 16 dead in the past 24 hours and some 140

wounded, nearly all in shooting accidents. "I shot my best friend in the head," sobbed one man outside a casualty unit.

Various theories began to take shape over who is organising the distribution of weapons, with reports coming in from several areas of the city suggesting that ruling Democratic Party activists are recruiting armed militia units to defend the President.

Along more conventional

lines of reasserting order, state television appealed to the police and army to put their uniforms on again and return to the streets, promising their salaries would be trebled.

Foreigners having trouble identifying who is who in the Albanian security services could take solace in the presence of 150 American Marines "in theatre".

There were also rumours of an SAS unit in the basement of the British Embassy.

ERIC CABANIS / EPA

# Chaos is the only order as mobs turn to plunder

FROM ANTHONY LOYD IN TIRANA

THIS is anarchy in its purest form. Burning houses; masked gunmen; streams of refugees; US Cobra gunships clattering overhead.

Tirana is imploding. Battle is confusing, but still has some basic parameters. Struggling policemen hold the capital's centre against the mobs, exchanging fire with increasing frequency as gangs push for plunder.

A thin line of nervous conscripts and Shik secret police have cordoned off the presidential quarters. Nobody knows whether President Berisha is still inside. Rumours are rife that he had fled the country were denied and, at an emergency meeting, he is reported to have declared resolutely: "I no longer have an army or a police force, but Albania still has a President."

No renegade group seems to have the same agenda. Some have taken up arms in support of Berisha, some in

support of the rebels; others to loot, others for their own protection.

On Thursday night Fier, 40 miles south of Tirana, was the last bastion of government support. By dawn, it had fallen, becoming a fiefdom loyal to no one but itself. We left its derelict streets at dawn,

## HELPLINE

The Foreign Office has set up a telephone line for people worried about relatives in Albania. The number is: 0171 839 5656.

jumping aboard an empty bus whose driver was trying to get back to his family in Tirana. Tanks rolled out of looted army bases as we neared the port of Durres, its harbour already choked by a flotilla of small boats as refugees struggled to escape

to Italy. Defecting conscripts jumped aboard the bus, pale with fear, joined soon by injured insurgents and wounded children. Twice we stopped at medical centres; twice the bloody casualties were turned away by doctors who no longer had the equipment to treat them.

The suburbs of Tirana seemed to have been taken over by the escaped inmates of a lunatic asylum. Drunken gangs laden with firepower, their faces hidden by ski-masks and balaclavas, orchestrated looting from homes and government buildings.

Children leapt from the breached doorway of a sports shop. Beside them gunmen fired at two US Cobra helicopters taking part in the evacuation of the US Embassy.

As the gunfire nears the presidential building it seems impossible that Mr Berisha could survive the next 24 hours.