

# US places a \$5 million bounty on Milosevic

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The US State Department announced Thursday that the American government would pay a reward of up to \$5 million for assistance in arresting Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and other Serb leaders in Yugoslavia and Bosnia.

State Department spokesman James Rubin made the announcement, proffering the reward to "those who provide information that leads to the transfer of indicted war criminals" to the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, at The Hague. Rubin declared in response to one reporter's question that the United States was not looking for "bounty hunters," although that is exactly what the posting of a reward means.

Rubin said that the reward "applies to persons indicted by the tribunal or who may be indicted in the future for war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia." This means that, in addition to Milosevic and four other Yugoslav political and military leaders indicted by the tribunal last month, the reward is also being offered for two dozen people, mainly Serbs, indicted for actions in the civil war in Bosnia, including the civilian and military leaders of the Bosnian Serbs during the war, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic.

Despite the references to "information," it is of course no secret to American and NATO military and intelligence officials where Milosevic is. Besides their own spies and satellite surveillance, Serb television broadcasts regular reports on the Yugoslav president, who has attended several ground-breaking ceremonies in recent days on rebuilding projects.

The bounty serves several purposes. At the most elementary level, it is a bribe to any Serb general, police chief or freelance kidnapper who wants to make \$5 million and receive protection from the US and NATO. While the reward announcement referred to Milosevic's "transfer" to The Hague, it did not indicate the desired condition of the Yugoslav president at the

time, i.e., whether Milosevic was wanted dead or alive.

Rubin did not deal with this issue specifically, simply stating that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would make the final decision "depending on the information and the target ... what particular information yields what particular amount of reward."

Significantly, however, American press reports linked the bounty on Milosevic to a similar reward of \$5 million placed on Osama bin Laden, the Saudi construction millionaire and Islamic fundamentalist who was built up as the newest bogeyman of "international terrorism" after the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The US cruise missile strikes last August at a training camp allegedly run by bin Laden in Afghanistan were an open attempt to kill the fugitive Saudi, and since then congressional Democrats and Republicans have called for the relaxation of the legal prohibition on government-sponsored assassinations.

Clearly no tears will be shed in Washington if the result of the bounty is the murder of the Yugoslav president by an ambitious military officer or political enemy who wishes to ingratiate himself to the United States. The entire policy of the Clinton administration in the Balkans requires the removal of Milosevic and the installation of a direct US-NATO stooge in Belgrade as soon as possible.

The posting of a bounty serves an ideological and propaganda function as well. It is one more attempt to conceal the political motives behind the US-NATO assault on Yugoslavia, by presenting it as a police action against a wanted criminal, rather than an act of military aggression against a sovereign state.

This pretense is reinforced by the dispatch of FBI agents to Kosovo. More than 50 forensics technicians and other investigators are in the province, and FBI Director Louis Freeh declared that Kosovo was "one of the largest crime scenes in history."

The methods employed by the United States in the Balkans are fundamentally reckless and lawless. The air war against Yugoslavia was launched in defiance of international law and without even the fig leaf of United Nations sanction which has been employed in the long-running bombing and blockade of Iraq.



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