

Another "executed" Kosovar leader back from the dead

Barry Grey
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How reliable are the press accounts of Serb atrocities in Kosovo? Consider the following item published June 17 by the *Boston Globe*: "Kosovo Albanian who was believed dead is alive and well, British official says."

The article by Kevin Cullen, dateline Pristina, reports that Veton Surroi, an ethnic Albanian leader with close ties to NATO leaders, met with senior British officials earlier in the week. The meeting is newsworthy because last March 29 NATO announced that Surroi had been murdered by Serb forces, a claim that was repeated by the White House on April 6.

Surroi is not the only prominent Kosovo Albanian to resurface after American and NATO officials declared they had been killed by the Serbs. Two other Kosovar leaders named by NATO on March 29 as victims of Serb assassins—Fehmi Agani and Baton Haxhiu—rejoined the living on March 31.

Then there was the case of Ibrahim Rugova, the long-time Kosovar leader whom the US relegated to the background earlier this year when it decided to promote the Kosovo Liberation Army. Rugova was reported to have gone into hiding in the first days of the NATO air war, after Serbs had burned down his home in Pristina.

But on March 31 Rugova told journalists in Pristina: "I am here in my home, where I've been since I returned from Paris with my family." The following day he was in Belgrade, holding talks with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

The alleged murders and attacks on Kosovar leaders were publicized widely by "responsible" newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and given extensive play by the networks. They were reported not as rumors or speculation, but as facts, and such "facts" played a key role in convincing broad sections of the public in the initial days of the war that Milosevic and the Serbs were carrying out a genocidal

assault on the Kosovo Albanian population.

The fact that these stories proved to be false was barely reported, so that millions around the world were left with the impression that Serb forces had systematically murdered leading Kosovan politicians and journalists. Nor was any accounting ever given by NATO or the media for such gross and recurrent cases of disinformation.

The resurrection of Kosovar leaders was repeated on a much larger scale last month, when the media suddenly began reporting the appearance of thousands of "missing" Kosovar males at the Albanian and Macedonian borders. A few weeks before US Secretary of Defense William Cohen had said 100,000 Kosovo Albanian males had disappeared, very likely murdered by the Serbs.

Many other examples could be cited of the distortions and lies that have characterized the war propaganda of NATO governments and the media. To give just one: it was reported at the end of March that Serb authorities had set up concentration camps throughout Kosovo, and herded 100,000 people into the main stadium in Pristina. German Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping told a press conference at the time that he had "serious reports" of such camps, which "brought to mind ... tactics used by Nazi Germany."

These claims were quickly revealed to be fabrications, the source of the "serious reports" having been the KLA.



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