

The “liberal” face of American imperialism

Patrick Martin
20 December 2010

The death of longtime US diplomat Richard Holbrooke December 13 has provoked an outpouring of praise from official spokesmen and apologists for American imperialism, and particularly from those who, like Holbrooke himself, came to prominence as advocates of US military intervention in the Yugoslav civil war of the 1990s.

In contrast to Vietnam, where Holbrooke first entered the service of American militarism, and the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US intervention in Bosnia in 1995 and then in Kosovo in 1999 were hailed by the representatives of American liberalism as wars that demonstrated the role of the United States as a “force for good.”

Last Wednesday, in the *Washington Post*, Strobe Talbott, the deputy secretary of state in the Clinton administration, hailed Holbrooke’s legacy, declaring that he came to “epitomize the very best of what a single American can do to improve a dangerous world.”

On Friday, *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen wrote that until “Richard Holbrooke appeared in the snake pit,” it seemed that the Bosnia war would go on and on. “Some things can’t be solved,” he continued, “This was one: until Holbrooke went for the Balkan jugular.”

Dismissing “pusillanimous paper-shufflers”—presumably those more reluctant to drop bombs on small countries and bully their rulers—Cohen declared: “this untimely death is a clarion call to America to set aside smallness in the name of values that can still inspire. Holbrooke was a fierce believer in the US capacity for good.”

On Saturday, the *Times* reported a private memorial service at Holbrooke’s Manhattan apartment that included, besides Bill and Hillary Clinton and Al Gore, media celebrities such as Charlie Rose of PBS and Christiane Amanpour of ABC, and actors Matt Dillon,

Mia Farrow and Alan Alda.

The praise for Holbrooke reached its peak in a five-minute video tribute Sunday morning on Amanpour’s ABC television interview program “This Week.” The piece was narrated by Amanpour and included footage shot in Bosnia during the civil war, where she was a CNN correspondent and advocate of US military intervention.

The segment portrayed Holbrooke as a sort of secular saint, the son of Jewish refugees who had devoted his efforts to stopping a second Holocaust from taking place in the Balkans.

The WSWS has already analyzed the career of Holbrooke in a previous commentary. (See “Richard Holbrooke: Long-time operative for US imperialism”.)

The attempt to use his death to revive illusions in the “humanitarian” role of American imperialism is a particularly foul effort to rewrite history. The Clinton administration’s professions about its noble goals in the former Yugoslavia were always a sham.

These pretenses were perhaps useful for deluding Manhattan liberals who wanted to be deluded, but only thinly disguised the imperialist appetites that drove all the outside powers that helped create the bloodbath, including Germany and Russia as well as the United States.

The Clinton administration actually *supported* the largest single act of ethnic cleansing, the expulsion of 250,000 Serbs from the Krajina region of Croatia in the summer of 1995. Holbrooke personally conveyed this support to Croatian President Franjo Tudjman.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has exhaustively analyzed the false analogies between the Nazi Holocaust and the crimes committed by nationalist militias on all sides in the civil wars that ravaged the former Yugoslavia from 1991 on, and exposed the real economic and strategic motives for the US intervention. (See the WSWS editorial board statement of May 24,

1999, “Why is NATO at war with Yugoslavia? World power, oil and gold”.)

But it is worth noting in this context that the death of Holbrooke coincided with the release of a report by the Council of Europe identifying the US-supported leader of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, as the head of a “mafia-like” Albanian organization that is responsible for trafficking in weapons, drugs and human organs throughout Eastern Europe.

Council of Europe human rights investigator Dick Marty presented his report to the 47 member states at a meeting in Paris Thursday. The document suggests that Thaci and the guerrilla organization he headed, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), took control of “most of the illicit criminal enterprises” conducted by Albanians around the time of the NATO bombing attacks that forced the withdrawal of Serbian troops from Kosovo.

The report declares, “In confidential reports spanning more than a decade, agencies dedicated to combating drug smuggling in at least five countries have named Hashim Thaci and other members of his Drenica group as having exerted violent control over the trade in heroin and other narcotics.”

Marty’s report largely confirms the suspicions voiced by Carla Del Ponte, former chief war crimes prosecutor at The Hague, that the KLA smuggled Serb captives across the border into Albania, where they were held at a secret prison near Tirana, the Albanian capital, while suitable purchasers were obtained for their kidneys.

The report continues: “As and when the transplant surgeons were confirmed to be in position to operate, the captives were brought out of the ‘safe house’ individually, summarily executed by a KLA gunman, and their corpses transported swiftly to the operating clinic.”

A separate transplant operation was conducted at a secret clinic near Pristina, the Kosovan capital, called Medicus, where doctors removed kidneys from desperate Russian, Moldovan, Kazakh and Turkish donors and transplanted them into wealthy recipients who paid up to €90,000 on the black market.

Referring to the United States and its European NATO allies, Marty writes, “The international actors chose to turn a blind eye to the war crimes of the KLA, placing a premium instead on achieving some degree of short-term stability.”

Richard Holbrooke played an instrumental role in the preparation of the US-led military onslaught that placed the KLA in power in Kosovo, visiting Belgrade to deliver a final US ultimatum to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic only days before the bombing of Serbia began.

Far from preventing a “second Holocaust” in the Balkans, the US intervention created the conditions for a repetition of the most hideous practices of Josef Mengele, the Nazi medical doctor who experimented on Jews at Auschwitz.



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