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By: William Norman Grigg
 May 24, 1999

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When Bill Clinton stopped in Detroit on April 17th on a fundraising visit, he met with a small group of Albanian-Americans at the Roseville Recreation Center. According to the *Detroit News*, a banner at the Roseville speech bore the logo of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Two days earlier, during an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Mr. Clinton offered an oblique reference to the KLA when he insisted that Serbian ruler Slobodan Milosevic had “not destroyed the armed opposition among Kosovars; indeed, [its] numbers and determination are growing.” NATO spokesman Jamie Shea, offering a more poetic take on the establishment line, reported that the KLA is “rising like a phoenix from the ashes.”

Part of the reason why the KLA’s ranks are growing, reported the *Chicago Tribune* on April 1st, is forced conscription: Shortly after NATO began its bombing campaign, the KLA ordered all Albanian men of fighting age “to join its ranks within one month or face unspecified consequence.” Many male refugees, who had been driven from their homes at gunpoint, “made it to the Albanian border only to encounter checkpoints of the KLA,” reported the *Tribune*. “Travelers who slipped through said they saw men being pulled from buses by armed guerillas and sent to KLA training camps in the rugged hills nearby.” There the conscripts are given one month of crude training before being thrust into battle.

Showcase Volunteers

Although the KLA has had to rely on press gangs to draft Kosovo Albanians into its ranks, it has attracted thousands of ethnic Albanian volunteers from Europe and the United States. Throughout émigré communities worldwide, reported the April 20th *Washington Times*, the call to enlist in the KLA “is considered obligatory for all men ages 18 to 55. Only those who are sick or who can contribute financially to the KLA are considered exempt.” Albanian émigrés from Philadelphia, Detroit, New York, Chicago, and other U.S. cities have repaired to the KLA banner, joining thousands more from Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and other European nations.

The KLA’s recruit army has little military value; the shopkeepers, waiters, teenagers, and middle-age professionals who have volunteered will not turn the tide of battle against Milosevic’s well-equipped paramilitary squads. As with the Communist-organized “Abraham Lincoln Brigade” in the Spanish Civil War, the KLA’s émigré army is a propaganda exercise intended to confer an air of romantic idealism to a movement dominated by corrupt terrorists. The KLA’s founders, reported Balkans correspondent Chris Hedges in the March 28th *New York Times*, were “diehard Marxist-Leninists (who were bankrolled in the old days by the Stalinist dictatorship next door in Albania) as well as descendants of the fascist militias raised by the Italians in World War II.”

Hedges fleshes out his portrait of the KLA in an essay published in the May-June 1999 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. “The KLA fighters are the province’s new power brokers,” Hedges writes. “Whatever political leadership emerges in Kosovo will come from the rebel ranks, and it will be militant, nationalist, uncompromising, and deeply suspicious of all outsiders.” The KLA’s leadership cadres, according to Hedges, are “given to secrecy, paranoia, and appalling mendacity when they feel it serves their interests, which is most of the time.”

The KLA’s ideology displays “hints of fascism on one side and whiffs of communism on the other,” continues Hedges, and its leadership includes the heirs and descendants of “the Skanderbeg volunteer SS division raised by the Nazis ... [who] took part in the shameful roundup and deportation of [Kosovo’s] few hundred Jews during the Holocaust.” Such is the character of the group that, in Hedges’ view, “represents the aspirations of most Kosovar Albanians,” which is to create “an independent Kosovo now and a Greater Albania later.” A map circulated among KLA supporters, including the Albanian-American Civic League (AACL), depicts a “Greater Albania” that includes not only Kosovo, but a slice taken from Serbia proper, in addition to portions of Montenegro, Macedonia, and Greece.

Despite repeated assertions from NATO that the war against Yugoslavia is intended to contain ethnic conflict, the alliance with the KLA effectively guarantees that the conflict will spread throughout the Balkans and beyond. Were Milosevic to relent and allow international “peacekeepers” to occupy Kosovo, the occupation force would be required to disarm the KLA, as specified by the Rambouillet framework. The KLA has made it clear that it has no intention of relinquishing its arms or renouncing its irredentist aims. Indeed, the terrorist group has already expanded its campaign in Macedonia, which has been overrun by Albanian refugees. On April 22nd, Interior Minister Pavle Trajanov reported that KLA arms caches totaling 4.5 tons of firearms, grenades, and ammo have been discovered in several Macedonian locations. The KLA has also reportedly recruited more than

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1,000 "volunteers" from that country... Clinton Administration decides to support the KLA's drive for a... "a NATO "victory" captured Milc... presage another conflict with the KLA, which?

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fundraising and recruiting efforts illustrates — has a disciplined and tightly organized international network at its disposal. The KLA would be well positioned to bring its war home to America in the form of terrorism.

Narco-Revolution

As previously reported in these pages (see "Diving into the Kosovo Quagmire" in our March 15th issue), the KLA is allied with Osama bin-Laden's international terrorist network and funded, in large measure, by Albanian organized crime — particularly heroin trafficking. In 1994, when the insurrectionary KLA was still in its larval stage, France's *Observatoire Geopolitique Des Drogues*, a counter-narcotics bureau attached to the European Commission, reported that "heroin shipment and marketing networks are taking root among ethnic Albanian communities in Albania, Macedonia, and the Kosovo province of Serbia, in order to finance large purchases of weapons destined ... for the brewing war in Kosovo."

A 1995 report from Kosovo published in the left-wing journal *Mother Jones* described how Kosovo Albanians committed to insurrection would work as "camels": "By the hundreds, they cross the mountains, lakes, and seas that comprise affluent Europe's outer frontiers — usually in the dead of night — carrying the mob's narcotics in one direction and its laundered money in the other."

"Here and in a half-dozen other Western countries," declared Pascal Auchlin, a criminologist with Switzerland's National Center for Scientific Research, "there is now an ant's trail of individual drug traffickers that leads right to Kosovo." In 1995, nearly 500 Kosovo Albanians were in Swiss prisons on drug-related charges, and more than 1,000 others were under indictment. Many other "camels" were not so fortunate, noted *Mother Jones*: "Empty boats wash up, after howling Mediterranean storms, on the Spanish and Sicilian coasts. Decomposed bodies are discovered each spring in the Alps, when the seasonal thaw opens snowbound passes."

In the United States, wrote criminologist Gus Xhudo in the Spring 1996 issue of *Transnational Organized Crime*, Albanian mobsters have been involved in "drug and refugee smuggling, arms trafficking, contract killing, kidnaping, false visa forgery, and burglary." Between 1985 and 1995, wrote Xhudo, "authorities estimated that 10 million U.S. dollars in cash and merchandise had been stolen from some 300 supermarkets, ATM machines, jewelry stores, and restaurants" by Albanian gangsters, a healthy cut of which was sent to fund "Greater Albanian" ambitions.

In Albanian gangs, reported Xhudo, "the basic command structure, reliant upon their politico-cultural experiences with communist rule, is one rooted in community party apparatus." A Leadership Council (whose membership, according to law enforcement officials, includes several leading Albanian politicians) directs the syndicate's international efforts through a decentralized chain of command. Recruits into Albanian gangs "swear an oath of allegiance and secrecy, an omerta or besa (literally, promise or word of honor in Albanian)," Xhudo explained. The executive committee of each Albanian bajrak (or crime "family") provides "the requisite tactics and training necessary for conducting arms and drug smuggling, as well as sophisticated burglaries."

The hands-on work of the crime syndicates is performed by "crews" made up of four to ten members: "A-team" units trained in the use of sophisticated tools and communications gear, and "B-teams" who, "while lacking in sophistication ... make up for it in brutality and cunning." In the mid-1990s, law enforcement officials in New York and New Jersey noticed that Albanian gangsters had dramatically improved their surveillance and counter-surveillance skills. This led some officials to suspect that former agents of the *Sigurimi*, the Communist Albanian secret police, had begun to train "crews" in this country. Even without the *Sigurimi's* help, however, the Albanian mob had established itself as a force to be reckoned with in the world of narcotics smuggling. Xhudo wrote that "by the mid-1980s, Albanians ... were already gaining notoriety for their drug trafficking," playing a predominant role in the "Balkan Connection" through which passed up to 40 percent of the heroin sold on U.S. streets.

Narcotics Network

Asked by THE NEW AMERICAN about accusations that the KLA is implicated in drug smuggling and terrorism, Shirley Cloyes, the Balkan affairs adviser for the Albanian American Civic League (AACL), dismissed the charges as "absolutely preposterous" products of "Serb propaganda." "These reports are quite baffling, and it is very, very disturbing that such propaganda has been given wide currency in the press," Cloyes declared. "As the atrocities of Milosevic's regime have been exposed to the public, the Serb propaganda machine has stepped up its rhetoric about the supposed connections between the KLA and drug traffickers and Islamic fundamentalists. There is simply no merit to any of these charges."

Former counter-narcotics agent Michael Levine, author of the exposés *Deep Cover* and *The Big White Lie*, begs to differ with Cloyes' assessment. "Backing the KLA is simply insane," Levine protests. Levine, a highly decorated former

undercover agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) told THE NEW AMERICAN, "My contacts within the DEA are quite frankly terrified, but they can say with outstretched hands that they have a network that's active on the streets of the city. It's a scary operation. In fact, the Mafia relied on Albanian hitmen to carry out a lot of their contracts. They're the worst elements of society that you can imagine, and now, according to my sources in drug enforcement, they're politically protected."

"It's the same old story," Levine notes. "Ten years ago we were arming and equipping the worst elements of the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan — drug traffickers, arms smugglers, anti-American terrorists. We later paid the price when the World Trade Center was bombed, and we learned that some of those responsible had been trained by us. Now we're doing the same thing with the KLA, which is tied in with every known middle and far eastern drug cartel. Interpol, Europol, and nearly every European intelligence and counter-narcotics agency has files open on drug syndicates that lead right to the KLA, and right to Albanian gangs in this country."

In early April, the FBI announced that an anonymous fax had been sent to Serbian Orthodox churches across the country urging Serbian-Americans to carry out terrorist acts against members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Although the FBI subsequently dismissed the message as a "rant" rather than a terrorist threat, the incident still served to misdirect public attention, according to Levine. "It's possible that a Serb might commit an act of terrorism, but the KLA's got a whole network up and running in this country, and they're in bed with Osama bin-Laden, who's shown that he intends to kill Americans and has the means to do it," Levine declares.

Robert Gelbard, the Clinton Administration's former special envoy for Kosovo, told Agence France Presse in February 1998 that the KLA "is, without any questions, a terrorist group." After this remark provoked criticism from the KLA's American partisans that it amounted to a "green light" for Milosevic to carry out repression against Kosovo's Albanian population, Gelbard clarified his point by telling the House Committee on International Relations that while the KLA had committed terrorist acts, it had never "been classified legally by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization."

In light of the fact that the KLA has been embraced by Osama bin-Laden, who has been identified by the Administration as the kingpin of global terrorism, this omission is a curious one indeed. On August 24th of last year, shortly after U.S. cruise missiles struck supposed assets of bin-Laden's network in Sudan and Afghanistan, the Saudi terror chieftain's World Islamic Front (WIF) issued a communiqué urging its followers to "direct your attacks to the American army and her allies, the infidels." Kosovo was listed among the locales in which the communiqué claimed the WIF had "achieved great victories" in recent years. In a November 30th dispatch from Pristina, Kosovo, *The Scotsman* reported that bin-Laden's operatives were active in Albania. In addition, intelligence officials reported that "Mujahadeen units from at least a half dozen Middle East countries [are] streaming across the border into Kosovo from safe bases in Albania."

Complement to Bloodshed

As preparations for NATO's war in Kosovo proceeded, according to *The Scotsman*, the Clinton Administration asked the KLA "to distance themselves from so-called Mujahadeen fundamentalists." In exchange, the Administration held out the promise of political and military support. According to the February 24th *New York Times*, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright promised the KLA leadership that in exchange for its signatures on the Rambouillet peace accord, "Officers in the Kosovo Liberation Army would ... be sent to the United States for training in transforming themselves from a guerilla group into a police force or a political entity, much like the African National Congress did in South Africa."

"We want to develop a good relationship with them as they transform themselves into a politically oriented organization," declared deputy State Department spokesman James Foley. "We want to develop closer and better ties with this organization."

Military cooperation between the KLA and NATO is already a reality in Kosovo. The *Times* of London reported on April 20th that KLA guerillas, using satellite communications systems, have been target-spotting for NATO bombing runs over the province. "The intelligence is passed to Western 'handlers' who relay the targets to the alliance, enabling NATO to claim that it has no 'formal links' with the rebels," continued the *Times*. Some of those "handlers" are commandos from the British SAS Special Forces; others reportedly are from the U.S. Delta Force.

One British report suggested that Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI), the Virginia-based private military training firm, had been retained by the Albanian government to train and equip the KLA. MPRI spokesman Ed Soyster told THE NEW AMERICAN that while the firm has ongoing programs in Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia, "we've not been contacted by the Albanian government, and we're not going to get in the middle of that thing in Kosovo." Alluding to the KLA's background in drug smuggling and terrorism, Soyster said that "this group is something that we simply don't want to associate with" — an interesting assessment, given the firm's willingness to contract with unsavory elements in both Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Some KLA partisans in the U.S. are urging the Administration to dispense with

“handlers” and arm the KLA direct...
 Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) introduced the Kosovo Self-Defense Act, which would provide \$100 million to the KLA and “equip 10,000”

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and anti-tank weapons for up to 18 months. McConnell told his colleagues, “Given Administration reluctance to deploy U.S. troops, there is only one option — the KLA must be given the means to defend their homeland.” Congressman James Traficant (D-OH) has introduced a complementary measure in the House.

Not surprisingly, the AACL supports the proposal to arm the KLA — but only in combination with the deployment of U.S. troops, rather than as a substitute for such a deployment. “Mr. President, how many Albanians must die before we do the right thing — namely arm the KLA, as we did the Croats in Bosnia — and committing NATO ground troops to stop the genocide and finish the job we started?” pleaded AACL director Joseph DiGuardi in a letter to Bill Clinton. Asked by THE NEW AMERICAN why American troops are necessary if the KLA can recruit Albanians from the diaspora to fight on the ground, the AACL’s Shirley Cloyes replied, “Our position has always been that we should start with arming the KLA before we send in ground troops.” This is to say that the AACL — which is essentially the KLA’s public relations organ — does not see arming the KLA as an alternative to shedding American blood on the ground in Kosovo, but as a complement to a ground campaign: The KLA gets U.S. arms to continue its irredentist campaign, and U.S. servicemen get the dubious privilege of dying on behalf of “Greater Albania” and, of course, the new world order.

A “Greater Albania”

When the conversation turned to the question of the KLA’s larger designs, Cloyes stuck close to her scripted talking points. “I have no time for talk about ‘Greater Albania,’” Cloyes emphatically told THE NEW AMERICAN. “The only quest for hegemony in the Balkans is Milosevic’s quest for a ‘Greater Serbia.’ You have only one land grab, and that’s Serbia’s grab of Kosovo.” When asked if it is the KLA’s intention to change existing borders in the Balkans, as the map distributed by the group suggests, Cloyes once again parried the inquiry by condemning “Serb aggression”: “There are no borders to change. The only borders that have been changed were changed by Serbia.” It will be interesting to see how this line of reasoning plays with those residents of Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece who live within the KLA-defined boundaries of “Greater Albania.”

“In the end, it will come to this: Led by the KLA, Kosovo will separate from Serbia, whether by negotiations or by violence,” concluded Christopher Hedges in his *Foreign Affairs* essay. “The grim reality is that we had better get to know the KLA — because it is not going away.” It must be remembered that *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations, serves to define policy alternatives for America’s foreign policy elite. Thus, Hedges’ essay could be taken as a summary of the official Establishment line.

“Why quit our own to stand on foreign ground?” asked George Washington in his Farewell Address. “Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice?” The wisdom of Washington’s warning to eschew damaging entanglements is underscored by the utterly demented determination of our ruling Establishment to knit our destiny with that of the KLA.

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