

Kosovo prime minister charged with war crimes

US-backed ex-militia leader on trial

Paul Mitchell
16 March 2005

Kosovo's former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj is on trial at the United Nations tribunal at The Hague, charged with 37 counts of war crimes. He faces 17 counts of crimes against humanity for murder, rape, persecution, inhumane acts, unlawful detention, deportation or forcible transfer of civilians and 20 counts of violations of the laws or customs of war for cruel treatment, murder and rape.

Haradinaj resigned his post as prime minister on Tuesday March 8, one day before he surrendered to the Hague tribunal.

The charges relate to the period in 1998-1999 when he was a senior commander in the ethnic Albanian Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) and became what the *Observer* described as "the key US military and intelligence asset in Kosovo during the civil war and NATO bombing campaign that followed." The indictment also names two of his former subordinates, Idriz Balaj and Lahi Brahimaj.

Amongst many charges, the tribunal alleges that Haradinaj and his associates were engaged in a "joint criminal enterprise" that came into existence on or before April 1998 with the purpose of consolidating KLA control over its operational zone of Dukagjin. It states that KLA forces under Haradinaj's command and control, including the "Black Eagles" under Balaj's direct command, "harassed, beat or otherwise drove Serbian civilian and Roma/Egyptian civilians out of these villages, and killed those civilians that remained behind or had refused to abandon their homes...as well as Albanian civilians perceived as collaborators."

The indictment of Haradinaj paints a devastating picture of systematic ethnic cleansing of Serbs by the KLA in the period before the launching of NATO's war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999. The pretext the United States and the European imperialist powers used to justify that war was that Serbian forces aligned with the regime of Slobodan Milosevic were carrying out a unilateral campaign of ethnic cleansing.

There is now a growing body of evidence proving that Washington actively encouraged inter-ethnic violence, using its stooges in the KLA, as part of a deliberate strategy of breaking up the Yugoslav republic into its constituent parts and so ensuring US hegemony within the Balkan region.

Haradinaj's rise from obscurity to power broker in Kosovo and now his indictment as a war criminal are a graphic illustration of this process. The charges against him raise the question of why

former and current officials in the US government have not been similarly indicted as the principal sponsors of his alleged crimes.

The origins of the Kosovo crisis lie in the economic breakdown of the former Yugoslavia that was fueled by IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment plans in the late 1980s and early 1990s. To divert social opposition to the destruction of jobs and living standards and to enhance their own positions, ex-Stalinist bureaucrats and nationalist demagogues in each of the former Yugoslav republics promoted nationalist sentiments and vied for support from the various imperialist powers. Militant Serbian and Albanian nationalism emerged as two sides of this process of social and economic disintegration.

Similar developments took place throughout eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as the Stalinist regimes collapsed and former bureaucrats scrambled to create a power base for themselves by whipping up nationalism.

Haradinaj emigrated in 1989 to Switzerland, working there as a security guard and nightclub bouncer. This was the same year that Ibrahim Rugova formed the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), which argued that Kosovan independence and the restoration of capitalism could be achieved through passive resistance to the Yugoslav administration and the creation of "parallel institutions."

Following reunification with the east in 1991, Germany decided its interests in the Balkans could best be furthered by promoting the secession of relatively prosperous Slovenia from Yugoslavia, followed by the secession of Croatia. The US, after initially opposing the breakup of Yugoslavia, changed its position, concluding that the Serbian ruling elite's determination to preserve a unitary state constituted a barrier to its own influence in the region.

Haradinaj returned to Kosovo in early 1998, just as the KLA carried out a series of military attacks aimed at destabilising Kosovo and provoking Western intervention. This sparked a major counter-insurgency operation by the Yugoslav security force that was in turn used by the US to justify its policy of direct military intervention.

Whereas the CIA had previously denounced the KLA as a small gang of drug-runners and terrorists, Western governments and media now portrayed it as a liberation movement fighting to free ethnic Albanians in Kosovo from the grip of Milosevic. In the propaganda barrage by the international press, Milosevic and

Serbian nationalism were equated with evil, while the KLA and its advocacy of Greater Albanian nationalism were treated with benign tolerance.

This change was necessary to clear the way for the training and arming of the KLA as a US proxy force on the ground to complement a NATO campaign of aerial bombardment. All suggestions of criminality and corruption were ignored or suppressed, and claims by the Serbian authorities that the KLA was conducting a campaign of terror were dismissed.

President Clinton's State Department spokesman James Rubin stated, "We simply don't have information to substantiate allegations that there was a KLA leadership-directed program of assassinations or executions" and that there was no "credible evidence" that the KLA was involved in drug trafficking. This lie was exposed in confidential NATO minutes acknowledging that the KLA was "the main initiator of the violence." Privately, US Ambassador William Walker had called its actions a "deliberate campaign of provocation."

Talks were convened at Rambouillet, France, in February 1999, where the US insisted that KLA leader Hashim Thaci lead the Kosovar Albanian negotiating team. They presented an ultimatum that the Serbian government could not possibly accept, because it demanded not just a NATO occupation of Kosovo, but unrestricted military access to the whole of Serbia.

In this way, the path was cleared for the US to begin a war against Serbia that had been prepared with the aid of CIA dirty tricks and political maneuvering with the KLA terrorists.

After the cessation of NATO bombing, the Western powers began to put together an administration under their control, which allotted key positions to the KLA and assembled its fighters in a reserve army—the Kosovo Protection Force. The KLA took advantage of its military dominance to impose its rule in the majority of the province's municipalities, taking over state enterprises and the running of public services, including hospitals and schools.

In the subsequent period, the Kosovan separatists have continued their campaign for independence by whipping up ethnic conflict. In March of last year, communal violence orchestrated by former KLA leaders resulted in the deaths of 19 people, and some 4,000 people, mainly Serbs, were forced to flee. The KLA has also been responsible for efforts to destabilise neighbouring Montenegro through its sister organisations in the Presevo Valley.

Following elections last October, Haradinaj was overwhelmingly endorsed by Kosovo's assembly as prime minister, despite having been questioned twice by investigators for the War Crimes tribunal at The Hague and his party only placing third in the poll.

Events in Kosovo have confirmed the reactionary character of the claim made by numerous former lefts and radicals that there was a progressive character to Bosnian and Kosovan nationalism because they were directed against an oppressive regional power in Serbia. It was on this basis that many lined up to support Western intervention as necessary to prevent ethnic genocide.

The *World Socialist Web Site* took a diametrically opposed stand to this glorification of contending national separatist tendencies. In an article published on June 14, 1999, "After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War," WSWS editor-in-chief

David North wrote:

"Seeking to evade the difficult task of combating all forms of chauvinism—whether based on language, religion or ethnicity—and effecting the unity of all sections of the working class within countries with heterogeneous populations, innumerable petty-bourgeois tendencies have chosen instead to base themselves on one or another national community. The cynical and largely ignorant use of Marxist jargon does not change the fact that the essential content of their policy has been the elevation of national or ethnic identity above class consciousness and, flowing from this, the subordination of the objective interests of the working class to the political and financial interests of the national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

"There is reason to believe that the high tide of the nationalist resurgence may have already been reached. Indeed, the impact of the events in Yugoslavia must contribute to undermining the prestige of nationalism and the political credibility of the demand for self-determination. The horrors of the inter-communal conflicts that have ravaged the Balkans have exposed the reactionary implications of nationalism. What has been achieved by the dissolution of Yugoslavia? The sordid machinations of Milosevic in Serbia, Tudjman in Croatia, Kucan in Slovenia and Izetbegovic in Bosnia have cost the lives of tens of thousands, and for what? The entire economic and cultural level of the Balkans has been lowered immeasurably. 'Independent' Bosnia is a miserable imperialist protectorate. 'Independent' Croatia lives off whatever crumbs the imperialists are willing to throw it. Serbia has been devastated. And as for Kosovo, it has been divided into several zones of occupation. Its 'national liberation movement,' the KLA, has no future except as the designated gendarmerie of the United States. All of the national and religious communities have been victimized by the civil wars. All the events surrounding the dissolution of Yugoslavia stand as a bitter indictment of nationalism."



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