

Further doubt cast on US claims of genocide in Kosovo

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There are growing questions about the claims by US and NATO officials, accepted uncritically in the media for more than a month, that Yugoslav forces have carried out genocide against the Albanian population of Kosovo.

These claims have been intensified in the wake of recent bombing atrocities such as the destruction of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the killing of as many as 100 Albanian Kosovars by NATO bombs in the village of Korisa.

In an effort to excuse their own crimes, US and British officials in particular have repeatedly compared the actions of Serbian forces to the Nazi Holocaust.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in a speech in Aachen, Germany May 13, called the bombing campaign “a just war against the most evil form of genocide since my father's generation defeated the Nazis.”

Hillary Clinton, during a visit to Kosovar Albanian refugees in Macedonia, said their suffering reminded her of *Schindler's List* and *Sophie's Choice*, both of which concern the Nazi mass murder of the Jews.

US Secretary of Defense William Cohen, speaking on a television interview program Sunday, dismissed Yugoslav criticism of the bombing of Korisa, in which 100 Kosovar Albanians were killed, declaring: “For the Serbs to lament publicly about the deaths of these refugees is almost tantamount to Adolf Eichmann complaining about allied forces bombing the crematoriums.”

And finally President Clinton himself, in a speech May 13 to an audience of veterans in Washington DC. Clinton admitted that the whole premise of the NATO propaganda campaign against the Milosevic regime was false, that “ethnic cleansing is not the same as the ethnic extermination of the Holocaust.” But then he reiterated the claim that “There are thousands of people that have been killed, systematically, by the Serb forces. There are a hundred thousand people who are still missing.”

None of these sweeping assertions was accompanied by

any evidence, such as aerial photographs and other documentation which could be provided by the massive electronic and satellite surveillance which the US intelligence services maintain over Kosovo.

Instead, the US-NATO claims were undermined by a dispatch published May 17 from an eyewitness on the ground, Canadian journalist Paul Watson, the correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* in Kosovo.

While the Clinton administration claims that 100,000 Albanian men have disappeared and are likely dead, murdered by the Yugoslav military and Serbian nationalists, Watson found many young Albanian men, displaced but otherwise unmolested, at the village of Svetjle in northern Kosovo.

Svetjle is one of the Kosovo Albanian villages that, according to NATO, has been depopulated by Serb forces who committed genocide. While NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana said that Serbian killings of Albanians had been so widespread that “you don't see males in their 30s to 60s,” Watson had no difficulty seeing them.

When he arrived at Svetjle for a second visit in a week, “hundreds of young men are everywhere, strolling along the dirt roads or lying on grass on a spring day.

“So many fighting-age men in a region where the Kosovo Liberation Army fought some of its fiercest battles against Serbian forces are a challenge to the black-and-white versions of what is happening here.

“By their own accounts, the men are not living in a concentration camp, nor being forced to labor for the police or army, nor serving as human shields for Serbs.

“Instead, they are waiting with their families for permission to follow thousands who have risked going back home to nearby villages because they do not want to give up and leave Kosovo.”

Watson visited the village without a police or military escort or any official Serbian monitor, and he spoke to

Albanian refugees who themselves said they had not had any conflicts with the police since they were allowed to return to the area around their village.

“For the month that we’ve been here, the police have come only to sell cigarettes,” one Albanian said, “but there hasn’t been any harassment.”

While the American media continues to give publicity to increasingly unbelievable estimates that more than 90 percent of the Kosovo Albanian population has been driven from their homes, Watson describes a population that went into hiding during the first two weeks of the NATO bombing, but is now emerging..

He writes: “Thousands of other ethnic Albanians are coming out of hiding in forests and in the mountains, hungry and frightened and either going back home or waiting for police permission to do so.

“While Serbian police seize the identity documents of Kosovo Albanians crossing the border into Albania or Macedonia, government officials in Pristina, Kosovo’s provincial capital, issue new identity cards to ethnic Albanians still here.”

Watson interviewed an Albanian political activist, Fatmir Seholi of the Kosovo Democratic Initiative, who denied the allegations of genocide against Albanians which have been the principal pretext for the NATO bombing.

“As an Albanian, I am convinced that the Serbian government and security forces are not committing any kind of genocide,” he said.

“In a war, even innocent people die,” he explained. “In every war, there are those who want to profit. Here there is a minority of people who wanted to steal, but that’s not genocide. These are only crimes.”

Seholi is a political opponent of the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army, which killed his father in 1997 and publicly justified it on the grounds of cooperation with the Yugoslav authorities. But it is significant that Watson himself, who has been in Kosovo throughout the war, gives the same description of the attacks by Serb nationalists on the Albanian population, and their eventual end.

“After waves of looting, arson, killings and other attacks turned many of Kosovo’s cities into virtual ghost towns, the government took steps to restore order, and ethnic Albanians began to move back, often under police protection,” he writes.

“Of an estimated 100,000 people living in Pristina, roughly 80,000 are ethnic Albanians and a quarter of these are displaced people from the Podujevo area living

with relatives...”

Watson’s report is thus in stark contrast with the statements of Clinton, Blair & Co., alleging systematic, ongoing mass murder by the Yugoslav government. It follows a similar series of reports published earlier this month in the *New York Times*.

These reports suggest that the claims of genocide in Kosovo, which have provided the essential pretext for the NATO bombing, are a deliberate and enormous hoax. This attempt to delude and stampede public opinion will be exposed with devastating political consequences for its authors once it becomes possible for outside observers to make a more systematic assessment of the conditions in Kosovo.

The Clinton administration is already making preparations to counter such exposures. The White House announced that it has hired a public relations coordinator for the Kosovo refugee campaign, veteran political operative Leslie Dach, to work on a 30-day contract. One White House official told the press, “There’s a feeling that the next month is critical in terms of American public opinion.”

A more sinister precaution is the statement issued by NATO that it cannot guarantee the security of Red Cross and UN aid workers who are returning to Kosovo this week after being evacuated when the bombing campaign began. Admitting that there had already been “perhaps hundreds of innocent casualties” from the bombing, a NATO spokesman suggested that Red Cross and UN workers, too, could become collateral damage.

Here is expressed both the real indifference of the imperialists to the suffering of the Albanian population which remains in Kosovo, and their concern that UN and Red Cross workers may report conditions far different from those claimed in NATO propaganda and parroted, for the most part, in the American media.



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