

Clinton in Kosovo: rhetoric versus reality

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27 November 1999

Bill Clinton's November 23 visit to Kosovo was staged as a celebration of US military might in the service of Washington's purportedly humanitarian world mission. It took place, however, against a backdrop of mounting evidence that the claims of Serb ethnic genocide against Kosovan Albanians, used to mobilize public opinion behind last spring's 78-day bombardment of Yugoslavia, were vastly exaggerated. (See *World Socialist Web Site* articles: "Investigations belie NATO claims of 'ethnic genocide' in Kosovo," 9 November 1999, and "Killings of Kosovans continue under NATO occupation at pre-war rate," 16 November 1999)

Social and political conditions in NATO-occupied Kosovo, five months after the end of the war, further discredit the justifications given by the US and its European allies for their military intervention. Kosovo remains a devastated land. As the Balkan winter sets in, hundreds of thousands of residents lack the most rudimentary necessities—shelter, water, sanitation, electricity, employment. Even the UN chief administrator in Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, has felt compelled to publicly decry the refusal of the US and its partners in the war to provide the minimal financial aid needed to stave off a new humanitarian disaster.

Under the auspices of NATO troops and UN officials, the American-backed Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) has conducted its own campaign of ethnic cleansing, driving well over 100,000 Serbs, Roma and other minorities out of the province. For all the talk of human rights, numerous commentators describe a proliferation of mafia activity, crime and political repression under the KLA's self-proclaimed provisional government.

The *New York Times*, for example, published an article on November 22 by its Kosovo correspondent Steven Erlanger entitled "Chaos and Intolerance Prevailing in Kosovo Despite UN's Efforts." The article presents a picture of social devastation, wanton criminality and widespread repression, directed not only against the Serbs and other minorities, but also against ethnic Albanians who run afoul of the KLA and its US-backed leaders, Hashim Thaci and General Agim Ceku.

Erlanger writes: "The burning of Serbs' homes takes place almost daily in an organized fashion, increasing the pressure on the Serbian minority to flee the province or ghettoize itself in enclaves, surrounded by hostile Albanians who remember their own years of repression."

He cites a report issued earlier this month by the United Nations special representative on human rights in the former Yugoslavia, Jiri Dienstbier, who said that "the spring ethnic cleansing of ethnic Albanians accompanied by murders, torture, looting and burning has been replaced by the fall ethnic cleansing of Serbs, Romas, Bosnians and other non-Albanians accompanied by the same atrocities."

Erlanger provides examples of anti-Serb agitation by the Kosovo Protection Corps, the new organization formed with the official sanction of NATO and the UN administration from the "supposedly disbanded" KLA. He cites senior UN and military officials who say that two detention camps were discovered on the grounds of the Kosovo Protection Corps, which is supposed to have no police functions, and that the camps held both Albanians and Serbs, "some of whom bore evidence of beatings."

These same officials, according to Erlanger, note the killings of at least two local leaders of the party of Ibrahim Rugova, an Albanian Kosovar nationalist who is a political rival of Thaci.

The day after Clinton's appearance in Kosovo the *Washington Post* carried an article headlined "Kosovo Rebels Make Own Laws" which describes a KLA campaign of forced evictions of Albanians as well as Serbs. The article claims "the evictions are part of what UN police officers and NATO officials in four of Kosovo's major urban centers describe as growing evidence of government-organized illegal activities by former rebel fighters in Kosovo." It continues: "former KLA fighters have been organized into groups that intimidate Serbs and ethnic Albanians alike to appropriate apartments, collect fees or gain access to rent money from the flats."

Such actions on the part of the KLA can not come as a surprise to American officials, who only two years ago characterized the organization as a terrorist group. When the US decided last year to openly throw its support behind the KLA it was well aware of the separatist insurgents' intolerance of Serbs and other minorities, its declared aim of uniting Kosovo and parts of Macedonia with Albania to form a "Greater Albania," and its links to Albanian mafia elements and their drug-smuggling activities. When it came to ethnic chauvinism, there was no essential difference between the Serb nationalism of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and the Albanian nationalism of the KLA. Nor was there any reason to believe that, once in power, the KLA would be any less ruthless

than the Serb forces it had displaced.

Against this political backdrop, Clinton's declamations in Kosovo about ethnic tolerance and democracy became not only fatuous, but somewhat surreal. That Washington's avowed devotion to human rights is utterly hypocritical—an expediency which it applies to countries considered obstacles to US global aims and forgets when it comes to friendly regimes—was underscored by the fact that Clinton had just completed a five-day state visit to Turkey. Ankara, which is notorious for its repressive policies, has waged a 15-year-long war against the Kurds in southeastern Turkey, resulting in tens of thousands of Kurd fatalities and the expulsion of more than a million civilians from their homes. This, however, did not prevent Clinton from demonstratively asserting US support for the Turkish regime.

Much has been made of the icy silence from ethnic Albanians assembled to hear Clinton speak in the town of Urosevac to the US president's call for Albanians to forgive the Serbs. Given Washington's role in demonizing the Serb population and propelling the KLA to power, however, this could not have come as a surprise. If, indeed, there were any members of the audience inclined toward reconciliation, they ran the risk of being singled out for reprisals by the KLA should they dare to openly express such a view.

In his speech to US troops at the Bondsteel military base in Kosovo, Clinton reiterated the official American line as follows: "This was a war caused by a man's determination to drive a whole people out of a country because of their ethnic and religious background." Unfortunately for the White House, the glaring discrepancy between American propaganda about the level of Serb killings and the actual number of Albanian fatalities, and the ugly reality of the American protectorate established in the aftermath of the war, discredit this banal and self-serving explanation. Inevitably the question is raised: what were the real causes and motives underlying the US-led assault on Serbia?

The *World Socialist Web Site* has published a great deal of material on this issue, most notably our May 24, 1999 statement entitled *Why is NATO at war with Yugoslavia? World power, oil and gold*. Suffice it to point out here that the eruption of ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia cannot be attributed simply, or even primarily, to the machinations of Milosevic. His Serb chauvinist policies are essentially no different than the chauvinist policies of his nationalist counterparts in the former Yugoslav republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, who rule with the full support of the United States.

Slovenia's Kucan, Croatia's Tudjman, Bosnia's Izetbegovic and Serbia's Milosevic were all brought forward as a result of the intervention of the Western banks and governments, which from the 1980s on imposed an economic regime of austerity and denationalization of industry and finance that exacerbated centrifugal tendencies within the multiethnic Yugoslav

federation. Beginning in 1991, first Germany and then the United States fostered the dismemberment of the federation, championing the secession of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, despite warnings from historians and others familiar with the Balkans that the breakup of Yugoslavia would inevitably lead to violent ethnic upheavals.

All of the great powers were motivated by the desire to rip up what remained of the old state-run economy and impose capitalist market relations as quickly as possible. At the same time, the US, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, etc. had their own designs on the markets and resources of Yugoslavia, the Balkans as a whole, and neighboring regions.

In the five months since the end of the Kosovo War, reports have begun to appear with increasing frequency in the bourgeois press pointing to some of the economic and geopolitical aims of US imperialism that figured centrally in its decision to go to war with Serbia. The Russian invasion of Chechnya in the Caucasus and the growing tensions between Washington and Moscow have brought these issues to the fore.

They center on the struggle for domination of the oil-rich regions bordering the Caspian Sea—the Caucasus and the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. American efforts to achieve supremacy over this area were very much at the core of Clinton's visit to Turkey, a country whose geography—forming a land bridge between the Balkans and Transcaucasia—makes it a strategic asset for world powers seeking to exploit the vast untapped reserves of oil and gas in the Caspian region.

The most significant event of Clinton's stay in Turkey was the signing of agreements between Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in support of US-backed plans to build an oil pipeline from the Azeri capital of Baku to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, and a second pipeline to deliver natural gas across the Caspian Sea from Turkmenistan to Turkey. Washington has been working feverishly for the past several years to bring these projects to fruition, making no secret of its opposition to alternative, cheaper and more direct routes that would flow through either Iran or Russia.

American spokesmen have openly stated that the US views its pipeline proposals as crucial to an overall strategy of weakening the position of Russia and bringing the former Soviet Republics in Transcaucasia and Central Asia into Washington's sphere of influence. The war against Moscow's chief ally in the Balkans, Serbia, as well as America's concentration on Turkey are part and parcel of this strategic thrust by US imperialism into the vital Caspian region.



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