

What does US sanction for the execution of Abdullah Ocalan say about its "humanitarian" aims in the Balkans?

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The United States has distinguished itself from its European allies by not condemning the death sentence against Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan handed down June 29 by a Turkish court. While expressing “concern” over the sentence and some aspects of the show trial of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) chairman, Washington has emphasized its agreement with Ankara that Ocalan is a dangerous terrorist, and indicated that it will not stand in the way of his hanging.

Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit last week praised the US, comparing its stand favorably to that of the European powers. “They (the US) have shown a far more understanding attitude than our European allies,” he said.

Neither the Europeans nor the Americans have clean hands when it comes to the capture and trial of Ocalan. They are all complicit in the international manhunt that ended with Ocalan's illegal abduction from Nairobi last February by Turkish secret police. One European government after another refused to grant the Kurdish leader asylum after he was expelled from Syria by President Assad in October of 1998. They all knew that the military-dominated Turkish regime would stop at nothing to capture its chief nemesis, and that any trial would be a mere formality, with a guilty verdict and death sentence certain to follow.

Their complicity renders their statements of moral dissent in the wake of the June 29 verdict less than compelling. Nevertheless, for their own geo-political and domestic reasons, the governments of the European Union would prefer to see Ankara accept Ocalan's offer of collaboration with the Turkish state and put aside the court's sentence.

The US, on the other hand, does not even bother to make a pretense of moral scruples when it comes to the state murder of a man who, whatever one may think of his

politics and tactics, is seen by millions of Kurds as the leading partisan in a protracted struggle for national recognition and basic democratic rights. Washington has admitted to playing a key role in organizing the kidnapping of Ocalan from the Greek embassy in Nairobi. It is, moreover, well known that the Clinton administration pressured Syria to expel Ocalan in the first place, and then oversaw the manhunt that ended with his capture. In the process Washington trashed the democratic principle of political asylum and provided yet another example of the gangland methods that underlie its lofty rhetoric.

In the seizure of Ocalan—which preceded by barely a month the US-NATO war waged ostensibly for “human rights” and against “ethnic cleansing”—the Europeans played second fiddle; it was Washington that called the tune.

The combination of venom and hypocrisy that characterizes the US position was summed up in an editorial published July 1 by the *Washington Post*, which often serves as an unofficial mouthpiece for the State Department. Entitled “A Tough Choice for Turkey,” the editorial begins by mulling over the possible benefits of accepting Ocalan's courtroom offer to “serve the Turkish state.” Commutation of his death sentence might, the *Post* suggests, provide an opportunity “to tame militant Kurdish nationalism.”

On the other hand, the editorial continues, no reasonable person could fault the Turks for hesitating to forego the hangman's option. “Give the Turks full marks even for weighing” commutation for “a man and a movement undoubtedly responsible for grave political and personal offenses,” the *Post* declares.

Next comes a description of the Turkish judicial and political process—notorious around the world for its

brutality and contempt for democratic rights—that attains a level of cynicism remarkable even for the American press: “The Turkish appeals process—through courts, parliament and president—builds in time and political space to provide for a measured national judgment on a fundamental issue. It lets the political society take part in a judicial decision.” (The Solons of the *Washington Post* obviously exclude, along with the Turkish military and political establishment, the 4.5 million Kurds in Turkey from the category of “political society.”)

The concluding paragraph contains language carefully crafted to uphold the position of the Turkish regime, which denies the existence of a distinct Kurdish nationality. “The first requirement is to avoid violence directed either by or at the minority of *Kurdish Turks* who belong to Mr. Ocalan's party. Next must come a dialogue—the United States supports it—between the *two groups of Turks*.” (Emphasis added)

In light of this glowing description of the Turkish political system, it is useful to recall the US State Department's own evaluation of Ankara's record on human rights. The *Report on Human Rights Practices in Turkey* issued by the State Department in January 1997 noted that a state of emergency has existed in the nine southeastern provinces with a Kurdish majority population since 1984, and acknowledged that the Turkish government “has long denied its Kurdish population, located largely in the southeast, basic cultural and linguistic rights. As part of its fight against the PKK, the Government forcibly displaced large numbers of noncombatants, tortured civilians, and abridged freedom of expression.”

The report estimates that the Turkish military has “depopulated” [the State Department's own term] 2,600 to 3,000 villages and hamlets, and “forcibly evacuated” 560,000 Kurds.

No American or NATO spokesman claimed that the Serb military was guilty of anything approaching this level of “ethnic cleansing” prior to the initiation of the air war last March. Whatever attacks Serbia carried out prior to March 24 against Kosovan Albanian civilians in the course of its war with the Kosovo Liberation Army, they appear to have been on a far smaller scale than the assault on Kurd civilians carried out by Washington's NATO ally, Turkey.

What does the Clinton administration's support for the abduction and likely execution of Kurdish leader Ocalan, and its indulgence toward Turkey's repression of Kurdish national rights, say about its official rationale for the war

against Serbia?

On June 2, speaking at the US Air Force Academy commencement, Clinton described the situation in Kosovo as “an effort by a political leader to systematically destroy or displace an entire people because of their ethnicity and their religious faith; an effort to erase the culture and history and presence of a people from their land.”

Obviously, the very same words could be used to sum up the policy of Turkey toward the Kurds.

On April 15, speaking in San Francisco before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Clinton said: “Finally, we must remember the principle we and our allies have been fighting for in the Balkans is the principle of multi-ethnic, tolerant, inclusive democracy.” As, presumably, is practiced by the NATO combatant, Turkey!

Needless to say, none of the gentlemen of the press rose up to challenge Clinton's absurd claims and point out the glaring contradictions in his justification for the Balkan War. Those who plot American imperialist policy count on the duplicity and servility of the media, and they have not been disappointed.

Once, however, one is familiar with the facts, it does not require an extraordinary degree of insight to perceive that US declamations about human rights and multi-ethnic tolerance are mere window dressing for the ruthless pursuit of imperialist interests around the world. Washington allies itself with Kosovan nationalism and goes to war with Serbia because it considers the Yugoslav state to be an obstacle to the realization of its strategic interests in Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. It supports the murderous regime in Turkey and sanctions its suppression of Kurdish rights because the Turkish state serves US aims.



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