

Attacks on Kosovar Serbs intensifying

The US, the KLA and ethnic cleansing

The Editorial Board
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It has not taken long for the horrific implications of the US-led war in the Balkans to manifest themselves. Each day brings new reports of killings, rapes, arson attacks and incidents of looting carried out against Serbs and Gypsies in Kosovo, spearheaded by the Kosovo Liberation Army. The attacks have assumed such a scale that even the US media cannot ignore them.

According to the Associated Press, returning Albanians on Monday burned and looted the Serb village of Belo Polje, the same town where KLA members allegedly raped and stabbed to death a mentally ill woman. The pillaging of the town was the latest in what is apparently a systematic campaign to drive the remaining Serbs, mostly elderly people, out of the western Kosovo city of Pec and surrounding villages. The AP reporter noted that men in KLA uniforms “drove up and down the village's dirt roads, watching the looting. NATO soldiers showed no immediate sign of stopping it.” Human Rights Watch, a US-based group, says it has “telling evidence” that KLA soldiers have murdered and abducted Serbs in several western towns.

At least 14 houses were burned to the ground in the sector of southern Kosovo patrolled by US forces during the course of Saturday night and Sunday morning. “‘Last night was ugly,’ Captain Marshall Niles told AFP [Agence France Presse], who said he suspected ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) rebels of being behind the attack. KLA fighters were spotted near the village.”

In Prizren an 85-year-old Serb man returned from shopping to find his 77-year-old wife had been hacked to death with an axe. Down the street NATO forces discovered a 63-year-old Serb man stabbed to death.

The violence is accelerating and spreading further into Kosovo as the Albanian Kosovar refugees pour back into the country from the camps in Albania and Macedonia; meanwhile the exodus of Kosovo Serbs, now more than 50,000, continues. The anti-Serb ethnic cleansing is taking place under the auspices of NATO, which moved into the province promising to guarantee peace and democracy. As one Serb religious leader observed, “This is ethnic cleansing

under cover of NATO.”

Whatever the statements of regret from NATO policy makers and military commanders, the fact remains that the NATO governments, and in particular the US, bear responsibility for the tragic and bloody consequences of their policies. And this responsibility is not of a general or abstract variety. Those leading the campaign against the Kosovo Serb civilians are NATO's “partners in peace.” President Clinton has gone out of his way on more than one occasion to praise the KLA for having chosen “the road of peace” at the Rambouillet talks.

US officials cannot credibly claim that the KLA's policy of ethnic cleansing against the Serbs comes as a surprise. It is entirely in keeping with the history and politics of this reactionary chauvinist organization. American officials are well aware of the nature of the KLA and its leadership. As late as 1997 Washington chose to include the secessionist group on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations. Why was the KLA subsequently removed from this list? What changed in the organization's methods or outlook to justify this reversal? No explanation has ever been provided. The Clinton administration counts on a servile press never to raise such embarrassing questions.

An article by Chris Hedges in the June 25 *New York Times* provides an indelible portrait of the KLA and its leaders. The picture that emerges from Hedges' piece bears little resemblance to the heroic liberation movement painted by the media in the period leading up to and during the war. It reveals a pattern of beatings and murders of rivals and dissidents within the KLA ordered by its leader Hashim Thaci beginning in early 1998, by means of which the latter consolidated his position within the top leadership. (See accompanying article: KLA leader Thaci ordered rivals executed, rebel commanders say).

It is hardly possible for US officials to deny that they were aware of the events cited by Hedges. The series of killings took place precisely during the period when Washington was shifting its policy from one of covert support for the Thaci group, to open political backing, while pushing Ibrahim

Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo into the background. During the Rambouillet negotiations, the US seated the KLA at the head of the Kosovo delegation. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright demonstratively promoted Thaci as the legitimate representative of the Kosovar people. Since that time, the US has continued to favor Thaci at the expense of other KLA leaders, such as Adem Demaci, who seemed less amenable to American demands.

State Department spokesman James Rubin has made no secret of his close association with Thaci, with whom he communicates virtually on a daily basis. Confronted with the accounts of Thaci's record of violence within his own organization, Rubin responded, "We simply don't have information to substantiate allegations that there was a KLA leadership-directed program of assassinations or executions." Rubin also claimed at a press conference last week that the State Department had no "credible evidence" the KLA was involved in drug trafficking.

Obviously the US State Department's standard of proof for Serb atrocities is considerably lower than for rapes and murders carried out by Washington's KLA allies.

Thaci and his cohorts are the elements the American government has unleashed on the Kosovan population, Albanians as well as Serbs. One shudders to think what type of "democracy" the Kosovar Albanians, let alone any surviving Serbs, will enjoy under a KLA-policed US protectorate.

Clinton, Albright and the NATO military commanders now preach brotherly love to the Albanian population. But the current violence has to be seen in the context of the propaganda effort to demonize the entire Serb people that has characterized the NATO approach during this entire crisis. This was first of all necessary to sell the war to the American and European populations, or at least neutralize opposition.

Furthermore, it should be recalled that the US and NATO gave KLA officials the run of the refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia, where they were encouraged, if they needed such encouragement, to incite hatred and vengeance against the Serb population. The KLA was able to play on the suffering and disorientation of the ethnic Albanian Kosovans, subjected to Serb violence and terror, NATO bombing, the trauma of flight, and the horrors of life in the makeshift camps.

The WSWS noted an incident, reported in the June 7 *New York Times*, in which a mob of Albanian refugees beat members of a Gypsy family at the camp in Stenkovec, Macedonia: "For a moment, it seemed as if the mob of Albanian refugees would literally tear the 7-year-old Gypsy boy apart, limb from limb, said three aid workers who saw

the attack on Saturday night."

The *Times* article noted: "In one sense, the refugee camps here are sweltering caldrons of hate, where increasingly frustrated Kosovo Albanians can commiserate about their mutual victimization at the hands of the Serbs. As might be expected, peer pressure is exerted in the camps to hate Serbs."

US officials did nothing to counter such sentiments. On the contrary, Albright visited the same camp in the immediate aftermath of the bombing campaign, one week after the assault on the Gypsy family, and incited a crowd of refugees, declaring, "Milosevic and the Serbs have lost control over Kosovo."

The close relationship of the Clinton administration to the KLA speaks volumes about the character of American foreign policy and those who carry it out. The attraction of Clinton, Albright and Rubin for Thaci and his ilk is telling. They find themselves irresistibly drawn to a social type: the semi-fascist, gangster-like "man of action." These types exist in every "trouble spot" and many end up on the payroll of the American state.

What is happening on the ground in Kosovo stands as an indictment of imperialist policy in general, and US militarism in particular. The pursuit of big power military and geopolitical advantage, and the ambitions of American-based corporations in regard to the oil-rich lands that lie to the east of the Balkans, have created such chaotic and degraded conditions in the former Yugoslavia as to turn a section of the population into pogromists.

What one sees in the current situation is only a foreshadowing of the future national and communal conflicts in the Balkans, whose seeds have been sown by the US-NATO war. But the results are already sufficient to demonstrate the disastrous consequences of accepting as good coin the claims of the US and European powers to represent justice, progress and humanitarianism.



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