

KLA given official police function in Kosovo

Julie Hyland
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The transformation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) into a "protection corps" was completed on Monday, after a series of delays. The NATO-brokered deal makes a mockery of the claim that the US-led intervention into the province was aimed at preserving a "multi-ethnic" Kosovo.

Under a deadline set by the United Nations Security Council, the KLA should have disbanded on September 19. But negotiations between Lieutenant General Michael Jackson, the commander of NATO's KFOR troops in Kosovo, and the KLA leaders failed to reach agreement over the weekend. A resolution was found only after disbandment was postponed for 48 hours to enable NATO Supreme Commander General Wesley Clark to fly into Kosovo to continue the talks.

KLA political leader Hashim Thaqi, UN special representative Bernard Kouchner, KLA chief of staff General Agim Ceku and Lieutenant General Jackson signed the final accord on Monday evening. Under its terms, the KLA will become a 5,000-strong Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), functioning under the operational control of KFOR.

In a written statement issued on behalf of the US, Germany, France, Britain and Italy, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said that the new "civilian force" would make a "useful contribution to the restoration of peace and security" in Kosovo. Outgoing NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana claimed that it meant the "KLA has ceased to exist as a structured paramilitary organisation".

KFOR's own statement on the new KPC force was more circumspect. "UCK [KLA] personnel will cease wearing uniforms and UCK insignia from midnight on 21 September 1999," it stated. This is all the final agreement does ensure. The KPC is specifically directed at the recruitment of former KLA paramilitaries, who will now appear on NATO's payroll. KLA chief Ceku—a former leading figure in the

Croatian military notorious for his role in organising the ethnic cleansing of Serbs from the Krajina during the Bosnian War—will take over as commander of the new corps. Even the KPC's new emblem bears the same combination of black, red and gold as the KLA's insignia.

Officially, the KPC is charged with "reconstruction and emergency relief work," but a major sticking point in negotiations was the number of arms that the new corps would be able to control. The KLA had argued against NATO plans to limit the new force to 200 sidearms. The final agreement set aside an additional unspecified "number of weapons" that corps members would be able to retain for "personal protection". Whilst NATO claims the KLA had handed in 10,000 weapons, many reporters say many of those received at the collection centres were either in very poor condition or were virtual antiques. NATO's original suggestion for the new formation to be named the Kosovo Corps was also amended to incorporate the word Protection.

Russia and Yugoslavia attacked the move. A statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry said that the accord "contradicts the letter and spirit of UN Security Council resolution 1244 under which the KLA and other armed groups of Kosovo Albanians should have disarmed". Yugoslavia's Tanjug state news agency said the deal meant that thousands of ethnic Albanian terrorists would become "mercenaries" of world organisations. A statement from the Justice Ministry said it meant a continuation of "the exodus of Serbs from Kosovo and the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia". On Wednesday evening, Serb leaders in Kosovo said they had quit the highest body advising the province's UN administration in protest at the composition of the new force. "This is an institution which is not Kosovar. It is Albanian and does not have the function of creating a multi-ethnic Kosovo," Momcilo Trajkovic, leader of the Serbian

Resistance Movement, said.

About 200,000 Serbs and other non-Albanians have left Kosovo in the last three months, in the face of rising intimidation by the KLA. Earlier this month, a joint report issued by the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) revealed continuing violence and discrimination against Serbs and gypsies. A week prior to the report, a series of armed attacks on Serbs were carried out in northern Kosovo; Serb villages in the east were mortared, and a series of killings, shootings and kidnappings took place. Serbs are unable to receive hospital treatment and gain employment, which is fuelling the exodus.

Throughout the bombardment of Serbia and Kosovo, NATO worked in concert with the KLA. NATO's peacekeeping forces have functioned in a similar manner. The major imperialist powers judge that their interests are best served through the de-facto partition of the province into ethnic cantons. Their point of difference has been that NATO should function as the main military power in the area, and opposition to the KLA's goal of a "greater Albania".

However, with nearly 50,000 NATO troops in Kosovo and 30,000 in Bosnia, the alliance's organisational strength is under strain—especially as it undertakes new ventures in East Timor. Discussions have already begun on reducing its Balkans commitment by one-third and merging the Kosovan and Bosnian operations. For NATO, the establishment of the KPC is aimed at boosting its own position in the region. However, KLA leaders have made clear that they see the KPC as the nucleus of the future army of an independent Kosovo. Welcoming the decision, Hysen Geci, senior KLA logistics officer, said that "the whole process is going in the right direction.... I see the Kosovo Protection Corps as a core of a Kosovo military force in future".



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