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Thursday, March 4, 2010

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How the United States became Albania's enforcer

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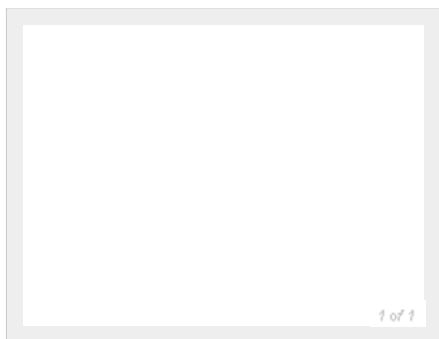
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lia Gorin

Nothing happened after President Clinton's 1999 war in Kosovo: It never ended. Its continuation was characterized by ethnic cleansing, kidnappings, bombings of UN-escorted civilian buses and efforts to kill everyone from schoolgirls to peacekeepers. Albanians, plus the rare peacekeeper tried to prevent any of this.

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Toward the end of 1999, several major newspapers reported on findings that mass graves such as the infamous Trepca zinc mine turned up empty, as did the stadium we were told was being used as a concentration

camp. Anyone reading this one-time follow-up also would have learned that the "cleansing" of 800,000 Albanians had more to do with NATO bombs and Kosovo Liberation Army orders than with the outrageous claim that Serbia was trying to empty the province of 90 percent of its population.

But the bombshell postwar story had no legs. No media outlet, human rights organization or congressional subcommittee launched an investigation, and the press moved on, taking the public with it. So Americans don't know that within months of our serving as the Kosovo Liberation Army's (KLA) air force, the Albanian insurgents also tried to seize the Presevo Valley area in southern Serbia and by early 2001 started a civil war in Macedonia, which had sheltered 400,000 refugees during the Kosovo war.

At the same time, the Albanian fighters started to engage NATO troops openly. In February 2000, the U.N. and NATO in Kosovo issued a joint statement that "two young French soldiers, who came here as peacekeepers, are lying in hospital beds suffering from gunshot wounds inflicted on them by the very people that they came here to protect," the CATO Institute's Gary Dempsey reported. He added, "As a candid intelligence officer with the U.N. Mission in Kosovo [UNMIK] explained to me in November, 'We are their tool, and when we stop being useful to them, they will turn against us.'"

In March 2000, The Washington Post reported, "A senior Pentagon official warned yesterday washingtontimes.com/.../the-blackmail...

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that U.S. troops in Kosovo this spring may have to fight their former allies, ethnic Albanian guerrillas who are rearming themselves and threatening cross-border attacks against Serbia. 'This has got to cease and desist, and if not, ultimately it is going to lead to confrontation between the Albanians and KFOR [NATO Kosovo Force].' "

But that didn't happen. Instead, we came around to seeing things the Albanian way. In November 2005, CNSNews.com explained why: "Rebels have blown up several vehicles belonging to UNMIK and the Kosovo [Police] Service, leading UNMIK to warn employees to check their vehicles for bombs before starting the engines. ... [G]raffiti across Kosovo warned 'UNMIK get out!' ... NATO's Kosovo Force has an emergency plan called 'Operation Safe Haven' in place to evacuate internationals. ... [Ex-OSCE security chief Tom] Gambill believes that Albanian frustration over the independence issue could lead armed rebels to forge an alliance with al Qaeda. Both groups want the international presence out of Kosovo and al Qaeda has a history of attempting to destabilize the Balkans region. ... The threats are played down, Gambill said, because 'it does not suit the internationals to have a serious crisis such as this at the time when they are sending out reports on how much improvement has been made in Kosovo.' "

We didn't want Albanians to start killing us, so we let them keep killing Serbs. Rather than see what would happen if we tried saying "no" to Albanian demands and designs, and risk Americans discerning the real nature of their new best friends - which of course would compound the domestic terror threat - we guaranteed ourselves a bigger, more entrenched and more global problem.

When Kosovo re-entered the headlines in 2008, some started catching on. In March 2008, Northwestern University law professor Eugene Kontorovich wrote in the New York Sun, "An important ingredient of Kosovo's success in achieving self-determination seems to be their constant threats of violence. The Kosovar prime minister ... often warned of 'dangers' and 'unforeseeable consequences' if the province were not allowed to secede. ... As a result, NATO and America have become parties to the carve-up of a sovereign state that they subdued by force. ... For international law, the entire process is a string of humiliations ... peacekeepers are hostages; and sovereignty is trumped by the threat of terror."

"Hostages" precisely describes the West in Kosovo. If anyone wonders why the George W. Bush administration joined the Clintonites in the belief that "independence is the only viable option" and "there can be no compromise," it's because in the gangster's paradise of Kosovo, the United States alternates between hostage and gangster. The Albanians give us ultimatums, and we give the Serbs ultimatums. Our government toes the Albanian line, and our press toes the government line. United Press International's Robert M. Hayden gave a glimpse of it in March 2008: "The problem is not that 'Serb nationalists' are resisting 'the West,' as it is put by those U.S. journalists who honor the First Amendment by parroting the State Department. ... [A political solution] could have been reached with Serbia, but neither the Clinton administration nor that of George W. Bush wanted one."

A clearer picture emerges of the "failed" negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, to which the Serbian delegation would come with lists of various broad compromises, and the Albanian delegation would look at their watches. Sabotaging the "negotiations" before each round - and redefining the term - Mr. Bush or Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would announce that the end result would be independence.

An excerpt from a 1999 Q&A in Time magazine illuminates how far we swerved from our original goals: "The alliance wants Kosovo to be given autonomy within the Yugoslav federation, but opposes the full independence that the KLA is fighting for, fearing that creating a new Kosovar-Albanian state would further destabilize an already volatile region."

Today, however, even the language is reversed: that which we knew would destabilize the region is now promoted as what is needed to "stabilize" the region. And so our military is being used to enforce KLA directives and make the last of the resisting Serbs comply with the new reality.

Most of the last resisting Serbs are in the only remaining part of Kosovo where it is still safe to be Serbian, Northern Kosovska Mitrovica, along the boundary with Serbia. The Serbs



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there have been open to a partition that would allow them to stay within the internationally recognized borders of their country, Serbia. But we were informed by our Albanian "partners" that a partition was out of the question, ironically invoking "territorial integrity" - which our leaders then repeated.


Rather than Kosovo's diabolical path to statehood, our bureaucrats and media point to Belgrade as the problem, because it backs Northern Mitrovica, where Serbian institutions are still in place. We are warned that the real threat is Belgrade's refusal to recognize the land grab, its turning to Moscow for support and its creation of "parallel institutions." A rich admonition indeed, given that Kosovo's parallel Albanian institutions within the host society were what brought us to the hailed secession itself.

NATO troops have been amassing around Northern Mitrovica, and in a few months, with or without Belgrade finally selling out the Kosovo Serbs (always a looming possibility), we will witness the next act of war by U.S.-led NATO against an ally that has never been a threat to America. We will be enforcing borders that only one-third of U.N. member states even recognize to deliver nothing less than the full territory that our masters demand.

This time, when Americans watch our military "contain" the Serbs, they should recognize it for what it is. The troops themselves would do well to understand what is being enforced with their hands. And when the images gracing American TVs are again exclusively of the "wild" Serbian reaction, meant to depict Serbs as violent and therefore justifying the aggression that caused it, Americans should ask themselves how they might react if coerced to secede from their country by an ethnic group that reached majority status in their area.

In February 2007, Jim Jatras, a former senior analyst for the Senate Republican Foreign Policy Committee, asked a Hungarian member of the European Parliament, "Why are you rewarding Albanian violence with state power?" The member replied, "Because we're afraid of them."

Julia Gorin specializes in Balkans issues and is an unpaid advisory board member of the American Council for Kosovo.

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