

Balkan realities: Who is responsible for War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia?

By [James Bissett](#)

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Text of Letter to the editor in the Washington Times in response to an article by Tod Lindberg

Tod Lindberg is right that the EU and NATO countries should not turn their backs on Balkan countries wishing to share in the peace and prosperity of the new Europe. However, he is wrong to suggest that it was only Slobodan Milosevic's "genocidal policies" that set the Balkans in flames in the early 1990s and wrong to condemn Serbian determination to maintain Kosovo as an integral part of its territory ("Where Milosevic's butchery held sway," Op-Ed, July 11).

It has become fashionable to blame Milosevic and Serbia for everything that went wrong in the former Yugoslavia while overlooking the concerns of the Christian Serbian population in Bosnia and in Kosovo at the grim prospects of having to live in Muslim-dominated states.

Alia Izetbegovic, the Muslim Bosnian leader, was an Islamist extremist who made no attempt to hide his plans for destroying the Christian entity in Bosnia, writing, "There can be no peace or co-existence between the Islamist faith and non-Islamist institutions." As for Agim Ceku, the so-called prime minister of Kosovo, the Canadian military knows what crimes he is guilty of even if the Hague Tribunal refused to indict him.

In 1993, Mr. Ceku commanded Croatian forces that violated a U.N.-brokered cease-fire and overran three Serbian villages in the Medac pocket. When the Canadians counterattacked and re-entered the burned villages, they discovered all of the inhabitants and domestic animals had been slaughtered. Mr. Ceku later also ordered undefended Serbian villages shelled in violation of the rules of war, causing heavy casualties among the civilian population.

In 2002, Mr. Ceku was indicted by Serbia for responsibility as a Kosovo Liberation Army commander for the murders of 669 Serbians and other non-Albanians during the fighting that broke out in Kosovo in 1998. The indictment includes murder, abduction, torture and ethnic cleansing of the non-Albanian population from Kosovo. This is the man recently invited to Washington to meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, a meeting obviously planned to show U.S. support for Kosovo independence.

For many outside observers, including this writer, the continued support by the United States for an independent Kosovo is incomprehensible. Granting independence to Kosovo would be a serious violation of Serbia's territorial integrity, which is one of the most cherished principles of international law and is enshrined in the United Nations Charter. U.S.

violation of this principle would have far-reaching implications for the very framework of international peace and security.

Independence for Kosovo also would create a criminal and terrorist state in the heart of the Balkans. This is not a happy prospect in today's world.

Kosovo independence would set a precedent for other aspiring ethnic groups for independent status and would destabilize not only the Balkans, but many other parts of the world. It also would mark a low point in U.S. foreign policy. It is difficult to be held up as the champion of the rule of law, of democracy and the global war on terror, while at the same time giving support to war criminals and terrorists.

James Bissett was Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia in the 1990s. He has been a staunch critic of US and NATO policies in the Balkans.

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