

Partners in Crime: the CIA, BND and Kosovo's narco 'government'

by Tom Burghardt via rialator - Antifascist Calling... *Sunday, Dec 7 2008, 8:38pm*

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When three officers of Germany's foreign intelligence service the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), were arrested in Pristina November 19, it exposed that country's extensive covert operations in the heart of the Balkans.

On November 14, a bomb planted at the office of the European Union Special Representative was detonated in downtown Pristina. While damage was light and there were no injuries, U.N. "peacekeepers" detained one of the BND officers hours after the blast when he was observed taking photos of the damaged building. Two of his colleagues waited in a car and acted as lookouts. The officer named these two colleagues as witnesses that he was in his office at the time of the attack.

That office, identified by the press as the "private security firm" Logistics-Coordination & Assessment Service or LCAS, in reality was a front company for BND operations. Its premises were searched three days later and the trio were subsequently arrested and accused by Kosovan authorities of responsibility for bombing the EU building. As a result of the arrests, the BND was forced to admit the real identities of their agents and the true nature of LCAS.

A scandal erupted leading to a diplomatic row between Berlin and Pristina. The German government labeled the accusations "absurd" and threatened a cut-off of funds to the Kosovo government. A circus atmosphere prevailed as photos of the trio were shown on Kosovan TV and splashed across the front pages of the press. Rumors and dark tales abounded, based on leaks believed by observers to have emanated from the office of Kosovo's Prime Minister, the "former" warlord Hashim Thaci, nominal leader of the statelet's organized crime-tainted government.

When seized by authorities one of the BND officers, Andreas J., demonstrated very poor tradecraft indeed. Among the items recovered by police, the operative's passport along with a notebook containing confidential and highly incriminating information on the situation in Kosovo were examined. According to media reports, the notebook contained the names of well-placed BND informants in the Prime Minister's entourage. According to this reading, the arrests were an act of revenge by Thaci meant to embarrass the German government.

But things aren't always as they seem.

On November 29, the trio--Robert Z., Andreas J. and Andreas D.--departed Kosovo on a special flight bound for Berlin where they "will face a committee of German parliamentarians who have taken an interest in their case," according to an account in Spiegel Online.

More curious than a violent attack on the streets of Pristina, a city wracked by gangland killings, car hijackings, kidnappings and assaults is the provenance of the bomb itself. In other words, why would German intelligence agents attack their own? But before attempting to answer this question, a grim backstory to the affair rears its ugly head.

An Agency Mired in Scandal

This latest scandal comes as yet another blow to the BND considering August's revelations by the whistleblowing website Wikileaks that Germany's external intelligence agency had extensively spied on journalists. Like their counterparts at the CIA, the BND is forbidden by law from carrying out domestic operations.

According to Wikileaks documents, journalists working for Focus Magazine and Der Spiegel were collaborators in a scheme by the agency to learn their sources as well as obtaining information on left-wing politicians, including Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) leaders Gregor Gysi and Andreas Lederer.

Indeed Focus Magazine journalist Josef Hufelschulte, code name 'Jerez, wrote articles based on reports provided by the BND "intended to produce favorable coverage." Wikileaks correspondent Daniel Schmitt and investigations editor Julian Assange comment that, "The document in general shows the extent to which the collaboration of journalists with intelligence agencies has become common and to what dimensions consent is manufactured in the interests of those involved."

In November, Wikileaks published a subsequent document obtained from the telecommunications giant T-Systems. In addition to revealing two dozen secret IP addresses used by the BND for surveillance operations, the document provides "Evidence of a secret out of control BND robot scanning selected web-sites. In 2006 system administrators had to ban the "BVOE" IP addresses to prevent servers from being destroyed." Additionally, Wikileaks revealed the "activity on a Berlin prostitution service website--evidence that intelligence seductions, the famed cold-war 'honeytrap', is alive and well?"

While the document does not spell out who was running the sex-for-hire website, one can't help but wonder whether Balkan-linked organized crime syndicates, including Kosovan and Albanian sex traffickers are working in tandem with the BND in return for that agency turning a blind eye to the sordid trade in kidnapped women.

Kosovo: A European Narco State

When Kosovo proclaimed its "independence" in February, the Western media hailed the provocative dismemberment of Serbia, a move that completed the destruction of Yugoslavia by the United States, the European Union and NATO, as an exemplary means to bring "peace and stability" to the region.

If by "peace" one means impunity for rampaging crime syndicates or by "stability," the freedom of action with no questions asked by U.S. and NATO military and intelligence agencies, not to mention economic looting on a grand scale by freewheeling multinational corporations, then Kosovo has it all!

From its inception, the breakaway Serb province has served as a militarized outpost for Western capitalist powers intent on spreading their tentacles East, encircling Russia and penetrating the former spheres of influence of the ex-Soviet Union. As a template for contemporary CIA destabilization operations in Georgia and Ukraine, prospective EU members and NATO "partners," Kosovo should serve as a warning for those foolish enough to believe American clichés about "freedom" or the dubious benefits of "globalization."

Camp Bondsteel, located on rolling hills and farmland near the city of Ferizaj/Urosevac, is the largest U.S. military installation on the European continent. Visible from space, in addition to serving as an NSA listening post pointed at Russia and as the CIA's operational hub in the Balkans

and beyond, some observers believe that Andreas J.'s notebook may have contained information that Camp Bondsteel continues to serve as a CIA "black site." One motive for rolling up the BND intelligence operation may have been U.S. fears that this toxic information would become public, putting paid U.S. claims that it no longer kidnaps and tortures suspected "terrorists."

When NATO partners Germany and the U.S. decided to drive a stake through Yugoslavia's heart in the early 1990s during the heady days of post-Cold War triumphalism, their geopolitical strategy could not have achieved "success" without the connivance, indeed active partnership amongst Yugoslavia's nationalist rivals. As investigative journalist Misha Glenny documented,

Most shocking of all, however, is how the gangsters and politicians fueling war between their peoples were in private cooperating as friends and close business partners. The Croat, Bosnian, Albanian, Macedonian, and Serb moneymen and mobsters were truly thick as thieves. They bought, sold, and exchanged all manner of commodities, knowing that the high levels of personal trust between them were much stronger than the transitory bonds of hysterical nationalism. They fomented this ideology among ordinary folk in essence to mask their own venality. As one commentator described it, the new republics were ruled by "a parastate Cartel which had emerged from political institutions, the ruling Communist Party and its satellites, the military, a variety of police forces, the Mafia, court intellectuals and with the president of the Republic at the center of the spider web...Tribal nationalism was indispensable for the cartel as a means to pacify its subordinates and as a cover for the uninterrupted privatization of the state apparatus. (McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008, p. 27)

Glenny's description of the 1990s convergence of political, economic and security elites with organized crime syndicates in Western intelligence operations is the quintessential definition of the capitalist deep state.

In *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, Peter Dale Scott describes how the deep state can be characterized by "the symbiosis between governments (and in particular their intelligence agencies) and criminal associations, particularly drug traffickers, in the stabilization of right-wing terror in Vietnam, Italy, Bolivia, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and other parts of the world." Indeed, "revelations in the 1970s and 1980s about the 'strategy of tension,' whereby government intelligence agencies, working in international conjunction, strengthened the case for their survival by actually fomenting violence, recurringly in alliance with drug-trafficking elements."

Scott's analysis is perhaps even more relevant today as "failed states" such as Kosovo, characterized by economic looting on an industrial scale, the absence of the rule of law, reliance on far-right terrorists (of both the "religious" and "secular" varieties) to achieve policy goals, organized crime syndicates, as both assets and executors of Western policy, and comprador elites are Washington's preferred international partners.

For the ruling elites of the former Yugoslavia and their Western allies, Kosovo is a veritable goldmine. Situated in the heart of the Balkans, Kosovo's government is deeply tied to organized crime structures: narcotrafficking, arms smuggling, car theft rings and human trafficking that feeds the sex slave "industry." These operations are intimately linked to American destabilization campaigns and their cosy ties to on-again, off-again intelligence assets that include al-Qaeda and other far-right terror gangs. As investigative journalist Peter Klebnikov documented in 2000,

The Kosovar traffickers ship heroin exclusively from Asia's Golden Crescent. It's an

apparently inexhaustible source. At one end of the crescent lies Afghanistan, which in 1999 surpassed Burma as the world's largest producer of opium poppies. From there, the heroin base passes through Iran to Turkey, where it is refined, and then into the hands of the 15 Families, which operate out of the lawless border towns linking Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia. Not surprisingly, the KLA has also flourished there. According to the State Department, four to six tons of heroin move through Turkey every month. "Not very much is stopped," says one official. "We get just a fraction of the total." ("Heroin Heroes," Mother Jones, January-February 2000)

Not much has changed since then. Indeed, the CIA's intelligence model for covert destabilization operations is a continuing formula for "success." Beginning in the 1940s, when the Corsican Mafia was pegged by the Agency to smash the French Communist Party, down to today's bloody headlines coming out of Afghanistan and Pakistan, global drug lords and intelligence operators go hand in hand. It is hardly surprising then, that according to a report by the Berlin Institute for European Policy, organized crime is the only profitable sector of the Kosovan economy. Nearly a quarter of the country's economic output, some €550 million, is derived from criminal activities.

Though the role of the United States and their NATO partners are central to the drama unfolding today, the BND affair also reveals that beneath the carefully-constructed façade of Western "unity" in "Freedom Land," deep inter-imperialist rivalries simmer. As the socialist journalist Peter Schwarz reports,

Speculation has since been rife about the background to the case, but it is doubtful whether it will ever be clarified. Kosovo is a jungle of rival secret services. In this regard, it resembles Berlin before the fall of the Wall. The US, Germany, Britain, Italy and France all have considerable intelligence operations in the country, which work both with and against one another. Moreover, in this country of just 2.1 million inhabitants, some 15,000 NATO soldiers and 1,500 UN police officers are stationed, as well as 400 judges, police officers and security officers belonging to the UN's EULEX mission. (Peter Schwarz, "Kosovo's Dirty Secret: The Background to Germany's Secret Service Affair," World Socialist Web Site, December 1, 2008)

Into this jungle of conflicting loyalties and interests, international crime syndicates in close proximity--and fleeting alliance--with this or that security service rule the roost. It is all the more ironic that the Thaci government has targeted the BND considering, as Balkan analyst Christopher Deliso revealed:

In 1996, Germany's BND established a major station in Tirana...and another in Rome to select and train future KLA fighters. According to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, "special forces in Berlin provided the operational training and supplied arms and transmission equipment from ex-East German Stasi stocks as well as Black uniforms." The Italian headquarters recruited Albanian immigrants passing through ports such as Brindisi and Trieste, while German military intelligence, the *Militäramtschirmdienst*, and the *Kommando Spezialkräfte* Special Forces (KSK), offered military training and provisions to the KLA in the remote Mirdita Mountains of northern Albania controlled by the deposed president, Sali Berisha. (The Coming Balkan Caliphate, Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007, p. 37)

But as Schwarz observed, why would the Thaci government risk alienating the German state, given the fact that after the U.S., Germany "is the second largest financial backer of Kosovo and ranks among the most important advocates of its independence." Why indeed?

According to Balkan Analysis, the International Crisis Group (ICG) funded by billionaire George Soros' Open Society Institute (OSI) and closely aligned with "liberal interventionists" in the United States, were instrumental in arguing that the United States and Germany, should guarantee "future stability," by building up the Kosovo Protection Corps (TKF), the KLA's successor organization, into a well-equipped army. Towards this end, the U.S. and Germany, in addition to arming the organized crime-linked statelet, have provided funds and equipment for a sophisticated military communications center in the capital.

Speculation is rife and conflicting accounts proliferate like mushrooms after a warm rain. One theory has it that senior Kosovan politicians were angered by BND criticisms linking KLA functionaries, including personal associates of Thaci and the Prime Minister himself, with organized crime. Tellingly, Schwarz reports, this "is contrary to the position taken by the CIA."

Is the affair then, merely a falling-out among thieves on how the spoils will be divided?

The CIA: Drugs & Thugs International

As noted above, U.S. destabilization programs and covert operations rely on far-flung networks of far-right provocateurs and drug lords (often interchangeable players) to facilitate the dirty work for U.S. policy elites and American multinational corporations. Throughout its Balkan adventure the CIA made liberal use of these preexisting narcotics networks to arm the KLA and provide them with targets. In their public pronouncements and analyses however, nary a harsh word is spoken.

According to the CIA, by any standard Kosovo's economy is a disaster, but that doesn't prevent the Agency from seeing "significant progress"!

Over the past few years Kosovo's economy has shown significant progress in transitioning to a market-based system, but it is still highly dependent on the international community and the diaspora for financial and technical assistance. Remittances from the diaspora--located mainly in Germany and Switzerland--account for about 30% of GDP. Kosovo's citizens are the poorest in Europe with an average annual per capita income of only \$1800--about one-third the level of neighboring Albania. Unemployment--at more than 40% of the population--is a severe problem that encourages outward migration. (Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, November 20, 2008)

Needless to say, one unmentionable "fact" disappeared from the CIA's country profile is the statelet's overwhelming dependence on the black economy. I suppose this is what the Agency means when it lauds Kosovo's transition to a "market-based system"! But as former DEA investigator and whistleblower Michael Levine, author of *The Big White Lie*, told B92, one of the wings of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was "linked with every known narco-cartel in the Middle East and the Far East", and that almost every European intelligence service and police has files on "connections between ethnic Albanian rebels and drug trafficking". And dare I say by extension, the CIA itself.

One bone of contention which could have led Thaci and his henchmen to seek revenge against his erstwhile German allies was a 67-page BND analysis about organized crime in Kosovo. As Schwarz noted the dossier, produced in February 2005 and subsequently leaked to the press, "accuses Ramush Haradinaj (head of government from December 2004 to March 2005), Hashim Thaci (prime minister since January 2008) and Xhavit Haliti, who sits in the parliament presidium, of being deeply implicated in the drugs trade."

According to the BND report, "Regarding the key players (e.g., Haliti, Thaci, Haradinaj), there exists the closest ties between politics, business and internationally operating OC [organized crime] structures in Kosovo. The criminal networks behind this are encouraging political instability. They have no interest in building a functioning state, which could impair their flourishing trade." (WSWS, op. cit.)

Haradinaj, an American protégé, became Prime Minister in 2004. However, he was forced to resign his post in March 2005 when the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia indicted him for crimes against humanity. Among other things, Haradinaj was accused of abducting civilians, unlawful detention, torture, murder and rape. Schwarz notes he was acquitted in April 2008 "for lack of evidence, after nine out of ten prosecution witnesses died violently and the tenth withdrew his statement after narrowly escaping an assassination attempt." Talk about friends in high places!

Mirroring evidence uncovered by journalists and investigators regarding the control of the drugs trade by 15 Albanian crime families, the Berlin Institute for European Policy laid similar charges against Thaci, stating that real power in Kosovo is wielded by 15 to 20 family clans who control "almost all substantial key social positions" and are "closely linked to prominent political decision makers."

According to Spiegel, when the BND operation was run to ground with the possible connivance of the CIA, its secret network of informants, instrumental to gaining insight into the interconnections amongst state actors and organized crime were compromised. The BND's Department Five, responsible for organized crime wrote a confidential report linking Thaci as "a key figure in a Kosovar-Albanian mafia network."

Department Two, according to Spiegel, was responsible for telecommunications surveillance. In 1999, the BND launched operation "Mofa99," a wiretap intercept program that targeted high-ranking members of the KLA--and exposed their links to dodgy criminal syndicates and Islamist allies, al-Qaeda. The program was so successful according to Spiegel that since then, "the BND has maintained an extensive network of informants among high-ranking functionaries of the KLA and the Kosovar administration."

Functionaries in possession of many dangerous secrets and inconvenient truths!

As researcher and analyst Michel Chossudovsky wrote back in 2001, among the "inconvenient truths" unexplored by Western media is the close proximity of far-right Islamist terror gangs and planetary U.S. destabilization operations.

Since the Soviet-Afghan war, recruiting Mujahedin ("holy warriors") to fight covert wars on Washington's behest has become an integral part of US foreign policy. A report of the US Congress has revealed how the US administration--under advice from the National Security Council headed by Anthony Lake--had "helped turn Bosnia into a militant Islamic base" leading to the recruitment through the so-called "Militant Islamic Network," of thousands of Mujahedin from the Muslim world.

The "Bosnian pattern" has since been replicated in Kosovo, Southern Serbia and Macedonia. Among the foreign mercenaries now fighting with the KLA-NLA are Mujahedin from the Middle East and the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union as well as "soldiers of fortune" from several NATO countries including Britain, Holland and Germany. Some of these Western mercenaries had previously fought with the KLA and the Bosnian Muslim Army. (Michel Chossudovsky, "Washington Behind

Terrorist Assaults in Macedonia," Global Research, September 10, 2001)

Fast forward seven years and one can hypothesize that the BND, stepping on the CIA's toes and that agency's cosy intelligence "understanding" with Mafia-linked KLA fighters and al-Qaeda assets, would have every reason to sabotage the BND's organized crime operations--not that the German military intelligence service's hands are any cleaner!

While we may never know all the facts surrounding this curious affair, one thing is certain: the role played by powerful Mafia gangs as a source for black funds, intelligence assets and CIA "agents of influence" will continue. Administrations come and go, but like motherhood and apple pie the shadowy workings of America's deep state is an eternal verity you can count on!

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