Washington’s “humanitarian” war and the KLA’s crimes

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Revelations of fascistic crimes carried out by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) prior to, during and after NATO’s war against the former Yugoslavia should provide a salutary lesson whenever Washington again cites humanitarian concerns to justify its predatory war aims.

A report by the Council of Europe describes Kosovo today as a country subject to “mafia-like structures of organised crime”. It accuses KLA commander and current prime minister, Hachim Thaci, of heading a criminal network involved in murder, prostitution and drug trafficking.

This may come as no surprise to those who have witnessed his rise from terrorist thug to head of the newly “independent” state. But what will be a shock to many is the grotesque way in the KLA helped finance its operations—by removing and selling body organs from kidnapped Serb and Kosovan Albanian civilian prisoners. The practice recalls the barbaric human experiments carried out by the Nazi “Angel of Death” Josef Mengele in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

The KLA’s crimes only came to light at all because of the unravelling of an ongoing cover-up by the US, the United Nations and other major powers. Information about KLA detention facilities in Kosovo and across the border in Albania first reached the International Centre for the Red Cross in 2000, after KLA fighters reported that Serb civilians were taken there in 1999 and their organs removed and sold abroad for transplant operations. The allegations surfaced once again in a BBC investigation in April last year and in the publication of the memoirs of International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, revealing that a 2008 investigation into the “organ harvesting” had been dropped because it was supposedly “impossible to conduct.”

Any prosecution of the KLA was made “impossible” by Washington, which has been its main sponsor since at least 1998. Following the Bosnian war of 1995, the KLA, seeking to capitalise on popular resentment among Kosovan Albanians against the regime of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, pursued a strategy of destabilising Kosovo by acts of terrorism in the hope of provoking Western intervention.

NATO was forced to admit that the KLA was “the main initiator of the violence” and its actions a “deliberate campaign of provocation”. But Washington was shifting its policy from proscribing the KLA as a terrorist organisation to one of covert support. During the 1999 Rambouillet negotiations, then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright promoted Thaci as the legitimate representative of the Kosovar people and seated him at the head of the Kosovo delegation. State Department spokesman James Rubin brushed aside concerns about the criminal nature of Washington’s new partner, claiming, “We simply don’t have information to substantiate allegations that there was a KLA leadership-directed program of assassinations or executions”, and that the State Department had no “credible evidence” the KLA was involved in drug trafficking.

The adoption of the KLA as an ally was vital to Washington's strategy of breaking up the Yugoslav republic into its constituent parts, ensuring its own hegemony within the Balkan region and threatening the broader geo-strategic interests of Russia. Germany, Britain and other NATO allies all colluded in glorifying the KLA as a liberation movement fighting to free Kosovo from Serbian oppression. To this end, US Senator Joseph Lieberman declared that “Fighting for the KLA is fighting for human rights and American

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values," while British Prime Minister Tony Blair famously proclaimed, "This is a just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values."

The US has continued to protect Thaci and his criminal gang as it pursued its goals of ethnic separatism. In 2007, the UN's special envoy in Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, started to promote Kosovo's independence from Serbia. Just 11 months later, on February 17, 2008, Kosovo's Assembly declared independence. It exists now as a US fiefdom, heavily dependent on international aid and with all major decisions pertaining to the economy, public spending, social programmes, security and trade controlled by the US, which has established its largest base in the Balkans at Camp Bondsteel.

Only two trials of KLA personnel have ever been held at the ICTY, compared to the scores involving Serbs. In the second trial the then prime minister Ramush Haradinaj was acquitted of war crimes charges with the trial judge complaining about the "significant difficulties" securing witness testimony. This prompted Del Ponte to complain about the protection Haradinaj was receiving from Western governments and officials. It was as a result of the Haradinaj trial, when the first reports of the body organ trade first emerged, that the Council of Europe was asked by Del Ponte to carry out an investigation.

Equally culpable in concealing the KLA's criminal activities are the various ex-liberal and "left" individuals and groups that threw their support behind the NATO bombing campaign--with claims that this was a humanitarian intervention in support of the KLA's struggle for "self-determination".

At that time, the arch-Conservative opponent of the war and former Defence Minister, Alan Clark MP, was moved to ask in the *Observer*, "What amazes me about the Yugoslav crisis is the credulity of the Left, and of progressive thinkers, who seem to get a vicarious thrill from seeing B52s taking off from Fairford. I address them: How have you swallowed whole the CIA-funded propaganda that demonises the Serbs? Are you not familiar with the duplicity and intimidation of United States foreign policy? That Ambassador Walker, in charge of monitoring forces in Bosnia, was financing the Contras? Have you no recall of that 'Free World' crap that embraced Batista, Noriega, Syngman Rhee, Bao Dai, Lee Van Thieu and Sukarno?"

In an accompanying editorial, "There is no alternative to this war", the *Observer* responded to critics of its "allegedly inconsistent standards" with the rejoinder, "We say so what? ... We have to live in the world as it is, not some Utopia."

The indifference to the realities of imperialist policy aims, and the embrace of the KLA and ethnic separatism, was of a piece with the evolution of this social layer ever since the first Balkan war in 1991—during which the selective citation of "humanitarian" considerations was first employed to justify making peace with imperialism. And nothing will change as a result of the latest revelations. The liberal media has been largely silent on the charges against Thaci and wholly silent as regards any editorial *mea culpa*—denoting their own agreement with the propaganda mouthpiece of US imperialism, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, which insisted, "Regardless of the truth behind the charges against Thaci and members of the KLA, one should not abandon the broader perspective, as some otherwise reliable commentators have done."

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