

In the Months Prior to 9/11: US Covert Support to Al Qaeda in Macedonia, “Financing Both Sides”

By [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#)
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This essay was first published by antiwar.com in April 2001, barely 5 months before the September 11, 2001 attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon.

It was subsequently published by Global Research when the site was launched in September 9, 2001. That was twenty-two years ago.

What is of utmost significance in our understanding of Al Qaeda’s alleged role in 9/11 is that US military operatives on contract the Pentagon were involved (in the months leading up to 9/11) in providing support to separatist forces in Macedonia with links to al Qaeda.

Michel Chossudovsky, August 31, 2022

US Finances Ethnic Warfare in the Balkans

by Michel Chossudovsky

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INTRODUCTION

While Washington supports the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, it is at the same time – behind the scenes – funneling money and military hardware to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) now engaged in a border war with the Macedonian Security Forces. In a cruel irony, Washington is arming and advising both the KLA attackers and the Macedonian defenders under military and intelligence authorization acts approved by the US Congress. Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), a mercenary outfit on contract to the Pentagon, is helping Macedonia – as part of a US military aid package – “to deter armed aggression and defend Macedonian territory.” But MPRI is also advising and equipping the KLA, which is responsible for the terrorist assaults. In this war, the American military-intelligence apparatus is pulling strings “on both sides of the fence.” What is the hidden agenda?

“[The] United States of America and the Kosovo Liberation Army stand for the same human values and principles ... Fighting for the KLA is fighting for human rights and American values.” (Senator Joseph Lieberman, quoted in the Washington Post, 28 April 1999)

THE KLA IS TRANSFORMED

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) – transformed in September 1999 into the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) under UN auspices – is behind the terrorist attacks in the Tetovo region of Macedonia as well as in Southern Serbia. In Macedonia, these assaults are waged by the KLA's proxy: the Ushtira Clirimtare Komtare (UCK) or National Liberation Army (NLA). The terrorists operate from KLA bases inside Kosovo under KFOR protection.

Supported by the US, the KLA and its various proxies are well equipped. According to Carl Bildt (special UN coordinator for the Balkans), the Macedonian Security Forces “are no match” for the rebels:

“the guerrillas are a competent military organization... They have a core of very experienced fighters. They are well fortified, evidently well prepared, and in all probability they control substantial parts of the hinterland.”

But where did they get the money? The Western media conveys the impression that the National Liberation Army (NLA) developed into a modern rebel force overnight, spontaneously “out of thin air” and that NATO leaders have no contacts with the KLA.

UN PEACE-KEEPING FINANCES TERRORISM

According to the (London) Sunday Times,

“American intelligence agents have admitted they helped to train the Kosovo Liberation Army before NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia.”¹

A review of US Congressional documents would suggest that CIA support was not discontinued after the war.² Moreover, while the KLA maintains its links both to the CIA and criminal syndicates involved in the Balkans narcotics trade, the paramilitary organisation - renamed the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) has been elevated to UN status, implying the granting of legitimate sources of funding through UN as well as through bilateral channels.

Procurement of military supplies, training of the KLA and military advisers has been entrusted to Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), a US based mercenary outfit linked to the Pentagon. The pattern is similar to that followed in Croatia and in the Bosnian Muslim-Croatian Federation where so-called “equip and train” programmes were put together by the Pentagon.

Central Balkan Region



MPRI's training concepts - which had already been tested in Croatia and Bosnia - are based on imparting "offensive tactics... as the best form of defence."³ In the Kosovar context, this so-called "defensive doctrine" applied in terrorist assaults in Southern Serbia and Macedonia is intent upon transforming the KLA paramilitary into a modern military force which serves the Alliance's strategic objectives. MPRI listed in 1999 "ninety-one highly experienced, former military professionals working in Bosnia & Herzegovina."⁴ The number of military officers working on contract with the KLA has not been disclosed.

There is, however, a consistent thread: KLA Chief of Staff Agim Ceku (previously with the Croatian Armed Forces) has been involved in a long-term relationship with the MPRI. Ceku

started working with MPRI in 1995 in the planning of “Operation Storm” in Croatia, which led to ethnic massacres and the expulsion of more than 200.000 Serbs from the Krajina region of Croatia. The fact that Ceku is “an alleged war criminal” – according to the files of the Hague Tribunal (a body reporting to the UN Secretary General) – does not, however, seem to bother anybody in the “international community.”⁵

Ceku holds a UN passport (Laissez-Passer) which provides him with diplomatic immunity within Kosovo. According to ICTY prosecutor Carla del Ponte, Ceku’s reputation and integrity, however, are unstained because the Hague tribunal’s “inquiries ... relate to atrocities committed [by Ceku] in Krajina ... between 1993 and 1995. Ceku’s record in Kosovo itself is not thought to be in question.”⁶

Behind to polite façade of international diplomacy, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has – on Washington’s instructions – knowingly and willfully approved the appointment of “an alleged war criminal” to participate in a UN peacekeeping operation. In other words, the UN system is “financing terrorism,” creating an ugly precedent in the history of a respected international body: “The United Nations is paying the salaries of many of the gangsters,” who are now involved in the terrorist assaults into Macedonia.⁷

RECYCLING NARCO-DOLLARS

US support to the KLA is only one among several sources of KLA financing. Various Islamic organisations have channeled money and military equipment to the KLA. Prior to the 1999 war,

“German, Turkish and Afghan instructors were reported to be training the KLA in guerilla and diversion tactics.”⁸

Mujehadeen mercenaries recruited in a number of countries fought against Serb Security forces alongside the KLA in Kosovo. According to the ‘Sunday Times,’ the recent assaults by the KLA’s proxy in the Tetovo region of Macedonia have been “encouraged by mercenaries from Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia.”⁹

Amply documented, the Balkans drug trade is used to finance ethnic warfare with the complicity of the US and NATO. The pattern of covert support – through the recycling of narco-dollars – has been an integral part of CIA covert operations since the Soviet-Afghan war. According to documents of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), “members of the notorious Albanian mafia have links to a drug smuggling cartel” based in Kosovo’s capital, Pristina. This cartel is allegedly manned by ethnic Albanians who are members of the Kosovo National Front (KNF) whose armed wing is the KLA. The DEA documents apparently show it is one of the “most powerful heroin smuggling organisations in the world” with its profits being diverted to the KLA to buy weapons.¹⁰

In the words of former DEA agent and author Michael Levine:

“Ten years ago we were arming and equipping the worst elements of the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan – drug traffickers, arms smugglers, anti-American terrorists...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.”¹¹

While US aid – combined with drug money – is channeled to the KLA, Washington and Brussels perfunctorily condemn the NLA-Tetovo instigated terrorist assaults while casually denying the links of the attackers to the KLA. In the words of former NATO Secretary General Javier Solana: “it would be a mistake to negotiate,... the terrorists have to be isolated. All of us have to condemn and isolate them. Nothing can be achieved through violence” ...

NATO has pledged to “starve” the rebels by cutting supply lines from neighboring Kosovo.”¹² While condemning the terrorists, NATO – through the UN – has also been “raising the urgent need for restraint by the Macedonian forces.”¹³

This double talk is of course a form of political camouflage: you say that you are against the terrorists and then support them via the KLA with guns, ammo and military advisers paid by the US public purse.

FINANCING BOTH SIDES

But there is something else even more terrifying which has not been revealed to public opinion. The guerilla war in the Tetovo region of Macedonia is being financed and therefore controlled by Washington “on both sides” of the border. While Washington pumps money into the KLA, the FYR of Macedonia – which has been an obedient client state – is also the recipient of US military aid and training. Macedonia is a member of NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) and aspires to acquire full NATO membership.

The same group of US military advisers on contract with the KLA is also “helping” the Macedonian Armed Forces. The MPRI – while assisting the KLA in its terrorist assaults – is also present behind enemy lines in Macedonia under a so-called “Stability and Deterrence Program.” The latter is intent upon “assisting the Macedonian Armed Forces ... to deter armed aggression and, should deterrence fail, defend Macedonian territory....”¹⁴ What is happening is that the US mercenary company with a mandate “to defend the border” is also advising the KLA on how best “to attack the border.”

Is this not crystal clear: The military-intelligence ploy is to finance both sides of the conflict, provide military aid to one side and finance the other side. And then “make them fight.” It’s a sinister military-intelligence game, an “insider operation” with US military advisers on both sides from the same mercenary outfit (the MPRI). Macedonia’s “Stability and Deterrence Program” is in fact largely supported by US foreign military sales (FMS), namely MPRI is in charge of delivering (i.e. dumping) to the Macedonian Armed Forces obsolete weapons and hardware which the US Department of Defense wants to get rid of.

Moreover, with its various sources of financing (drugs, Islamic organisations, US military aid, contributions from the US-Albanian community), the KLA and its Macedonian proxy the Ushtira Clirimtare Komtare have the upper edge. The money channeled from various sources including the drug trade far exceeds the meager FMS allocations granted in the form of surplus military equipment to the Macedonian Ministry of Defence.¹⁵

The friendly and cordial meetings held in Skopje (July 2000) between General Henry H. Shelton, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and his Macedonian counterpart, General Jovan Andrevski, constitute an obvious smoke screen. While America's top brass pays lip service to its PfP partner and ally, the KLA – with the support of the Albanian American community – is actively recruiting US citizens to fight as volunteers against the Macedonian Security Forces.¹⁶ Bear in mind that this pattern of “financing both sides” is not limited to the Balkans: since the end of the Cold War, Washington has been involved in channeling covert financing and triggering civil conflicts in different parts of the World including Central Africa, the Caucasus and Central Asia. By financing both sides of the conflict, the US controls the outcome of the war.

MPRI OVERSEES THE SHOW

While recruiting a wide range of military and intelligence expertise from its data bank of former military personnel, MPRI is controlled by a handful of former generals and ex-CIA officers. MPRI General (retired) Rich Griffiths – responsible for MPRI's program in Macedonia – is talking to the Macedonian Chief of Staff. He also talks to KLA Commander Agim Ceku – with whom he has established a longstanding relationship since Operation Storm in Croatia in 1995. Ceku is part of the MPRI's “old boys network”; in collaboration with MPRI, he was one of the main architects of “Operation Storm.” In this capacity, he also acted as Commander of the Artillery division, which ruthlessly shelled Krajina Serb civilians!¹⁷

Whether MPRI personnel stationed in Kosovo is in direct contact or communication with their colleagues in Macedonia is not the issue: all MPRI military staff in the field report back to Rich Griffiths, Crosbie Saint and Carl Vuono (President of MPRI) at the company's headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. Crosbie Saint – in charge of the company's “International Group” – coordinates MPRI's various operations in Kosovo and Macedonia as well as in Croatia and Bosnia. In turn, Saint – who is a former director of military intelligence – is in permanent contact with the Pentagon, KFOR and the CIA.¹⁸

HIDDEN AGENDA

So what kind of war is this? Both sides in the Macedonia border war are controlled by the US. American military personnel from the same private mercenary company are stationed on “both sides of the fence” assisting their local counterparts to fight a war on Washington's behest.

If this war is allowed to continue, it will inevitably lead to the escalation of ethnic hatred, civilian casualties and refugees. This in turn will result in political destabilization and social unrest in both Macedonia and Yugoslavia, thereby providing a pretext to Washington and NATO to directly intervene under the disguise of “peace-keeping” and “confidence building.” The hidden agenda also consists in the mobilization of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia to support or become part of the KLA'S structure.

In other words, Washington is “financing ethnic warfare” as a means to achieving broad geopolitical, strategic and economic objectives using the KLA as proxy force. Meanwhile, the “international community” – warning of an impending “humanitarian disaster” – has sent in an army of observers and human rights experts, with a mandate to protect the political and social rights of ethnic Albanians. This brokered “reconciliation” – imposed by NATO under UN auspices – is based on the premise that ethnic Albanians in Macedonia are an oppressed

social minority. It not only fosters socio-ethnic divisions within Macedonia; it also provides legitimacy to the KLA sponsored “freedom fighters” as well as international media sympathy. It tends to discredit the Macedonian Security Forces, thereby weakening their ability to fight the KLA.

While Washington continues to support the terrorists behind the scenes, the military alliance presents itself as an impartial mediator. In turn, NATO’s informal mouthpiece, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), is placing the blame on the Skopje government, calling upon:

“the legal authorities in the FYR of Macedonia, Presevo and Kosovo to act to restore peace and security, ... all sectors of the Macedonian society [should] co-operate peacefully and ... build inter-ethnic confidence.”¹⁹

The dispatching of Bulgarian troops into Macedonia (under NATO’s “Partnership for Peace” Program) to fight the rebels could (if implemented) contribute to triggering a much broader conflagration in the region. Similarly, ethnic clashes – also engineered by Washington – have been triggered in Montenegro, which has a sizeable Albanian ethnic minority. And in Montenegro, the MUP, Montenegro’s highly partisan police force is being assisted by the Croatian Armed Forces, which in turn are being trained by the MPRI under the so-called Croatian Armed Forces Readiness and Training System (CARTS). Similarly, demanding “autonomy” for ethnic Hungarians in the North of Vojvodina is part of NATO’s ploy with large numbers of NATO troops stationed on the Hungarian side of the border. More generally, the various military aid packages provided to Croatia, Bosnia and the KLA are ultimately directed against Serbia.²⁰

Despite the compliance of the Belgrade and Skopje governments to Washington’s demands, US foreign policy purports to eventually dismantle political institutions and get rid of political parties which resist US-NATO domination. Their objective is to eventually break up what remains of Yugoslavia into what UN Balkans envoy Carl Bildt has called a “patchwork of protectorates” on the “Kosovo-Bosnia model under UN “peace-keeping,” namely under military occupation.²¹

A Dayton-style agreement is the chosen framework for displacing and destroying existing State institutions including a fragile yet functioning parliamentary system. With regard to Macedonia, the OSCE has appointed Ambassador Robert Frowick to work with the Skopje government. His terms of reference are clear. In 1996, Frowick was put in charge of implementing “democracy” in Bosnia-Herzegovina under the Dayton agreement: the Bosnian “Constitution” – previously drafted by American lawyers at the US Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio – was appended to the 1995 US brokered “General Framework Agreement.”²²

DISARMING THE NEW WORLD ORDER

The terrorist assaults in Macedonia and Southern Serbia are serving Washington’s strategic goals in blatant violation of international law. NATO is increasingly discredited in the eyes of World public opinion. The lies and falsehoods are surfacing and the people of Yugoslavia are determined to preserve their sovereignty in the face of American aggression.

US foreign policy directed against so-called “rogue states” lacks credibility both in the US and internationally. Around the World, citizens are looking to Yugoslavia and the courage of

its people who have resisted the imposition of the New World Order. The lies concerning the war against Yugoslavia have been uncovered and revealed to millions of people.

NOTES

1. Tom Walker and Aiden Laverty, 'CIA Aided Kosovo Guerrilla Army', *Sunday Times*, 12 March 2000).
2. See "Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000." HR 1555, Section 308 ["Report on Kosova Liberation Army."](#)
3. See Tammy Arbucki, "Building a Bosnian Army," *Jane's International Defence Review*, August 1997.
4. See Military Professional Resources, Inc, "[Personnel Needs](#)," MPRI web page.
5. See Michel Chossudovsky, "[United Nations Appoints Alleged War Criminal](#)," *Emperors Clothes*, March 2000.
6. See Tom Walker, "Kosovo Defense Chief Accused of War Crimes," *Sunday Times*, London, 10 October 1999.
7. Quoted in John Sweeney and Jen Holsoe, "Kosovo Disaster Response Service Stands Accused of Murder and Torture," *The Observer*, London, 12 March 2000.
8. Michel Chossudovsky, "Kosovo Freedom Fighters Financed by Organized Crime," *Covert Action Quarterly*, Fall 1999, also published by [Emperors Clothes](#).
9. Tom Walker, "NATO Troops caught in a Balkan Ulster," *Sunday Times*, London, 18 March 2001.
10. According to DEA documents reviewed and quoted in R. Chandran, "[US-backed KLA linked to Heroin Network](#)."
11. [Quoted in the New American Magazine](#), May 24, 1999)
12. Quoted in the *New York Times*, 20 March 2001)
13. United Nations Interim Administration Mission In Kosovo (UNMIK), Press Release, 29 March 2001.
14. See [MPRI](#).
15. US military aid under the FMS program for Macedonia was \$4 million in FY 2000, 7.9 million was appropriated for 2001. More recently, the US announced a \$13.5 million military aid package, See Government of Macedonia, Ministry of Defence, Communique, 21 March 2001; Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2001, Released by the Office of the Secretary of State, Resources, Plans and Policy, U.S. Department of State, March 15, 2000.
16. *New York Times*, 19 March 2001.
17. See Michel Chossudovsky, "[NATO has Installed a Reign of Terror in Kosovo](#)," July 1999.
18. See [MPRI](#).
19. [Statement by OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Severin on former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo](#), 23 March 2001.
20. See Michel Chossudovsky, "[The War Against Yugoslavia Is Not Over](#)," June 2000.
21. See [Carl Bildt's statement](#). Bildt was formerly the High Representative in Bosnia following the adoption of the Dayton Agreement in 1995).
22. For a discussion see Michel Chossudovsky, "Dismantling Yugoslavia, Recolonizing Bosnia," *Covert Action Quarterly*, Spring 1996, also published by [Emperors Clothes](#). Also, see text of the [Bosnian Constitution](#).

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About the author:

Michel Chossudovsky is an award-winning author, Professor of Economics (emeritus) at the University of Ottawa, Founder and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), Montreal, Editor of Global Research. He has taught as visiting professor in Western Europe, Southeast Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. He has served as economic adviser to governments of developing countries and has acted as a consultant for several international organizations. He is the author of 13 books. He is a contributor to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. His writings have been published in more than twenty languages. In 2014, he was awarded the Gold Medal for Merit of the Republic of Serbia for his writings on NATO's war of aggression against Yugoslavia. He can be reached at crgeditor@yahoo.com

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