

Seven years after US-led war on Yugoslavia

Deadlocks continue at Kosovo final status talks

Part Two

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1 April 2006

This is the conclusion of a two-part article on Kosovo. Part One was published on March 31.

The attitude taken by the US and EU toward ethnic cleansing depends on who is conducting it and whether it furthers their strategic interests at the time. While Serbia has been threatened with economic sanctions, the representatives of the US and EU have extended a welcoming hand to the war criminals of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army).

As part of the post-conflict arrangements in 1999, the KLA was officially disbanded. However, the KLA has remained a force in the land ever since and this in no small part due to the connections it had established with its powerful backers, particularly the US.

Head of the negotiating team for the Kosovo Albanians was to have been President Ibrahim Rugova. The latter, and his party, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), were historically associated with a non-violent campaign for secession. In every provisional election since 1999, it has been the main secessionist party, far outpolling the two political offshoots of the KLA—the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Alliance for the Future Kosovo (AAK).

Since Rugova's death from lung cancer in January, the main beneficiary has been the KLA. No sooner had the status talks begun, than former KLA commander in chief Agim Ceku was appointed prime minister. The AAK, a junior partner in a coalition government with the LDK, installed Ceku, at the expense of AAK deputy chairman Bajram Kosumi, who had been a KLA supporter but not an active combatant.

Reuters referred to the external pressure behind the decision: "Kosumi has been criticised for ineptness by other members of Kosovo's ruling ethnic Albanian coalition and Western mentor states shepherding the UN-run Serbian province through talks that could lead to its independence later this year.... He [Ceku] is seen as a political heavyweight more in the mould of Kosumi's predecessor Ramush Haradinaj, another former guerilla commander who resigned a year ago to stand trial at the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague."

Ceku served in the Croatian army and was a key planner in Operation Storm, a military offensive in the Krajina region of Croatia in 1995 that resulted in the expulsion of some 150,000 Serbs, the largest single act of ethnic cleansing to date in the Balkans. The incident became so notorious that even The Hague tribunal indicted former Croatian general Ante Gotovina for his part in this war crime. But while the latter has been in custody awaiting trial, Ceku has enjoyed complete immunity.

Ceku was made head of the KLA as it was reconfigured by the US to act as proxy land army for the NATO aerial bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999. After the conflict, he was appointed head of the newly-created Kosovo Protection Corp (KPC), effectively an embryonic national army,

supported and supplied by the UN. Over the past seven years KPC officers have been involved in attacks on Serb civilians. Belgrade has an Interpol arrest warrant for war crimes carried out by Ceku. He was apprehended twice, in Hungary and Slovenia, but released after the intervention of EU and UN diplomats.

Ceku is the second former KLA commander to have assumed the position of prime minister since 1999. The first, Ramush Haradinaj, resigned in March 2005 in order to stand trial for war crimes in The Hague. He faces 37 counts of murder, rape, persecution, inhumane acts and unlawful detention in Kosovo during 1998. Nevertheless, he has been permitted into the province and to participate in politics while awaiting trial.

According to Tim Juddah, writing in *The Observer*: "The move to lift the ban on politics for Haradinaj has been spearheaded by the UN mission in Kosovo and supported by diplomats there.... What is clear is that since his release the UN and diplomats in Kosovo have courted Haradinaj in a way unprecedented for a man indicted for murder and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. On 26 September, for example, a huge party was held at Pristina's Hotel Grand to celebrate the wedding of Haradinaj's brother. Among the guests were Larry Rossin, the deputy head of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), plus other senior officials and diplomats."

The Kosovo separatists have positioned themselves as middlemen, offering up the province's resources for exploitation by major transnationals. Kosovo has the second largest coal reserves in Europe and rich deposits of lead, zinc, gold, silver and petroleum. Ethem Ceku, Agim's cousin and member of the AAK, is energy and mining minister.

A brochure aimed at attracting foreign investment states: "A major objective of the donor agencies and the Provisional Institutions of Self Government of Kosovo (PISG) is the development of Kosovo's private sector economy. Accordingly, UNMIK and the PISG have adopted a set of laws to ensure an investor friendly environment including: regulations on foreign direct investment; repatriation of capital; the purchase of real estates; the registration of businesses and land; and the establishment of 99-year leaseholds for land formerly used by SOEs."

Last November, the UN-administered Kosovo Trust Agency sold the ferro-nickel plant Ferronikeli to the UK-based Alferon, which is part of the large Eurasian Natural Resources Group. The Trepca mining complex, once described by the *New York Times* as one of the biggest pieces of real estate in the Balkans, valued at \$5 billion, has been turned over to an international consortium, ITT Kosovo Ltd, a joint venture between US, French and Swedish companies.

Wealthy elements within the Kosovo Albanian émigré community are

seeking Washington's backing through organisations like Alliance for a New Kosovo. According to the *Financial Times*, one of the main figures behind this organisation, Behgjet Pacolli, is "possibly the world's richest Albanian". The newspaper reported: "Following a well-worn campaign trail, the Kosovo Albanians have put up a large pool of money, attracted big names among former US officials, brought in a big ticket think-tank and international lobbying company and marshaled their supporters in Congress."

Among those enlisted are Samuel Hoskinson, former deputy head of the US National Intelligence Council, and Frank Carlucci, former defence secretary and emeritus chairman of the Carlyle Group, a private investment firm close to the Bush administration. The article said: "Other former officials suggested the US might have to resort to an 'imposed settlement' if Serbia did not yield from its position of 'more autonomy, less than independence'".

Geographically, Kosovo lies at the centre of a critical pipeline route for transporting the largely untapped oil and gas resources of Central Asia to markets in the West. The traditional East-West route from the landlocked Caspian Sea has been via the Bosphorus Straits. However, this route has been increasingly unable to cope with demand. The question of "Bosphorus by-pass routes" is inextricably connected to the strategy championed by the US of building new pipelines that circumvent Russia and Iran.

The Balkan peninsula was earmarked for several pipelines but only the US-registered consortium AMBO (the acronym for the transit countries, Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia) has reached the construction stage. The 900-km pipeline is expected to carry 750,000 barrels per day once completed. Oil from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan will be shipped across the Black Sea to the port of Burgas in Bulgaria, where it will be pumped across the peninsula via Skopje, Macedonia to the Mediterranean port of Vlore, Albania. The consortium's CEO is Edward Ferguson, a former director of Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, the energy and defence contractor connected to the US administration.

The AMBO project has advanced in competition with the shorter and cheaper oil pipeline project from the same starting point in Burgas, Bulgaria to the Greek port of Alexandroupoulos on the Aegean Sea. The latter is associated with transporting Russian oil to Western markets and Greece's attempt to challenge Turkey as a major East-West energy node.

AMBO's development has proceeded hand in glove with its transit states becoming virtual NATO protectorates. Bulgaria, together with Rumania and several central European and Baltic states, was admitted into the alliance in 2004. Albania has participated in joint exercises with NATO and the latter has been involved in Macedonia.

One of the America's largest overseas military bases since Vietnam, Camp Bondsteel, was built on 1000 acres of farmland seized in the US military sector of south east Kosovo. The heavily fortified complex with bomb shelters and guard towers has an ammunition site and heliport that can accommodate up to 55 Apache helicopters. It is located near the Macedonian border on the Kacanik pass way to the country's capital, Skopje.

The AMBO project was delayed while efforts were concentrated on completing the Anglo-American BTC (Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan) pipeline, one of the largest in the world. It carries Caspian oil from Azerbaijan through Georgia to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Since its completion last May, attention has returned to the Bosphorus by-pass route.

Kosovo's abundant resources and the Balkan pipeline routes are only a small part of a bigger picture. Even more is at stake in the wider inter-imperialist conflicts over the oil- and gas-rich regions further to the east in the Caspian Sea area and Central Asia. The vacuum left by the dissolution of the Soviet Union has led to a scramble for hegemony that contains the seeds of future wars.

US expansionism in the Balkans and Central Asia has been at the direct expense of Russia and China, but they feel unable to confront the US at this stage. Recent reports indicate that Russian and China have told the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice they would probably abstain on a UN resolution to grant independence to Kosovo.

However, in return, Moscow is pushing for concessions to its interests and is playing the card of Europe's reliance on its oil and gas supplies. In an interview for Russian TV on January 30, Russian President Vladimir Putin asked: "If people believe that Kosovo can be granted full independence, why then should we deny it to Abkhazia and South Ossetia?"

This was a reference to two secessionist movements in Georgia. Russia has troops stationed in Georgia and Armenia, which previously clashed with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Significantly, *EUobserver.com* described Putin's comments as a direct threat to the BTC pipeline and the European Union's strategy of breaking European dependence on Russian energy supplies.

The Russian-Ukrainian standoff in January, which led to shortfalls in gas deliveries further west, was a shock for the EU, which imports half its gas from Russia. The EU is currently trying to get Moscow to sign an agreement that would allow EU companies access to Russian pipelines in order to use them to buy oil and gas directly from Central Asia.

The *EUobserver.com* web site quoted a senior Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) diplomat, Bernard Fassier saying: "If there was a new conflict (in Nagorno-Karabakh) the first target would be the oil pipeline and oil terminals". It further stated: "The idea of Kosovan independence as a precedent for other separatist states is catching on in the South Caucasus, with damaging implications for EU energy interests."

This comment reflects fears in European capitals that if the aggressive stance of the US leads to renewed instability in the Caucasus, or to Russia strengthening its position in the region, it could endanger their access to oil and gas.

The European members of the Contact Group—Britain, France, Germany and Italy—have expressed no opposition to declaring Kosovo an independent state. The EU is also seeking to ensure that it is not excluded from a division of the spoils of US militarism. It recently endorsed a referendum on Montenegro's independence, due to take place this May. The mountainous republic of just 600,000 was the last to remain within any association with Serbia after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Once again the involvement of the major powers in the Balkans and Central Asian regions is stirring up ethnic tensions and threatening a continued cycle of splintering states under foreign tutelage. For the masses it means only further social misery and a downward spiral of culture, with all the backwardness of the past being dredged up.

The self-interested conflicts over Kosovo further expose the fraud that Western military interventions are ever conducted for "humanitarian" and "democratic" purposes. In 1999, the Clinton administration was able to enlist liberals and middle class radicals in building a constituency for a "moral" use of military force. But the "human rights" war launched by the Clinton White House and the "war against terrorism" initiated by the Bush administration four years later have the same underlying motivating forces. They represent stages in the policy of exploiting US military power to assert the dominance of American imperialism in geo-politically strategic regions of the globe.

Against all the liberals and former "lefts" who backed the onslaught on Serbia, in 1999 the *World Socialist Web Site* pointed to the relationship of the Balkans war to the world strategic ambitions of the US and the other NATO powers. In our Editorial Board statement, "Why is NATO at war with Yugoslavia? World power, oil and gold," we warned:

"The principal significance of Yugoslavia, at this critical juncture, is that it lies on the Western periphery of a massive swathe of territory into which the major world powers aim to expand. It is impossible for the US,

Germany, Japan, France, Britain and the other powers to simply look passively at the opening of this area. Unfolding is a struggle for access to the region and control over its raw materials, labor and markets that will far outstrip last century's 'scramble for Africa'".

The sordid horse-trading over the fate of Kosovo and the inflammation of new tensions across the region are further warnings that even the threat of a wider conflagration in Central Asia will not inhibit the US drive to establish its domination of Eurasia and control of critical energy supplies.

Concluded



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