

# United States uses, and abuses, Kosovar refugees

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The scenes of tens of thousands of Kosovar refugees, driven from their homes by Serbian troops and police, deprived of all possessions except the clothes on their backs, have been broadcast throughout the world, evoking widespread sympathy for their plight.

By focusing television cameras on the refugees' distress, the US and NATO have sought to shift public opinion in favor of the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. According to polls published this week in the United States, Britain and France, this media campaign has had an effect, at least temporarily boosting support for both the bombing and for the introduction of ground troops, a major escalation of the imperialist assault on Yugoslavia.

The enormous flood of refugees is being exploited for another purpose as well--rebuilding the Kosovo Liberation Army, the US-backed guerrilla force which was largely broken in the Serb military offensive of the past two weeks. KLA officials are reportedly recruiting heavily from among the Kosovar refugees in Albania, aided by the fact that KLA guerrillas, not Albanian government troops, man most of the guard posts along the border between Albania and Kosovo.

US arms shipments to the KLA have been sharply accelerated, and the Pentagon is expected to provide military instruction to the new recruits. According to a report in the *Irish Times* Wednesday, a private military training company set up by retired US officers, Military Personnel Resources Incorporated (MPRI), is preparing to provide training to the KLA once Washington gives the green light.

MPRI has a sinister record in the Balkans. Its personnel planned and directed the Croatian military offensive in 1995 which resulted in the largest single instance of ethnic cleansing prior to the current events in Kosovo: the expulsion of more than 200,000 Serbs

from the Krajina region of Croatia, where they had lived for many centuries. The international war crimes tribunal in the Hague is now considering charges against the Croatian generals who commanded the Krajina campaign. Their American "advisers" would be good candidates to join them in the dock.

While the US government regards the refugees as useful for propaganda purposes and as potential cannon fodder in the war against the Milosevic government in Yugoslavia, its real indifference to the suffering of the Kosovar Albanians is demonstrated in Washington's response to the human catastrophe taking place in Macedonia and Albania.

No aid was in place for the surge of refugees which was to be anticipated as soon as the international monitors left Kosovo with the start of the US-NATO bombing campaign. Especially dismal are the conditions in Macedonia, where the government is openly hostile to the refugees, fearing that they will settle permanently there and alter the ethnic balance in a country which already has a 23 percent Albanian minority.

On Tuesday there were terrible scenes in Macedonian camps where hundreds of unwilling Albanian refugees were herded onto buses and then cargo jets where they were shipped, like so much baggage, to Turkey. Macedonian police used batons and rifle butts to coerce the refugees into embarking on a journey whose destination they did not know. In one case they warned reporters not to tell the Albanians that they were being sent to Turkey, hundreds of miles from their homeland.

Even more barbaric is the proposal to ship as many as 40,000 refugees to various parts of northern Europe and to Guantanamo Bay, the US naval base in Cuba. These Kosovars are being removed thousands of miles from their homeland, not for humanitarian purposes, but as

part of a diplomatic arrangement between the imperialist powers and Macedonia. The authorities in Skopje have made it clear that their continued collaboration with the NATO onslaught on Serbia is conditioned on keeping down the number of Albanian refugees on their territory.

In Europe, the Kosovar deportees will be dispersed as far as Norway and Scotland--the southern European countries closer to Kosovo, like France and Italy, have refused to take any refugees. Even more repugnant is the airlift set to begin soon from Macedonia to Guantanamo Bay. Refugees shivering from the spring snowfall in the Kosovo mountains will be packed into jetliners and flown directly to a tropical destination where the temperature is regularly above 90 degrees Fahrenheit and tents bake in the sun on the tarmac of a converted airfield.

Guantanamo Bay was previously a prison camp for tens of thousands of Cuban refugees, and before that for as many as 21,000 Haitians intercepted in the Atlantic by the US Navy as they attempted to reach Florida or the Bahamas in tiny fishing boats. The living conditions and crowding were so bad that riots broke out on several occasions. When the Haitians were detained there, US officials cynically commented that their purpose was to keep them alive, but not to make conditions better than those prevailing in Haiti, for fear of attracting more boat people.

A Pentagon spokesman described the virtues of Guantanamo as a refugee camp, telling *USA Today*, "It's all set up. It's a cordoned-off area. It's easy to control. It's easy to supply. And nobody will be freezing there." Nobody will be escaping either. On one side is the Caribbean Sea, on the other, a military perimeter across which US and Cuban forces face each other, one of the most heavily-mined borders in the world.

The main reason for choosing Guantanamo as the dumping ground for the US share of Kosovo refugees is that it prevents the Kosovars from entering the continental United States where they might make contact with relatives and immigration lawyers and assert their rights as political refugees fleeing repression. According to a spokesman for the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Washington, the Kosovars at Guantanamo will not be allowed to meet with INS agents or attorneys and will not be

permitted to apply for political status or US residency.

The US government is prepared to rain bombs and missiles indefinitely on Serbia and move ground troops into position for an assault, all in the name of defending "human rights" in Kosovo. But not a single Kosovar can be permitted to exercise those rights within the boundaries of the United States.



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