Serbian “Ethnic Cleansing” of Albanians in Kosova

Kosova lies on the south of former Yugoslavia, bordered by Serbia proper to the northeast, Montenegro to the north, Macedonia to the south and Albania to the southwest. More than 90% of its 2 million people are Albanians, and most of the rest are Serbs. Albanians also live in large numbers in aforementioned areas bordering Kosova: 1 million in Macedonia; 100,000 in Montenegro; 50,000 in Serbia proper (Presheve, Medvegje, and Bujanovc); and 3.5 million in the state of Albania – a divided nation of 7 million people living side by side in the Balkans.

THE KOSOVA PROBLEM SINCE WORLD WAR II

The 1946 Yugoslav constitution recognized the separate identity of Kosova. At the same time, it divided Albanian-inhabited lands among Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro. In 1963, under the influence of Serbian secret police, boss Alexander Rankovic, Kosova was incorporated as commune in Serbia. After Rankovic’s fall in 1974, Kosova was reinstated as an autonomous Province and given federal representation equal to that of the six Yugoslav republics of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Slovenia and Montenegro.

Following Tito’s death, persecution by Serbian Government troops ensued, which led to massive student uprising in Kosova in 1981. The Serbian police and troops killed at least twenty-two Albanians and beat wounded and arrested thousands more. From 1981 to 1988, official statistics confirm the arrest and jailing of more than 7000 people and the incredible figure of 586,000 Albanians (about 1/3 of the Albanian population) who passed through the hands of police for one reason or another.

Serbian determination to strip Kosova of its independence accelerated the violence. In 1989, the Serbian authorities forcibly abolished the autonomy of Kosova and sent Yugoslav tanks to patrol the streets. Six days of rioting ensued, during which more than 100 Albanians were killed and more than 900 arrested.
In April, 1990, facing more demonstrations, Serbia passed a special law extending prior emergency measures. The people of Kosova through their Assembly responded on July 2nd with a declaration of independence. Three days later, Serbia suspended the Kosova Assembly, falsely purporting that the Serbian minority in Kosova was being oppressed by the Albanian majority. Serbia then seized some seventy-five enterprises, including hospitals, and energy plants. On September 7, following the general strike, the Assembly met secretly, proclaimed Kosova a Republic within the Yugoslav Federation, and adopted the Constitution. By September 17, its 111 Albanian members had been arrested or had fled into hiding or exile. On September 28, 1990, Serbia adopted a new Constitution that completely eliminated Kosova’s autonomy. As of mid-1991, the people of Kosova held a referendum in which 87% of the population participated, resulting in a 99% vote in favor of an independent state. In October 19th, 1991, based on this referendum, Kosova was declared a sovereign independent state and a transitional government was formed. In May, 1992, the first multiparty elections for parliament and president of the Republic of Kosova took place. On June 23, 1992, however, the Serbian police used armed vehicles to prevent seating of a newly-elected government in Kosova.

In the years that followed, life for the Albanian people of Kosova deteriorated dramatically. In spite of their policy of peaceful resistance, the barbaric treatment at the hands of the Serbian Police, paramilitary, and military persisted unchecked on a daily basis.

Serbian police have expelled nearly all Albanian physicians, dismissed 7000 students, prohibited the use of Albanian as a language of instruction, closed the University of Prishtina, replaced the Albanian judges with Serbian jurists, and engaged in random beatings, kidnappings, torture, house searches and killing. The Serbian government has shut down Albanian Radio and television operations and used its own media to promote anti-Albanian racism in the region. Economic strangulation has been a key element of Serbia’s takeover of Kosova. “Compulsory administration” has been imposed on most of Kosova’s more than one hundred economic centers, resulting in the collapse of Kosova’s economy. More than 75,000 Albanian families are unemployed. It is estimated that close to half a million Albanians are suffering from food shortages, and there is a very real danger of widespread starvation. Many analysts believe that the Serbian government is trying to bring the Albanian population to its knees through hunger.

With no real recognition and intervention by the International community to prevent the daily brutality inflicted on innocent civilians, Albanians had no choice but to resort the self-defense of their families, neighbors, property, and communities. The ill-equipped Kosova Liberation Army emerged from this struggle to survive and it has declared itself as a defense force with no terrorist aims. The most recent events in Kosova, from February 28 to
March 8, 1998 in the Drenica region, including the villages of Prekaz, Voynich, Llausha, and Likosan clearly demonstrate what has been feared all along; namely that the atrocities that the world witnessed in Bosnia will be repeated in Kosova and will result in completely lopsided conflict in which the unarmed civilian population of Kosova is massacred. A full-scale civil war is certain to involve the larger Albanian population in Macedonia, Montenegro, Southern Serbia, and Albania, and this would make the nightmare of a second genocidal war in Europe in this century a reality.

CONCLUSION

The Albanian American Civic League believes that the west must play an immediate role in stopping the Serbian assault on Albanian villages, which has its aim the “ethnic cleansing” of the Albanians of Kosova. Because of the importance of the Balkans to our national security, President Clinton had already dispatched some six hundred American troops in neighboring Macedonia, as observers, and we have committed a substantial contingent of American soldiers in Bosnia. With the recent, tragic Serbian assault in Kosova, it is now time to take strong measures to prevent further bloodshed.

President Bush on his way out of office and President Clinton on assuming office clearly put Slobodan Milosevic on notice that “a line has been drawn in the sand of Kosova.” President Clinton should now make good on this foreign policy declaration by implementing a swift and powerful counterstroke against any further aggressions against the Albanians in Kosova.

Kosova Situation

Historical Perspective

Albanians in the former Yugoslavia are an indigenous population living in their historical homeland. They inhabited these territories since the times of the ancient Illyrians, from whom they descended. Today, they make up about 50 percent of the Albanian people in the Balkans (50 percent living in the mother country, Albania). Kosova, as well as the other territories inhabited by Albanians in Yugoslavia, was occupied by Serbia in 1913, and the
Europe of those days approved the borders we have today. The new arrangement dismembered the Albanian territories leaving the predominantly Albanian lands of Eastern Albanian to Serbia, and later to Yugoslavia. Similarly, after World War II, Serbia succeeded in reannexing Kosova again by force. Immediately following World War II and for a short period thereafter, Albanians in Kosova, who make up over 90 percent of the local population, enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. This brief period was fully destroyed by Serbia after 1981. Today Kosova is an occupied territory with a heavy concentration of Police forces and military units from Serbia. The present confrontation in Kosova dates back six hundreds years. In June 13, 1399, in the battle of Kosovopolja the allied Christian armies of Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania, under the command of the Serbian King Lazar, fought a gallant but losing battle against the advancing Ottoman Turks. From that year until 1913, nearly the entire Balkan area came under Ottoman rule, which ended only with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire on the eve of World War I.

With the creation of modern Yugoslavia in 1945, six federal “republics” emerged: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. Serbia included two autonomous provinces: Voivodina, with a large Hungarian population, and the predominantly Albanian Kosova. The latter is a province with a 2 million population (1990) bordering on Albania and occupying an area about the size of the state of Connecticut. Large numbers of Albanians (approx. 1 million) were left to the Republics of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia proper.

From 1974 on, Kosova was governed by an elected parliament under Serbian control, but with considerable latitude to organize it’s internal affairs. Since May 1987, the rise in power of Serbia’s Communist Party boss, Slobodan Milosevic, was accompanied by a sharp rise in Serbian chauvinism and the continual destruction of Kosova’s autonomy. The destructive process began in 1981, after the bloody student riots that left as many as 300 Albanians killed. More than 600,000 Albanians (approx. 1/3 of the Albanian population) have gone through police hands since then, and over 7,000 have received jail sentences of up to 20 years. In 1988, 1989 and 1990, a wave of massive demonstrations by dissatisfied Albanians were mercilessly crushed by mainly the Serbian police. During this period of time, seventy cases of Albanians murdered by the Police have been reported. The wounded and the arrested are in the hundreds and maybe in the thousands. Police brutality, operating on “emergency state laws” has reached monstrous proportions: house searches, massive beatings, torture and killings. With the forced “constitutional changes” of March 1989, and the subsequent dismantling of Kosova’s administration and economy (Serbia has taken over 250 large and medium-sized companies), Kosova has been transformed into an administrative and economic appendix of Serbia, and human rights of Albanians are violated at will. Faced with these “intolerable acts”, 115 delegates from the Assembly of Kosova proclaimed the independence of Kosova within the Yugoslav Federation/Confederation (July 2, 1990) and promulgated clandestinely the Constitution of the Republic of Kosova.
(September 7, 1990). Serbia’s response has been the abolition of the Assembly of Kosova and the dissolution of its Government. A Serbian “gauleiter” rules now over Kosova by decree. Presently, the struggle in Kosova is between the 90 percent Albanian population led by the democratic parties and engaged in peaceful resistance on one side, and the ruling pro-communist Government of Serbia acting as an occupying power with the assistance of the 9 percent Serbian minority, on the other side. Under these circumstances, Albanians insist on free elections and the work resumption by the Assembly and the Government of Kosova. Serbia so far has rejected these demands. In Macedonia (where almost one million Albanians live) the recent elections (November 1990) produced 23 elected Albanian delegates to the 120 Member Macedonian Parliament. In Montenegro (with over 50,000 Albanians) elections gave them some minor representation. It appears that only through a genuine democratic process can the thorny political problems of Yugoslavia be overcome. In its First report The Society for Endangered Nations (Germany 1987) writes: “This Topic should be taken in parliaments and pressure exercised on governments not to give further help, credit and trade facilities to Yugoslavia, unless (the Yugoslav Communist Government) stop violating human rights, and they render equality to Albanians and all other nations of this multi-national state”.