

US, Europe concealed organ trafficking by Kosovo Liberation Army

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The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) has been implicated in war crimes involving torture and the illicit trade in human organs, including those removed from Serb civilians taken captive and killed during and after NATO's 1999 war against Yugoslavia.

The current prime minister of Kosovo and former KLA commander, Hashim Thaci, is identified as the leading figure within a criminal network involved in drug trafficking as well as the trade in human organs. Thaci and other commanders within the "Drenica group" faction of the KLA exercised command control over detention facilities based in neighbouring Albania and determined the fate of those held captive.

A two-year inquiry conducted by the Council of Europe (CoE), the results of which were published earlier this month by the CoE rapporteur Dick Marty, provides details showing that the human organ trade has continued to the present day, with the KLA running Kosovo as a criminal fiefdom.

The CoE oversees the European Court on Human Rights.

The Medicus clinic in the Kosovan capital, Pristina, is the subject of criminal proceedings over the trade in human organs. It has been closed down by EULEX (the European Union rule of law mission), which took over aspects of law enforcement from UNMIK (the United Nations Mission in Kosovo) in 2008. A number of individuals, including doctors and a former health ministry official, have been charged with being part of an international criminal network. Health law in Kosovo forbids organ transplantation, but the health secretary granted the centre a licence.

The KLA brought people into Kosovo for the purpose of removing and selling their organs, European Union prosecutor Jonathan Ratel said in the indictment. Some victims came from countries such as Moldova, Turkey and Russia. They were promised up to US\$20,000 (€14,500), but the organ recipients were required to pay between US\$110,000 and US\$137,000 (€80,000 to €100,000).

In his report, Marty did not pull his punches with regard to the wealth of information long in the possession of Western intelligence services regarding Thaci's criminal activities. He cited records from five countries—Germany, Britain, Italy, Greece and the United States—showing that they all knew of the KLA's activities and helped conceal them.

Point 70 of the report states: "Thaci and these other 'Drenica Group' members are consistently named as 'key players' in the intelligence reports on Kosovo's mafia-like structures of organised

crime. I have examined these diverse, voluminous reports with consternation and a sense of moral outrage."

Other sources cited in the report include witness testimony from former KLA soldiers and auxiliaries involved in transporting detainees as well as from some of those held captive.

The CoE inquiry was undertaken to follow up allegations of the KLA's involvement in human organ trafficking that were first made public in early 2008. These were contained in the memoirs, entitled *The Hunt*, of Carla Del Ponte, the outgoing chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). She chose to make these revelations only after she was replaced as chief prosecutor and Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence was endorsed by the US and other European powers.

Del Ponte's claims centred on a suspected detention facility in Rripe, near Burrel in central Albania. Referred to as the "Yellow House," it was identified as a location where Serb civilians abducted from Kosovo were taken and killed and their organs removed for sale abroad.

One of the most damning aspects of Marty's report is its revelation that the ICTY and UNMIK, which conducted an initial investigation of the "Yellow House" in 2004 and found bloodstains in the main room, later destroyed the physical samples retrieved from the site. The report states, "We must permit ourselves to express astonishment that such a step was taken."

Large numbers of people listed as missing during and directly after the 1999 Kosovo conflict are still unaccounted for. There remain 1,869 missing persons, according to the International Red Cross. Two thirds of these are Kosovan Albanians. Of this total, 470 disappeared after NATO troops entered the province on June 12, 1999. Of these, 95 are Kosovan Albanians and 375 are non-Albanian, mainly Serbs.

At this time, the KLA, backed by NATO, was able to exercise control over a large amount of territory. The proportion of those who went missing after NATO entered Kosovo may, in fact, be even higher. The law on compensation for "martyrs" excludes those who died after the June 12, 1999, cut-off point.

A major reason for the lack of progress in tracing missing persons has been obstruction by the authorities in Kosovo and Albania. While Serbia has been obliged to cooperate with the ICTY in exhuming suspected sites of mass graves, the same pressure has not been exerted on the governments in Tirana and Pristina.

Albania has continued to refuse to cooperate with the investigations, even though it served as the launch pad for the KLA's terrorist attacks and was the site of all of its detention centres.

The report describes the claim by the government of Albania that no bodies of deceased persons from the Kosovo conflict have been buried in the country as "manifestly untrue." It cites records obtained from a local cemetery in Kukes, the site of one of the secret detention facilities, including a five-page document entitled "List of deceased immigrants from Kosovo, 28 March 1999-17 June 1999."

One of those named is Anton Bisaku, identified as a detainee at the Kukes facility. His killing is cited in an indictment of a KLA operative issued in August of this year. The indictment states that Bisaku was "killed as a result of gunfire directed at him during a session of inhuman treatment, beating and torture which occurred on or about 4 June 1999."

The report divides the detention facilities operated by the KLA into two categories—war-time and post-conflict. It identifies three detention facilities operational during the conflict between April and June 1999, which also served as military bases. Included is the facility at Kukes.

The inquiry was informed that the Albanian national intelligence apparatus participated in some of the interrogations of prisoners at these facilities. Those detained were abducted at the border by the KLA from the thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict. Detainees were held in makeshift prison cells without food or water.

The Office of Special Prosecutor took statements from 10 individuals between 2009 and 2010 who had been incarcerated and subjected to beatings.

The report explains that after the cessation of the conflict, the KLA operated a separate network of makeshift detention centres, which were used primarily for the gruesome practice of trafficking in human organs. Most of the victims were Serb civilians abducted from southern Kosovo, but they also included Kosovar Albanians. There are no known survivors in this category.

According to testimony from former KLA soldiers and auxiliaries, prisoners were transported in unmarked trucks and vans, which were also used for the trafficking of women for the sex trade. These operations spanned the period between July 1999 and August 2000.

The report states that the Yellow House served as a "way station for those taken captive for organ trafficking." It continues: "The end point was the detention centre in Fushe-Kruje, a two-storey farmhouse set back from main roads but in close proximity to Tirana Airport, where the organs could be shipped abroad."

There are substantial "elements of proof" that a small number of captives were killed at the Yellow House, including witness accounts from people who saw the burial, disinterment, movement and reburial of captives' corpses. Captives were killed by a gunshot to the head before the operation to remove one or more organs took place. The principal trade was in kidneys.

The report offers certain rationalisations for the cover-up by NATO and the United Nations of these crimes, attributing it to a dearth of UN personnel and a misguided attempt to achieve short-

term stability. In fact, the report exposes the criminal character of the US-NATO war against Yugoslavia and the utterly cynical nature of the propaganda campaign waged to justify it. The air war was presented as a humanitarian campaign against genocide and rape, with the Serbs cast as the villains and the KLA as freedom fighters defending the Albanian Kosovar population.

The CIA and European intelligence agencies backed the KLA and used it as a cat's paw to facilitate the plans of the US, using NATO as its military umbrella, to complete the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and undermine Serbia, a long-time ally of Russia.

At the Rambouillet talks directly before the US-NATO declaration of war on Yugoslavia, the KLA leader, Hashim Thaci, was inserted at the head of the Kosovo negotiating team by the US, which had delisted the KLA as a terrorist group in 1998. Through Thaci, Yugoslavia was served a diktat to accept the full and unconditional surrender of its sovereignty to NATO.

Allegations of genocide were ramped up in order to justify the 78-day aerial bombardment by NATO, during which 15,000 bombs and precision guided missiles were rained down on Yugoslavia, killing an estimated 1,200 to 2,000 civilians. This was the context in which the KLA was able to carry out its own atrocities as America's chosen proxy and ally.

The UN provided the rubber stamp for this act of military aggression and a multinational fig leaf for the establishment of a NATO protectorate. It worked with Washington, Bonn and London to whitewash the crimes of the KLA. The US and the major European powers recognised Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008, under the rule of a clique of gangsters, drug pushers and murderers.

The CoE report points to the fact that Washington has been able to carve out a permanent military presence in Kosovo as part of its broader geo-political interests. It states: "The United States of America has an Embassy endowed with impressive resources and a military base, Camp Bondsteel, of a scale and significance that clearly transcends regional consideration."



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