

Washington gets a [temporary] new colony in the Balkans

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In evaluating the recent "declaration of independence" by Kosovo, a province of Serbia, and its immediate recognition as a state by the U.S., Germany, Britain and France, it is important to know three things.

First, Kosovo is not gaining independence or even minimal self-government. It will be run by an appointed High Representative and bodies appointed by the U.S., European Union and NATO. An old-style colonial viceroy and imperialist administrators will have control over foreign and domestic policy. U.S. Imperialism has merely consolidated its direct control of a totally dependent colony in the heart of the Balkans.

Second, Washington's immediate recognition of Kosovo confirms once again that U.S. Imperialism will break any and every treaty or international agreement it has ever signed, including agreements it drafted and imposed by force and violence on others.

The recognition of Kosovo is in direct violation of such law—specifically U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244, which the leaders of Yugoslavia were forced to sign to end the 78 days of NATO bombing of their country in 1999. Even this imposed agreement affirmed the "commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Serbia, a republic of Yugoslavia.

This week's illegal recognition of Kosovo was condemned by Serbia, Russia, China and Spain.

Thirdly, U.S. Imperialist domination does not benefit the occupied people. Kosovo after nine years of direct NATO military occupation has a staggering 60 percent unemployment rate. It has become a center of the international drug trade and of prostitution rings in Europe.

The once humming mines, mills, smelters, refining centers and railroads of this small resource-rich industrial area all sit silent. The resources of Kosovo under NATO occupation were forcibly privatized and sold to giant Western multinational corporations. Now almost the only employment is working for the U.S./NATO army of occupation or U.N. Agencies.

The only major construction in Kosovo is of Camp Bondsteel, the largest U.S. Base built in Europe in a generation. Halliburton, of course, got the contract. Camp Bondsteel guards the strategic oil and transportation lines of the entire region.

Over 250,000 Serbian, Romani and other nationalities have been driven out of this Serbian province since it came under U.S./NATO control. Almost a quarter of the Albanian population has been forced to leave in order to find work.

Establishing a colonial administration

Consider the plan under which Kosovo's "independence" is to happen. Not only does it violate U.N. Resolutions but it is also a total colonial structure. It is similar to the absolute power held by L. Paul Bremer in the first two years of the U.S. Occupation of Iraq.

How did this colonial plan come about? It was proposed by the same forces responsible for the breakup of Yugoslavia and the NATO bombing and occupation of Kosovo.

In June of 2005, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari as his special envoy to lead the negotiations on Kosovo's final status. Ahtisaari is hardly a neutral arbitrator when it comes to U.S. Intervention in Kosovo. He is chairman emeritus of the International Crisis Group (ICG), an organization funded by multibillionaire George Soros that promotes NATO expansion and intervention along with open markets for U.S. And E.U. Investment.

The board of the ICG includes two key U.S. Officials responsible for the bombing of Kosovo: Gen. Wesley Clark and Zbigniew Brzezinski. In March 2007, Ahtisaari gave his Comprehensive Proposal for Kosovo Status Settlement to the new U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon.

The documents setting out the new government for Kosovo are available at unosek.org/unosek/en/statusproposal.HTML. A summary is available on the U.S. State Department's Web site at state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/100058.htm

An International Civilian Representative (ICR) will be appointed by U.S. And E.U. Officials to oversee Kosovo. This appointed official can overrule any measures, annul any laws and remove anyone from office in Kosovo. The ICR will have full and final control over the departments of Customs, Taxation, Treasury and Banking.

The E.U. Will establish a European Security and Defense Policy Mission (ESDP) and NATO will establish an International Military Presence. Both these appointed bodies will have control over foreign policy, security, police, judiciary, all courts and prisons. They are guaranteed immediate and complete access to any activity, proceeding or document in Kosovo.

These bodies and the ICR will have final say over what crimes can be prosecuted and against whom; they can reverse or annul any decision made. The largest prison in Kosovo is at the U.S. Base, Camp Bondsteel, where prisoners are held without charges, judicial overview or representation.

The recognition of Kosovo's "independence" is just the latest step in a U.S. war of reconquest that has been relentlessly pursued for decades.

Divide and rule

The Balkans has been a vibrant patchwork of many oppressed nationalities, cultures and religions. The Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia, formed after World War II, contained six republics, none of which had a majority. Yugoslavia was born with a heritage of antagonisms that had been endlessly exploited by the Ottoman Turks, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and interference by British and French imperialism, followed by Nazi German and Italian Fascist occupation in World War II.

The Jewish and Serbian peoples suffered the greatest losses in that war. A powerful communist-led resistance movement made up of all the nationalities, which had suffered in different ways, was forged against Nazi occupation and all outside intervention. After the liberation, all the nationalities cooperated and compromised in building the new socialist federation.

In 45 years the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia developed from an impoverished, underdeveloped, feuding region into a stable country with an industrial base, full literacy and health care for the whole population.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Pentagon immediately laid plans for the aggressive expansion of NATO into the East. Divide and rule became U.S. policy throughout the entire region. Everywhere right-wing, pro-capitalist forces were financed and encouraged. As the Soviet Union was broken up into separate, weakened, unstable and feuding republics, the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia tried to resist this reactionary wave.

In 1991, while world attention was focused on the devastating U.S. bombing of Iraq, Washington encouraged, financed and armed right-wing separatist movements in the Croatian, Slovenian and Bosnian republics of the Yugoslav Federation. In violation of international agreements Germany and the U.S. gave quick recognition to these secessionist movements and approved the creation of several capitalist ministates.

At the same time U.S. finance capital imposed severe economic sanctions on Yugoslavia to bankrupt its economy. Washington then promoted NATO as the only force able to bring stability to the region.

The arming and financing of the right-wing UCK movement in the Serbian province of Kosovo began in this same period. Kosovo was not a distinct republic within the Yugoslav Federation but a province in the Serbian Republic. Historically, it had been a center of Serbian national identity, but with a growing Albanian population.

Washington initiated a wild propaganda campaign claiming that Serbia was carrying out a campaign of massive genocide against the Albanian majority in Kosovo. The Western media was full of stories of mass graves and brutal rapes. U.S. officials claimed that from 100,000 up to 500,000 Albanians had been massacred.

U.S./NATO officials under the Clinton administration issued an outrageous ultimatum that Serbia immediately accept military occupation and surrender all sovereignty or face NATO bombardment of its cities, towns and infrastructure. When, at a negotiation session in Rambouillet, France, the Serbian Parliament voted to refuse NATO's demands, the bombing began.

In 78 days the Pentagon dropped 35,000 cluster bombs, used thousands of rounds of radioactive depleted-uranium rounds, along with bunker busters and cruise missiles. The bombing destroyed more than 480 schools, 33 hospitals, numerous health clinics, 60 bridges, along with industrial, chemical and heating plants, and the electrical grid. Kosovo, the region that Washington was supposedly determined to liberate, received the greatest destruction.

Finally on June 3, 1999, Yugoslavia was forced to agree to a ceasefire and the occupation of Kosovo.

Expecting to find bodies everywhere, forensic teams from 17 NATO countries organized by the Hague Tribunal on War Crimes searched occupied Kosovo all summer of 1999 but found a total of only 2,108 bodies, of all nationalities. Some had been killed by NATO bombing and some in the war between the UCK and the Serbian police and military. They found not one mass grave and could produce no evidence of massacres or of "genocide."

This stunning rebuttal of the imperialist propaganda comes from a report released by the chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Carla Del Ponte. It was covered, but without fanfare, in the New York Times of Nov. 11, 1999.

The wild propaganda of genocide and tales of mass graves were as false as the later claims that Iraq had and was preparing to use "weapons of mass destruction."

Through war, assassinations, coups and economic strangulation, Washington has succeeded for now in imposing neoliberal economic policies on all of the six former Yugoslav republics and breaking them into unstable and impoverished ministates.

The very instability and wrenching poverty that imperialism has brought to the region will in the long run be the seeds of its undoing. The history of the achievements made when Yugoslavia enjoyed real independence and sovereignty through unity and socialist development will assert itself in the future.

Sara Flounders, co-director of the International Action Center, traveled to Yugoslavia during the 1999 U.S. bombing and reported on the extent of the U.S. attacks on civilian targets. She is a co-author and editor of the books: "Hidden Agenda—U.S./NATO Takeover of Yugoslavia" and "NATO in the Balkans."

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