

KLA seizes Kosovo positions, Serb flight grows

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The occupation of Kosovo by NATO ground troops is setting the stage for a new campaign of ethnic warfare in the Yugoslav province, this time spearheaded by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) against the Serb minority population.

As NATO contingents fanned out into the five occupation zones, armed KLA fighters took possession of police stations, border crossings and other strategic points, flying Albanian flags and parading with weapons, openly violating the terms of the agreement between NATO and Yugoslavia and setting in motion a mass exodus of Serb civilians.

The biggest single population movement took place in Prizren, Kosovo's third largest city and the headquarters of the southwestern occupation zone patrolled by 7,000 German and Dutch troops. Nearly a thousand armed KLA fighters marched into the city Monday morning, set up checkpoints and began policing the city, which has a large non-Albanian population, including Turks and Gypsies as well as Serbs. As the German troops and KLA guerrillas marched in, virtually the entire Serb population of the city fled, as many as 10,000 people packed into cars, trucks and other vehicles.

A spokesman for the German commander in Prizren admitted that the KLA checkpoints and armed patrols were in violation of the NATO-Yugoslavia agreement, but German troops made no attempt to disarm the KLA soldiers or limit their activities, instead exchanging salutes and high-fives when their patrols met.

Gun battles between the KLA and retreating Yugoslav Army troops could be heard within a few miles of the city. Only when a KLA detachment went to the city's hospital and sought to arrest three injured Yugoslav soldiers did the NATO force intervene. German soldiers took the KLA group's weapons and

escorted them from the hospital.

The occupation of Prizren represents a major extension of KLA power, since the group never had a strong presence there during the two-year civil war. There was relatively little ethnic conflict between Serbs, Albanians and Turks living in Prizren, and the city was largely spared the anti-Albanian pogroms which took place elsewhere during the first two weeks of NATO bombing.

A series of incidents Monday demonstrated the increasing aggressiveness of the Albanian nationalist forces. The KLA seized control of Morina, the main border crossing between Albania and Kosovo, and began clearing groups of Kosovar Albanian refugees to return to their homes, examining the passports and identity papers of all those attempting to cross. German troops made no attempt to interfere with the KLA operation, thereby giving the nationalist group effective control of the border and allowing it to decide who among the refugees will be permitted to return and who will not—something that bodes ill for those Kosovar Albanians critical of the KLA's politics.

KLA gunmen seized one of Serbia's largest coal mines, at Dobre Selo near the Kosovo-Macedonia border, and KLA checkpoints were set up in dozens of towns and villages throughout the southeastern and southwestern parts of Kosovo, the first areas to be completely evacuated by Yugoslav Army troops.

KLA gunmen opened fire on British paratroopers in Pristina, the capital city, when the British were investigating an apparent KLA execution. British soldiers surrounded a house where a Serb had been shot dead, and came under fire from inside the building. Five KLA members were eventually arrested and disarmed.

Perhaps the most chilling incident took place after

unarmed KLA members took over the police station in the town of Kacanik in the American-run southeastern zone. The *New York Times* interviewed one KLA guerrilla who explained why they were unarmed. “We don’t need guns anymore,” he said. “This is an ethnically clean town.”

This sums up the perspective of the KLA, which is no less racist than the Serb nationalist paramilitary groups which spearheaded the anti-Albanian violence of the past two months. Nor is there the slightest reason to believe that the KLA in power will be any less ruthless in suppressing minority groups and political opponents than the other nationalists who have come to power in the various fragments of the former Yugoslavia.

The result of the decade-long American intervention in the former Yugoslavia has been to transform a multi-ethnic country into a series of ethnically “pure” statelets, mainly at the expense of the Serbs, the largest ethnic group in the Yugoslav Federation. Serbs once lived throughout the country, but are now confined to Serbia, Montenegro and the Serbian portion of Bosnia.

When the repatriation of Kosovar Albanians and the expulsion of Kosovar Serbs has been completed—a process which may be only weeks away in the case of the Serbs—the United States will have sponsored, in succession, the creation of a Croatia with its Serb minority expelled, a Bosnia divided into three ethnic-based cantons, Moslem, Croat and Serb, each of which has expelled its minorities, and a Kosovo depopulated of its Serb minority.

Despite the demonization of the Serbs as arch racists, the only exception to this process of forced separation of nationalities is Serbia itself, which still hosts a large Hungarian-speaking minority in Vojvodina, as well as Slavic Moslem, Bulgarian and Gypsy minorities in Serbia proper. Meanwhile the Serb people are losing in Kosovo historical battlefields, monuments, cathedrals and other sites of deep cultural significance.

Notwithstanding Clinton’s incessant homilies on the necessity for ethnic harmony, the policy pursued by the United States during the past decade has been based on the cynical manipulation of ethnic and communal differences, in which the racist stereotyping of the Serbs has played a pivotal part. The net result of American “humanitarian” intervention has been, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives and untold material devastation, the promotion of ethnic hatred as

the axis of human and political relations.

To cover up this central fact, the American media is reporting the flight of Serb civilians in a far different fashion than it portrayed the mass exodus of Albanian Kosovars, which began after NATO launched its air war ten weeks ago. Albanians who fled Kosovo because of atrocities by Serb nationalists and fear of NATO bombing were portrayed as the victims of genocide. Serbs who flee now are supposedly leaving “voluntarily,” or because they fear “retribution” from justifiably outraged Albanians.

Instead of the saturation coverage given the earlier Albanian flight, the removal of the Serb population—an estimated 50,000 have already left their homes—is receiving relatively little attention. The focus instead is on reports of mass graves of Albanian victims killed by Serb nationalists, to give the impression that all Serbs are guilty and thereby justify ethnic cleansing in reverse.

While atrocities were certainly committed by the Serb nationalists, especially during the first two weeks of the NATO air war, the reported discovery of mass graves by NATO and KLA forces cannot be accepted uncritically. The media automatically assumes that the victims were civilians, rather than KLA guerrillas, and no proof is offered as to who was responsible for the killing. Nor is it possible to arrive at an unbiased determination under conditions in which the reported grave sites are in the hands of the KLA.

The evidence so far tends to refute the hysterical claims of genocide which were the initial pretext for the US-NATO war. In the half of Kosovo so far occupied by NATO, the graves of several hundred people have been discovered, compared to the claims by US officials of 100,000 to 225,000 missing Kosovar Albanian men.



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