

The U.S.-NATO Military Intervention in Kosovo

Triggering ethnic conflict as a pretext for intervention

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Introduction

Western historians, academics, and media sources overwhelmingly paint the Serbs, led by Slobodan Milosevic, as architects of suffering, committing atrocities in Kosovo that necessitated NATO intervention. Serbs are portrayed as xenophobic fascists who caused a “humanitarian crisis,” while the role of the West, in intentionally severing Kosovo from Yugoslavia and Serbia, is rarely mentioned. This essay will demonstrate that the Serbs legitimately feared Serbian expulsion from Kosovo, as well as the separation of Kosovo from the FRY. Serbian nationalism was not the cause of the 1999 Kosovo Crisis. Rather, the KLA, an Albanian paramilitary organization supported by NATO, was used to exacerbate ethnic tensions in Kosovo in order to legitimize a NATO intervention. This conflict occurred in the context of broad Western, particularly U.S., objectives in the Balkans. After describing some relevant history, and providing a synopsis of Western objectives in Yugoslavia, this essay will examine and demonstrate the fraudulent nature of NATO’s justifications for the war and alleged “humanitarian” objectives. Information will be drawn predominantly from research-supported studies of the conflict by well-known academics, news articles from mainstream Western newspapers, and whenever possible, primary sources from U.S. State Department, U.N. and NATO releases, to observers on the ground, journals of forensic investigation, and the Rambouillet Accord itself.

Kosovo Then and Now

The history of Kosovo, in terms of its relevance for Serbs and Albanians, stretches back to 1389. Kosovo was a centre of Serbian culture in the fourteenth century. After the Serbs suffered a great defeat to the Turks at Kosovo Polje in 1379, Kosovo became a key symbol in the Serbian national consciousness. Afterwards, Albanians gradually replaced the migrating Serbian population following the 1379 defeat, though Kosovo once again became part of Serbia in 1878. During World War II [WWII], Kosovo was annexed by fascist Italy to their Albanian client state,[1] the first instance of a “Greater Albania.”

After WWII, Kosovo was re-integrated into Serbia. Many Kosovar Albanians, however, felt betrayed since they had believed that Kosovo would be united with Albania. Inside the Yugoslav federation, Albanians were given concessions such as language rights and special education. In 1974, Kosovo became an autonomous province with access to the federal structure of government. However, Albanians continued to desire full republic status. Kosovar Albanians perceived a great deal of racism from the Serbs and Yugoslav government. They possessed a “legitimate grievance,” Lydall argues, for not having

received the national status enjoyed by groups such as the Serbs and Croatsians.[2]

The secessions of Croatia and Bosnia also provide an important backdrop for the Kosovo conflict. Specifically, the U.S. demonstrated a willingness to intervene heavily to significantly influence the outcome of Yugoslavia's disintegration. Former U.S. ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith claims that the U.S. supported Croatia's war of secession against Yugoslavia, and allowed large-scale military operations such as Operation Storm to be carried out. "Even before Operation Storm," explains Galbraith, "the United States pursued a strategy that helped create the opportunities we exploited." [3] Galbraith had decided to end the civil war in Bosnia by backing the Croatsians.

In my policy messages back to Washington, I urged that we reward Croatia's cooperation by [...] (2) looking the other way in the face of Croatian (and Bosnian) violations of the arms embargo [...] and, (4) supporting Croatia's desire for closer relations with the West.[4]

Though Washington's approval of Operation Storm resulted in ethnic cleansing and murders of Serbs – at least 200,000 were displaced, Galbraith felt that U.S. diplomatic maneuvering led to an acceptable conclusion of the civil war.[5] While Galbraith failed to mention NATO's tactical air support of Croatian forces and training of Croatian forces through Military Professional Resources Incorporated [MPRI],[6] Galbraith elaborated the position that it was acceptable to back one side in an internal conflict. "Humanitarian intervention" proponent Michel Ignatieff would later mirror this logic.

Lydall (1989) describes the current ethnic tensions arising from the complex history of Kosovo as stemming from "Serbian nationalism...which has provoked the natural response of Albanian nationalism." [7] Lydall describes the high growth-rate of the Kosovar Albanian population, which in combination with Serbian emigration, had resulted in ethnic Albanians constituting 85% of the Kosovo population by the late 1980s.[8] Almost no mention is given in contemporary Western accounts about how this situation arose. At the end of World War II, Albanian forces operating under Nazi command conducted "ethnic cleansing" operations against the Serbian population.[9] The infamous "Skanderbeg" SS division, for example, was responsible for attacking and deporting Jews and ethnic Serbs in Kosovo.[10] As the change in population balance continued in post-war Kosovo, some Serbs argue that the ethnic Albanians used their growing influence to apply pressure against the Serbian population. Many Serbs did flee the province citing harassment by ethnic Albanians, a situation documented by the Western media before the Kosovo Crisis.[11]

Chomsky referred to the New York Times, which stated that 130,000 Serbs had fled Kosovo prior to 1999.[12] Highlighting the panicked reaction to these developments by Serbia's government and media in a mocking tone, Lydall does not seriously treat their fears of Serbian depopulation in Kosovo, or their fear that an independent Kosovo republic would lead to secession.[13] Instead, like most Western academics and media, she blames Slobodan Milosevic, with his combination of "Serbian nationalism [and] dogmatic Marxism," for "whipping up anti-Albanian feeling in Kosovo.[14] Dutifully loyal to their patrons, in the form of government-funded universities and think-tanks, these academics do not discuss the real Western interests or role in Kosovo.

Unlikely Angels? Non-Humanitarian Factors Behind NATO Involvement

NATO came to the negotiating table with three basic economic objectives in Kosovo and Yugoslavia in 1999: (1) to dismantle Yugoslavia's competing socialist economic system, (2) to gain control of valuable mineral resources, and (3) to command the site of a future energy distribution network.

Chossudovsky (2003) argues that NATO sought to dismantle the socialist economic system in Yugoslavia. He notes that Western intervention in Yugoslavia prior to the Kosovo Crisis was not limited merely to the diplomatic maneuvering described by Galbraith. In fact, a Reagan-era document from 1984, National Security Decision Directive [NSDD] 133 - "U.S. Policy Towards Yugoslavia," encouraged the dismantling of its communist system:

A censored version, declassified in 1990, elaborated on NSDD 64 on Eastern Europe issued in 1982. The later advocated "expanded efforts to promote a 'quiet revolution' to overthrow Communist governments and parties," while reintegrating the countries of Eastern Europe into a market-oriented economy.[15]

Chossudovsky further asserts that IMF "economic medicine" in Yugoslavia, a country already devastated through debt-restructuring, weakened its welfare state institutions. This austerity program amplified weaknesses in Yugoslavia's ethnic fault line, serving to destabilize the country. "Secessionist tendencies, feeding on social and ethnic divisions, gained impetus precisely during a period of brutal impoverishment of the Yugoslav population." [16] Additionally, Parenti (2000) argues, "Of the various Yugoslav peoples, the Serbs were targeted for demonization because they were the largest nationality and the one most opposed to the breakup of Yugoslavia." [17] Pilger (2004) noted that as the last socialist economic system in Europe, Yugoslavia faced negative pressure from the West. In the lead up to the Kosovo crisis, before the press began the media campaign about the Kosovar Albanians, Tony Blair's main concern towards Yugoslavia was about its "failure to embrace 'economic reform' fully." [18] Finally, Chossudovsky mentions that NATO's "peace" proposal to Yugoslavia before the bombings required that "the economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles." [19]

Before the NATO bombing, the World Bank had already created economic forecasts based on a crisis situation in Kosovo. It, together with the European Commission, was assigned to provide economic aid in the Balkans. However, the World Bank decided that Yugoslavia was not to receive any aid until "political conditions there change." [20]

In regard to mineral resources, as Lydall briefly noted, Kosovo is home to "substantial deposits of lignite and non-ferrous metals." [21] Indeed, Kosovo's mineral possessions in the Trepca mining complex are quite substantial, and have continuously been a focus of ethnic conflict.

Describing this focus a year before the NATO intervention, New York Times columnist Chris Hedges labeled northern Kosovo's mines, rich in "lead, zinc, cadmium, gold and silver," as the "Kosovo war's glittering prize." [22] According to one mine's director, Novak Bjelic, "the [ethnic] war in Kosovo is about the mines, nothing else. This is Serbia's Kuwait — the heart of Kosovo." [23] Hedges described the millions of tons of valuable metals produced by the Trepca mine complex in the three years preceding his article, the strategic role of these resources in military infrastructure from the Second World War to the present, and Kosovo's "17 billion tons of coal reserves." [24] He also recounted the ethnic conflicts between Serbs and Albanians over the mines where, for example, the \$5 billion-dollar mine complex itself became a centre of Albanian militancy.

One month following the NATO intervention, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo [UNMIK] gave itself the authority to administer FRY and Serbian assets in Kosovo. A think-tank, the International Crisis Group [ICG], then published a report on Trepca stating that UNMIK should “take over the Trepca Mining Complex from the Serbs as quickly as possible and explained how this should be done.”[25] The Trepca mines were occupied in 2000 by UN peacekeepers on the grounds that the mines posed an environmental hazard, and were turned over to the Washington Group, a large U.S. defense contractor with partners in France and Sweden.[26]

Some argue that NATO is also seeking to control certain areas in the Caspian Sea in order to secure the route of a key oil pipeline. The World Socialist Web Site in particular has been one major proponent of this argument (though the credibility of the WSWS lacks general public acceptance compared to a more mainstream source). In order to reduce its dependence on imported Middle East oil, the WSWS argues, the U.S. has targeted Caspian oil. A \$1.3 billion dollar oil pipeline will cross the Caspian in order to serve this purpose.

In April 1999, British General Michael Jackson, the commander in Macedonia during the NATO bombing of Serbia, explained to the Italian paper *Sole 24 Ore* “Today, the circumstances which we have created here have changed. Today, it is absolutely necessary to guarantee the stability of Macedonia and its entry into NATO. But we will certainly remain here a long time so that we can also guarantee the security of the energy corridors which traverse this country.”[27]

The WSWS in other articles, along with many anti-war commentators, also argues that NATO seeks to fill a power void in Eastern Europe caused by the collapse of the USSR. Its own imperial ambitions necessitate the elimination of sovereignty and competing systems in strategic zones throughout the world. Looking at the bigger picture in the Balkans, it has quoted U.S. strategists such as Mortimer Zuckerman, who warned,

The region of Russia’s prominence—the bridge between Asia and Europe to the east of Turkey—contains a prize of such potential in the oil and gas riches of the Caspian Sea, valued at up to \$4 trillion, as to be able to give Russia both wealth and strategic opportunity.[28]

The role of NATO as an international military force was also a factor. After the break-up of the USSR, NATO faced an identity crisis and a challenge to its legitimacy and *raison d’être*. Chomsky argues that NATO fought to maintain its “credibility,” or Washington’s ability to use force to resolve international disputes. He quoted National Security Advisor Samuel Berger, who “listed among the principal purposes of bombing ‘to demonstrate that NATO is serious.’”[29] One European diplomat mentioned how “inaction” would have cost NATO “credibility” at its 50th anniversary. And Tony Blair stated, “To walk away now would destroy NATO’s credibility.”[30]

During the Rambouillet negotiations before the Operation, NATO strongly desired intervention on its own terms, even though strife might have been avoided through intervention by other bodies. Yugoslavia was willing to accept a UN or OSCE-led peacekeeping force. But Madeleine Albright asserted, “We accept nothing less than a complete agreement, including a NATO-led force.” Two days later, she stated “It was asked earlier, when we were all together whether the force could be anything different than a NATO-led force. I can just tell you point blank from the perspective of the United States, absolutely not, it must be a NATO-led force.[31] This attitude, in combination with NATO’s

sabotage of the Rambouillet talks (discussed below), seriously undermines any U.S. or NATO claims that it open-mindedly sought a peaceful solution in good faith.

Ignatieff claims that NATO intervention in Kosovo occurred not just for “humanitarian” reasons, but also to implement stability and assert American dominance over NATO.[32] Because this essay demonstrates that NATO contributed to the very opposite of stability, the U.S. push to dominate NATO appears predominant.

As NATO supporter David Fromkin argues, “To preserve credibility, a great power that starts an intervention must carry through to victory.” He described arguments in 1999 that the great power must “back up its words with deeds and its requests with armed force.”[33] Fromkin reminds the reader, however, that “it was not to keep our credibility that most Americans supported [the bombing]. It was to save a million or more people from horrors, suffering, and death.”[34] This common claim will be examined in the following sections of this essay.

The KLA

The events of the Kosovo Crisis can only be understood in the context of U.S. support for the Kosovo Liberation Army as a tool to foment ethnic strife in Kosovo. A May 4, 1999 Washington Times article by Jerry Seper described the narco-terrorist characteristics of the KLA. Seper reported that,

Some members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which has financed its war effort through the sale of heroin, were trained in terrorist camps run by international fugitive Osama bin Laden — who is wanted in the 1998 bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa that killed 224 persons, including 12 Americans.[35]

Led by Agim Ceku, the KLA imported into Kosovo “mujahadeen” from throughout Eastern Europe. Seper referred to official U.S. State Department reports labeling the KLA as an “insurgency” organization, while State Department officials themselves labeled the KLA as a “terrorist” organization for attacking both Serbian and ethnic Albanian civilians in its war for Kosovo’s independence. Seper also quoted the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s statement that gangs of Kosovar Albanians were “second only to Turkish gangs as the predominant heroin smugglers along the Balkan Route.”[36]

Mainstream media was fairly ambiguous on the question of the NATO-KLA ties. For example, Slate magazine claimed, “The Department of Defense acknowledges that the KLA reports to NATO on the situation inside Kosovo, but the extent of KLA/NATO cooperation is not known.”[37] After the NATO Operation, however, the truth began to seep out. The Times reported that U.S. intelligence admitted its linkages to the KLA. The CIA had provided the KLA with arms and training. Co-operation between the U.S. state and the KLA was so close that some KLA soldiers were given OSCE telephones and GPS equipment, and had NATO commander General Wesley Clark’s personal phone number.[38] During the NATO bombardment, according to pro-U.S. historian David Fromkin, the KLA acted as a ground force for NATO, drawing out Serbian forces so that NATO air command could target them.[39]

The KLA also possessed an agenda of an ethnically pure “Greater Albania.”[40]

The Kosovar Albanians played us like a Stradivarius violin,” wrote the former UN commander in Bosnia, Major General Lewis MacKenzie, last April. “We have subsidised and indirectly supported their violent campaign for an ethnically pure Kosovo. We have never blamed them for being the perpetrators of the violence in the early 1990s, and we continue to portray them as the designated victim today, in spite of evidence to the contrary.[41]

Interestingly, KLA commander Agim Ceku had previous ties with the U.S. military. The Nation reported,

Ceku refined his brutality as a general in the US-backed Croatian Army during the Balkans war and was trained by Military Professional Resources Inc., a private paramilitary firm founded in 1987 and based in Alexandria, Virginia, with former high-ranking US generals and NATO officials on its board.[42]

Canadian soldiers have also witnessed the results of Ceku’s prior actions in Croatia, which included the rape and murder of civilians, and attacks on refugee columns.[43]After the war, Ceku was placed in command of the UN-backed “Kosovo Protection Force,” where he escalated attacks against the Serbian population [44] (see conclusion).

Rollie Keith was an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitor in Kosovo in early 1999, and a former Canadian military officer. According to Keith, the conflict situation in Kosovo had previously stabilized after 1998 with a cease-fire. However, the KLA staged increasingly “provocative attacks on the Yugoslavian security forces.”[45] This resulted in roadblocks by the JNA that inconvenienced Kosovar residents. The population had generally settled down from the earlier, more intense conflicts the preceding year. The KLA, however, “was building its strength and was attempting to reorganize in preparation for a military solution, hopeful of NATO or western military support.”[46] Slate Magazine explained,

The KLA began hit-and-run attacks against Serb policemen and officials in early 1996 in hopes of abolishing “Serb colonization.” In 1997, following the collapse of order in Albania, that nation’s military depots were looted and small arms poured into Kosovo. The KLA stepped up its attacks, kidnapping and executing not only Serb officials and their families but suspected ethnic Albanian collaborators.[47]

These actions by the KLA served to trigger conflicts in Kosovo that were painted in the Western media as ethnic repression by the Serbs (see below). In 2001, the British newspaper The Observer conducted a series of interviews in its investigation of the KLA. The Observer revealed,

The CIA encouraged former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters to launch a rebellion in southern Serbia in an effort to undermine the then Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, according to senior European officers who served with the international peace-keeping force in Kosovo (K-For), as well as leading Macedonian and US sources.[48]

A representative from the U.S. State Department did not deny the allegations of prior U.S. support for the KLA, but rather blamed the “previous administration,” and asserted that there had since been a “shift of emphasis.”[49]

The NATO case for intervention in Kosovo

How did NATO justify its intervention? NATO's "Historical Overview" claims,

During 1998, open conflict between Serbian military and police forces and Kosovar Albanian forces resulted in the deaths of over 1,500 Kosovar Albanians and forced 400,000 people from their homes. The international community became gravely concerned about the escalating conflict, its humanitarian consequences, and the risk of it spreading to other countries. President Milosevic's disregard for diplomatic efforts aimed at peacefully resolving the crisis and the destabilizing role of militant Kosovar Albanian forces was also of concern.[50]

NATO's argument is false, or misleading at best. First, as already described above, the conflict between the Serbian government and KLA forces was *initiated* by NATO in order to create a situation that justified intervention. Second, despite NATO's revisionist history, no refugee crisis existed until after NATO began its bombardment.

William Blum points out that in the real historical timeline, and not NATO's, the New York Times of March 26 1999 read, "With the NATO bombing already begun, a deepening sense of fear took hold in Pristina [the main city of Kosovo] that Serbs would *now* vent their rage against ethnic Albanian citizens in retaliation." [51] Civilians only began to flee after the bombing because NATO bombs, not vengeful Serbs, pushed Kosovars into safer ground.[52] As OSCE observer Taylor remarked,

There were no international refugees over the last five months of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) presence within Kosovo, and Internal Displaced Persons only numbered a few thousand in the weeks before the air bombardment commenced.[53] [...]

What has transpired since the OSCE monitors were evacuated on March 20, in order to deliver the penultimate warning to force Yugoslavian compliance with the Rambouillet [see below] and subsequent Paris documents and the commencement of the NATO air bombardment of March 24, obviously has resulted in human rights abuses and a very significant humanitarian disaster as some 600,000 Albanian Kosovars have fled or been expelled from the province. This did not occur, though, before March 20, so I would attribute the humanitarian disaster directly or indirectly to the NATO air bombardment and resulting anti-terrorist campaign [by the JNA].[54]

Though even left-wing commentators suspected Serbian attacks behind the refugee crisis after the bombing, common sense dictates that it is entirely reasonable to expect that *during* a bombing of a province wracked by civil war, many thousands of refugees will be generated. This is exactly what happened. As the San Francisco Guardian reported during the bombing, "An Albanian woman crossing into Macedonia was eagerly asked by a news crew if she had been forced out by Serb police. She responded: 'There were no Serbs. We were frightened of the [NATO] bombs.'" [55] Besides the surprisingly well-dressed and provisioned Albanians, Serbs also fled during the bombing. Parenti (2000) asks in jocular fashion, "were the Serbs ethnically cleansing themselves?" [56]

During the NATO bombardment, as a retroactive justification for their invasion, the U.S. government then suggested that large numbers of Albanians were being harmed or killed by the Serbian military. On April 19, 1999, the U.S. State Department announced its concern that Serbs were separating military-aged Albanians from their families.

Their number ranges from a low of 100,000, looking only at the men missing from among refugee families in Albania, up to nearly 500,000, if reports of widespread separation of men among the IDPs within Kosovo are true.”[57]

State Department spokesman James P. Rubin further asserted that these 100,000 men were “unaccounted for” and that “based on past practice, it is chilling to think where those 100,000 men are...We know that civilian casualties are the objective of President Milosevic’s policy.”[58] On May 16, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen stated, “We’re now seeing about 100,000 military-age men missing. They may have been murdered. We’ve had reports that as many as 4,600 have been executed. But I suspect it’s far higher than that.”[59] Labeling the Serbs as “mass killers,” Cohen argued that Serb complaints about NATO’s civilian bombing casualties were comparable to Holocaust architect Adolph Eichmann complaining about the crematoriums being bombed.[60]

During the NATO bombardment, Hillary Clinton and Elie Wiesel also worked to tie the violence in Kosovo to the Holocaust. At a speech at the invitation of the First Lady, “The Perils of Indifference,” Wiesel defended what he called President Clinton’s “justified intervention.” Wiesel condemned the West’s failure to take action against the Nazi death camps during World War II, and expressed his satisfaction that unlike in the case of the Jews in the 1930s and 40s, the West was responding to the plight of the Kosovars with military intervention.

Hillary Clinton also tried to draw a comparison to the Holocaust. She introduced Wiesel’s speech, mentioning that,

I never could have imagined that when the time finally came for him to stand in this spot and to reflect on the past century and the future to come, that we would be seeing children in Kosovo crowded into trains, separated from families, separated from their homes, robbed of their childhoods, their memories, their humanity.[61]

Wiesel toured and gave interviews on the subject, repeating U.S. allegations about events in Kosovo. In an interview with the Canadian Jewish News, Wiesel claimed,

This is certainly a major change. In my day, the world was silent. Today, the world is no longer silent. If we had been able, in 1938-39, to count on the support of such an incredible alliance as the one established by NATO, we would certainly have prevented the angel of death from holding sway. I don’t like war, and I have always been fiercely opposed to any sort of violence; nevertheless, I am in favor of the military campaign NATO is conducting against the Belgrade regime. It is essential that the democracies of the free world put an end to Milosevic’s aggressive folly. Deporting a million innocent human beings, evicting them from their homes, burning their villages, destroying their hopes, these are crimes against humanity that we cannot continue to tolerate. I am absolutely convinced that this coalition of democratic nations will succeed in forcing Milosevic to give in to the humanitarian demands dictated by the civilized world. At any price, the hundreds of thousands of persecuted Kosovar refugees must return home, and the western democracies must help them rebuild their ruined homes.[62]

Wiesel and Clinton’s comments stand as a seminal example of the rhetoric that was being delivered to the Western public at the time of the bombing. The First Lady’s claims and endorsement of Wiesel’s views should be compared to any recent attempts by NATO

apologists to deny that events in Kosovo were portrayed as massive and genocidal in scale.

NATO and U.S. claims of vast numbers of dead in a genocidal campaign would certainly have justified its intervention. There was, however, one problem: every single one of NATO's claims *was a complete fabrication*.

As the Guardian reported, the final death count during the period of alleged massacres and ethnic cleansing is likely to be under 3,000. The international tribunal's forensic teams found approximately 2,100 bodies in gravesites, and these were not necessarily civilians killed by the JNA. After covering more than 100 suspected mass grave sites, which contained a significant proportion of dead animals, or were empty, the forensic teams decided that covering the other 350 suspected sites would not be worthwhile.[63]

When the tribunal's teams reached Kosovo last summer, shortly after the international peacekeepers, they were given reports of 11,334 people in mass graves, but the results of its exhumations fall well short of that number. In a few cases, such as the Trepca mine where hundreds of bodies were alleged to have been flung down shafts or incinerated, they found nothing at all.[64]

The Guardian quoted one senior international official in Kosovo who complained that both NATO, and local Albanian politicians, were unwilling to discuss the discrepancy in the atrocity claims, as it undermined their positions.[65]

A similar New York Times article largely supported the Guardian's claims, and also mentioned that "A Spanish forensic team's experience has been typical. According to the newspaper El Pais, the team was told to prepare for at least 2,000 autopsies. But it found 187 bodies, usually buried in individual graves." [66] Most appeared to have been killed in combat. The London Sunday Times reported that Spanish forensic expert, Emilio Perez Puhola, "dismissed the widely publicized references about mass graves as being part of the 'machinery of war propaganda.'" [67] If Slobodan Milosevic's goal was civilian casualties, he was quite the underachiever. Perhaps he would have been better served by attempting to replicate NATO's bombing campaign, discussed later in this essay.

Because the Serb/KLA conflict alone was not enough to generate a pretext for NATO intervention, and because NATO had to wait until it began bombing in order to generate a refugee crisis, its major justification before the bombing necessarily was the alleged "Racak Massacre." NATO claims that, "in January 1999, evidence was discovered, by a United Nations humanitarian team, of the massacre of over 40 people in the village of Racak." [68] As Toronto Sun columnist Peter Worthington recalled, President Clinton claimed, "We should remember what happened in Racak ... innocent men, women and children were taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt and sprayed with gunfire." [69] Worthington writes,

U.S. Foreign Secretary Madeleine Albright, eager to make war against then-Yugoslavia and speaking on CBS' Face the Nation, cited Racak where, she said, there were "dozens of people with their throats slit." She called this the "galvanizing incident" that meant peace talks at Rambouillet were pointless, "humanitarian bombing" the only recourse. [70]

In fact, this portrayal of the Racak "massacre" was extremely misleading. The Racak dead were Albanian militants assembled together for the benefit of Western observers

Western sources, notably Canadian war crimes prosecutor Louise Arbour and foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy, U.S. diplomat William Walker, German foreign minister Joschka Fischer, and the London Times, unanimously claimed that the dead at Racak had been civilians, and were even mutilated (e.g. eyes gouged out) or executed “as they lay.” Most of these sources called for war against Yugoslavia as the only solution to the humanitarian crisis.[71]

The report by an international forensic team published in *Forensic Science International* did not support the claims of Western governments and media. It found that NATO’s story was not the only story, as other accounts suggested that the deceased had been combatants engaged in battle, rather than civilians killed by Serb police forces.[72] They also identified the bodies as 39 men and 1 woman, not “women and children.”[73] [This is a minor point, however, as accounts vary on the exact gender and age breakdown of the bodies.][74] Furthermore, the team was not able to establish a chain of events verifying that the 40 bodies they were given to investigate even came from the Racak site. Bullet trajectories extrapolated from wounds indicated that the dead had been shot in a variety of locations, from different directions.[75] While the journal described the gunshot wounds sustained by the deceased as likely originating from rapid fire by automatic rifles, the report did not contain any evidence of torture or deliberate mutilation of victims, or any stated evidence of a “massacre.” The team did discover one “superficial” post-mortem neck laceration.[76]

How is this best explained? What the Racak “massacre” coverage excluded was that Racak was a KLA stronghold – a “fortified village with a lot of trenches.”[77] After four Serbian police officers were murdered by the KLA, the Yugoslav army invited journalists to film their operation against the town. After some brief but intense fighting, 20-45 KLA fighters were killed, but the KLA retained control of the town. Stripped of uniforms and insignia, the militants were dumped in a pit, and shown to journalists by the Albanians as “massacred civilians.” Few media personnel were suspicious that there was no blood and few bullet casings at “massacre site.”[78] It is possible that any mutilation of the corpses were staged by the KLA post-mortem. Whatever really occurred at Racak, the Western media’s dubious portrayal provided further justification for NATO’s build-up to war.

Interestingly, William Walker, the first Western diplomatic observer on the scene at Racak, was involved previously in the Iran-Contra scandal in funding the covert U.S.-backed anti-government force in Nicaragua. Afterwards, he was appointed as U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, during which time the death squad activity against left-wing guerillas escalated. In Kosovo, as confirmed by KLA press statements, Walker worked closely with the KLA in his capacity as the head of the Kosovo Verification Mission.[79]

The reality NATO so desperately wishes to deny is that no situation existed in Kosovo warranting the disproportionate force and illegal means (see below) used by NATO. While the German foreign minister actively supported the intervention on the basis of alleged oppression against ethnic Albanians, Chossudovsky (1999) revealed text from internal German ministry documents that suggested the exact opposite, stating,

Even in Kosovo an explicit political persecution linked to Albanian ethnicity is not verifiable. The East of Kosovo is still not involved in armed conflict. Public life in cities like Pristina, Urosevac, Gnjilan, etc. has, in the entire conflict period, continued on a relatively normal basis. The actions of the security forces [were] not directed against the Kosovo-Albanians as an ethnically defined group, but against the military opponent [KLA] and its actual or alleged supporters.”[80]

NATO's final pretext for war was the "failure" of negotiations with Yugoslavia to arrive at a solution or resolution over the conflicts in Kosovo. But Milosevic *had* been willing to negotiate. Early in the talks at Rambouillet, the New York Times printed an article by Steven Erlanger that claimed "Mr. Milosevic has shown himself at least as reasonable as the ethnic Albanians about a political settlement for Kosovo." [81] Yugoslavia was concerned over the details of an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo, but was willing to discuss a compromise solution, such as a large Russian presence in the force. One month later, the same reporter released an article with the headline "U.S. Negotiators Depart, Frustrated by Milosevic's Hard Line." In fact, the FRY's position had not changed at all. [82] But the nature of NATO's proposals guaranteed that Yugoslavia could not have accepted them.

The suggested Rambouillet Accord was unbelievable as a peace treaty. Chapter 7 would have given legal immunity for NATO and NATO members throughout the FRY, NATO access to FRY transportation (infrastructure, airspace, and waters), freedom from duties and taxes, and use of FRY communications. Article I proposed the immediate autonomy of Kosovo by way of independent legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. Article II of the introduction, and Chapter 7, Articles II and III, called for the withdrawal of most Yugoslav forces from Kosovo. Chapter 8, Clause 3 called for an international meeting to decide the fate of Kosovo three years after ratification. [83] [See Appendix for selected excerpts.] Combined with NATO's desire for extraterritoriality, how would Serbia have perceived an agreement that translated into the withdrawal of FRY forces from Kosovo, a strengthening of Kosovo's autonomous governing apparatus, and international bodies reviewing Kosovo's status? These are but a small selection of the provocative demands placed by NATO upon the FRY. No government could possibly have signed the Accord, without losing its own sovereignty.

On the other hand, NATO treated the KLA as a legitimate representative of the Kosovar Albanians. The KLA found the Rambouillet terms acceptable, though only reluctantly." [84] The Serbian National Federation argues that the Accord "was, in truth, a declaration of war disguised as a peace agreement." [85] Indeed, reporter George Kenny recounted how an "unimpeachable press source" who traveled with Madeleine Albright, told him that a "senior state department official had bragged that the United States had 'deliberately set the bar higher than the Serbs could accept.'" [86] The Rambouillet proposal was a deliberate provocation of the Serbs that guaranteed a NATO intervention.

The Debate Over Humanitarian Intervention

Western media and academics rushed to provide justification for a NATO attack, framed in terms of a humanitarian intervention against Slav savages. Even Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" doctrine made an appearance in the New York Times article "A New Collision of East and West." Serge Schmemmann described "a democratic West, its humanitarian instincts repelled by the barbarous inhumanity of Orthodox Serbs." [87]

Ignatieff (2003), in "State Failure," explains the rationale for humanitarian intervention, and provides the most complete justification for the type of operations conducted by NATO during and after the Kosovo Crisis. He argues that countries unable to maintain order within their borders, suffering from ethnic tensions raging unhindered, are 'failed states.' Presenting a challenge to stability, they do not deserve the international rights of sovereign countries. Many countries do fine with little real sovereignty or no officially-recognized

sovereignty (e.g. Taiwan), and negligible military spending (e.g. Canada), he argues.[88] He also asks “if states have failed, *should* they be put back together?”[89] Following his logic, he proposes,

If they can trust a stronger neighbour [weak states] should devolve the costs of security onto another rich state as Canada has done; if possible they should seek customs and commercial union with richer neighbours. Thus, in the case of the Balkans, the future for all the micro-states created by the break-up of Yugoslavia [...] and Kosovo – would seem to lie in eventual integration in both NATO and the EU. Their chief goals should be to reduce, if not eliminate, the costs of defense, to open up to a continental market and to give their populations the chance to live and work anywhere in Europe.[90]

In this way, Ignatieff conveniently labels states – that have suffered from the U.S. policy of backing insurrections – as “failed states” requiring invasion, disintegration, the dismantling of competing economic structures, and integration into Western military and political bodies. Is this not what Chossudovsky revealed as NATO’s goals? Ignatieff even argues that bloody civil wars can be ended by backing one side, violating the sovereignty of the other, and proudly explains how the bombing of “Serb installations” saved Bosnia.[91] Clearly articulating the real substance of the issues surrounding U.S. involvement in the Balkans, Ignatieff asserts that “internationals” (i.e. NATO-backed U.N. operations) will have to remain in Kosovo and Bosnia indefinitely in order to “re-build” them. He calls for “a form of temporary rule that reproduces the best effects of empire.”[92] As will be demonstrated below, the call by Ignatieff and other academics for the dismantling of state sovereignty and for intervention by large states is not a new development towards human rights by concerned Westerners, but these calls instead entail ominous imperial overtones that harken back to previous “humanitarian” interventions remembered bitterly today.

Given the fairly serious civil war situation in the Kosovo province, which had resulted in about 2000 deaths by the time of the NATO bombing,[93] and ignoring the role of NATO in exacerbating the conflict (and its exaggerations of humanitarian crises), did the situation in Kosovo justify humanitarian intervention? Chomsky (2000) compared the pre-bombing situation in Kosovo to Colombia, where a civil-war comparable in scope to Kosovo in 1998 existed, and Turkey, where examples abounded of massive government repression and ethnic cleansing against its Kurdish minorities. Instead of intervening with a media campaign and wholesale bombing of cities in Turkey and Columbia, the U.S. instead provided arms to these countries.[94] “Turkey, in fact, had nearly threatened to veto the NATO decision that it could act on Kosovo unless Ankara was assured that this policy could never be applied to Turkey’s treatment of Kurds,” adds Blum (2000), who reminds the reader that NATO also stood by while Croatia ethnically cleansed Krajina of Serbs.[95] Perhaps this is what Ignatieff meant when he said, “the fact that we cannot intervene everywhere is not a justification for not intervening where we can”[96] – when intervening “where we can” means attacking countries not allied with the interests of the United States and NATO, and where “we” have strategic interests and a goal of occupation and Balkanization. As Chomsky has pointed out, if a humanitarian crisis existed in Yugoslavia, NATO had three choices: “try to escalate the catastrophe, do nothing, or try to mitigate the catastrophe.”[97] NATO abandoned the opportunity to mitigate the crisis at Rambouillet, and had been escalating the crisis all along.

Blum reveals the enormous hypocrisy of the U.S. in supporting Kosovo secessionists against Yugoslavia. In 1996, Clinton muted his criticism of Russia’s actions in Chechnya because, arguably, Russia had a right to prevent the breakaway province from separating.

I would remind you that we once had a civil war in our country in which we lost on a per-capita basis far more people than we lost in any of the wars of the 20th century over the proposition that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for, that no State had the right to withdraw from our Union.[98]

Apparently, Serbia did not have the right to secure its own province. And it is highly doubtful that the U.S. would allow itself to be bombed by Russia on the basis of U.S. treatment of internal ethnic minorities, such as its dying First Nations or economically marginalized and highly-imprisoned African-Americans. The U.S.' extreme inconsistency on issues of humanitarian intervention, then, suggests that it was following motives in Kosovo unrelated to humanitarian objectives.

Chomsky brings about a dark comparison. The most prominent early examples of "humanitarian intervention" in the 20th century were carried out by Japan in Manchuria, Italy in Ethiopia, and Hitler in Czechoslovakia. All of these aggressor countries claimed lofty humanitarian principles of fighting slavery and bandits, liberating ethnic groups, and meeting the true interests of the target populations.[99] Important laws were originally created to prevent the reoccurrence of slaughter under a humanitarian guise – laws that NATO violated in its "humanitarian" campaign. Washington lawyer and former Nuremberg War Crimes prosecutor Walter J. Rockler argues that in initiating aggression against Yugoslavia, NATO has committed "the supreme international crime" of the exact sort that he tried German leaders for after WWII.[100] He stated that NATO had in addition violated the United Nations Charter sections 2(4) and (7), and UN resolution 2131, which declared that "forceful military intervention in any country is aggression and a crime without justification." Amnesty International states that the 38,000 bombing sorties conducted by NATO warplanes killed hundreds, or even thousands of civilians, and were illegal.[101]

Was the NATO bombardment conducted in a manner commensurate with a humanitarian mission? Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter disagrees.

As the American-led force has expanded targets to inhabited areas and resorted to the use of anti-personnel cluster bombs, the result has been damage to hospitals, offices and residences of a half-dozen ambassadors, and the killing of hundreds of innocent civilians and an untold number of conscripted troops.[102]

As many as 5,000 Serbian military personnel are claimed to have been killed.[103] Carter also criticized NATO's targeting and extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Human Rights Watch, an organization that often uncritically accepts NATO statements as fact, nevertheless observes that many of the casualties of the NATO bombardment were children and the very refugees NATO claimed to be protecting. The most infamous incident by NATO was probably at Korisa, when a NATO jet destroyed a bridge used by refugees and displaced persons, killing up to 87 people. NATO also bombed a Serbian Radio and Television Station (RTS) that was broadcasting media unfavourable to the NATO intervention. Low-end estimates of civilians killed by NATO range from 350-500, while a more typical figure is about 1,500. High-end figures start at 5,000 and peak at 18,000. Up to 150 civilians were killed by NATO "cluster bombs." [104]

Chossudovsky, citing the 1999 UNICEF representative in Belgrade, believes that up to 30% of casualties from the NATO bombing may have been children. NATO has also used toxic Depleted Uranium (DU), which may be responsible for symptoms of radiation among

children, as postulated by Dr. Siegwart-Horst Guenther to the PBS party in Germany.[105] NATO even bombed large chemical storage facilities, releasing an assortment of harmful chemicals into the environment. NATO precision bombing destroyed all manner of civilian buildings, including schools and medical facilities (115 of which were damaged or destroyed.)[106] Consistent with NATO's ideological and economic motives in Kosovo, Pilger quotes Balkans writer Neil Clark, who pointed out that of the 372 industrial sites bombed by NATO, only Yugoslav state-owned industries, and not private corporations or multinationals, were targeted.[107]

It may well be the case that the NATO bombardment killed more people than the civil strife in Kosovo. Also worth considering is whether NATO's "smart bombs" were smart enough to avoid killing ethnic Albanians in Kosovo under NATO's protection. NATO ran roughshod over a half-century of international law, designed in part to prevent "humanitarian" intervention, in order to support a violent separatist army.

The Aftermath

In June, 1999, KFOR arrived in Kosovo to "protect civilians and support the civil authority." [108] According to Sell (2004), "as soon as the Serb forces left, Albanians poured back into Kosovo and began a predictable revenge against their Serb neighbours." [109] Sell is typical of Western commentators in framing the attacks against Serbs as "revenge attacks," as opposed to the manifestation of the KLA's plan for an ethnically-pure "greater Albania." The KLA has in fact engaged in a campaign of attacks on non-Albanians since the end of the Crisis in 1999.

Post-war Kosovo is a province on a route to ethnic Albanian purity, where the few remaining Serbs and other groups are huddled fearfully in isolated enclaves.[110] As former Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia James Bisset sorrowfully observed,

The war allegedly to stop ethnic cleansing has not done so. Serbs, Gypsies, Jews, and Slav Muslims are being forced out of Kosovo under the eyes of 45,000 NATO troops. Murder and anarchy reigns supreme in Kosovo as the KLA and criminal elements have taken charge. The United Nations admits failure to control the situation and warns Serbs not to return.[111]

Numerous recent articles by reputable Western news agencies have reported not "revenge attacks" against Serbs in Kosovo, but instead organized campaigns of ethnic cleansing. NATO commanders admit that the violence is "ethnic cleansing," and they are "investigating" Albanian militants. While many KLA members have joined "mainstream politics," others continue to fight for an "independent Kosovo" and demonstrators chant KLA slogans in the streets. The attacks on Serbs and destruction of Orthodox churches is said to be part of an "orchestrated campaign." [112] The Scotsman reports,

According to a senior international United Nations police official, "The situation is not under control. This is planned, co-ordinated, one-way violence from the Albanians against the Serbs. It is spreading and has been brewing for the past week. "Nothing in Kosovo happens spontaneously." [113]

It was only after the NATO intervention that the ethnic cleansing could begin in earnest. But this time, despite being there on the ground, NATO is apparently powerless to stop it.

Sell, however, claims that KFOR immediately rushed to the aid of Serbs, escorting them to safety and conducting arrests of perpetrators. The suffering did not end there, though, and Sell is worth quoting extensively,

Despite the best will in the world, KFOR, as its first commander British General Sir Michael Jackson said, “cannot be everywhere.” By the end of 1999 approximately half of the Serbs in Kosovo had fled and most of the rest lived fearfully in a few areas where they had concentrated for protection by KFOR. Dozens if not hundreds of Serbs had been killed, the most egregious incident being the murder of 14 Serb farmers, gunned down on 24 July 1999 by automatic weapons within earshot of patrolling British troops.[114]

Sell excused the massacres by explaining that, “soldiers do not make good policemen. Perhaps international police can never substitute for local ones,” and reveals how “privately, UN officials admitted that efforts to maintain Kosovo as a multi-ethnic province were doomed.”[115]

These justifications ring hollow in light of Western support for the KLA and its known policy of ethnic cleansing, *now directly legitimized as the Kosovo Protection Corps by the NATO/U.N. force*. After the NATO intervention, General Ceku and the KLA became the U.N.-sanctioned overseers of Kosovar safety. The BBC reported that the postwar deal mediated by NATO pact “provides for the transformation of the KLA into a 5,000-member Kosovo Protection Corps, under the command of the former rebel army’s leader, General Agim Ceku.” The same article mentioned that the agreement provided that the KLA would turn in most of its weapons, and merely act as a “lightly armed” protection force.[116] The KLA never did turn in its weapons.[117] Perhaps the BBC has never heard the old adage of the fox and the chicken coop. If the unreality of NATO placing a vicious war criminal in charge of Kosovo’s security is too difficult for the reader to believe, the UN confirmed it in a 1999 press release.

PRISTINA-In a ceremony last night at KFOR headquarters, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo...appointed General Agim Ceku, former Chief of Staff of the Kosovo Liberation Army, as Commander of the Kosovo Protection Corps, in order to assist the transitional arrangements...Taking part in the 9:30 p.m. signing ceremony was NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley Clark, KFOR Commander General Mike Jackson, SRSG Kouchner, UCK Commander-in-Chief Hashim Thaci and Gen. Ceku.[118]

These facts explain how the West facilitated the KLA’s post-war ethnic cleansing of non-Albanians. NATO, however, must be pleased. After its intervention, it built the gargantuan Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo. The city-sized 1,000 acre military base houses 5,000 soldiers and over 1,000 vehicles. It is the largest U.S. military base construction since the Vietnam War.[119] The WSWS claims that the establishment of Camp Bondsteel might have been the major NATO intention all along.

According to leaked comments to the press, European politicians now believe that the US used the bombing of Yugoslavia specifically in order to establish Camp Bondsteel. Before the start of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, the Washington Post insisted, “With the Middle-East increasingly fragile, we will need bases and fly over rights in the Balkans to protect Caspian Sea oil.”[120]

Moreover, Pilger reports that “multinational companies are being offered ten- and 15-year leases of the province’s local industries and resources.”[121]

Conclusion

There was no internationally-significant human-rights crisis in Kosovo immediately prior to the NATO bombardment that justified its intervention on behalf of the ethnic-Albanian population. In arguing for a humanitarian intervention, NATO applied a standard to Kosovo that it does not apply to other countries, such as Turkey, the U.S., or Israel for that matter. The problems of warfare that existed in Kosovo were largely a result of U.S. support for the KLA, with the intent of causing a crisis that justified intervention. Proponents of the NATO intervention cannot argue that the intervention was humanitarian. The intervention was illegal, destructive, and based on fraudulent claims.

NATO has failed to produce evidence of massacres approaching anywhere near their significant claims. Why was it necessary for NATO to fabricate a refugee crisis, massacre, and genocide? Why did NATO allow its bombs to kill ethnic Albanians and children? Why did Washington provide support for the KLA, a narco-terrorist organization linked, according to U.S. intelligence services, to Osama Bin Laden? Even if the reader does not believe that the KLA launched attacks against the Yugoslav state apparatus in order to provoke a retaliation leading to war, how does she explain the basis of the many tangible links between NATO and the KLA?

The intervention is better understood in terms of NATO's objectives. As mentioned above, U.N. soldiers stormed the valuable Trepca mining complex and handed it to a Western corporation. NATO's "credibility" as an organization that will back its demands with force has been established. It also enjoys an enormous new military base in a strategic location close both to former enemies, and projected oil pipelines crucial to the future of the U.S. as a world power. Finally, the dismantling of Yugoslavia, decline of socialism, and division of the Balkans into feuding ethnic statelets, has proceeded one step further.

Western academics continue to write self-satisfied and prosaic accounts of the "humanitarian intervention" in Kosovo, and slow but steady process of "democratization" in Yugoslavia. The sordid details touched upon in this essay are left out. Most "establishment" literature also fails to comprehend the broader picture. During the NATO bombing, commentators across the political spectrum spoke with concern about the implications of NATO's "humanitarian intervention," and warned that similar dubious interventions could follow. Today, the U.S. justifies its illegal and extraordinarily violent occupation in Iraq as an exercise in nation-building and democracy. The war against Afghanistan was promoted with images of veils being removed from oppressed women. Today, the "Axis of Evil" grows. Though its sights are currently set on Iran, the U.S. hit-list has extended to Cuba and Syria. Most interesting, left-wing activists now parallel George Soros and members of the U.S. government in calling for a humanitarian intervention in oil-rich Sudan.

The Kosovo case is interesting also because most countries currently targeted by the United States for military intervention are composed predominantly of Arabs or Muslims. Yet in Kosovo, the U.S. supported the KLA, which was largely Muslim in origin. At the time that this essay is being re-released, many Slavs and Muslims who oppose U.S. militarism may harbour feelings of resentment towards one another over the bitter conflicts in Kosovo, Chechnya, and elsewhere. Given, however, that the U.S. and NATO will intervene both to support Muslim extremists but also to attack Muslim populations generally, it is obvious that the problem is not so much between Muslims and Orthodox Christians as it is a global power who will support or destroy anyone in order to achieve its objectives. The U.S. handling of

the Kosovo Crisis demonstrated its complete moral inconsistency. In future imperial engagements, the U.S. can be counted upon to support whichever national minority will serve its own interests.

Appendix: The Rambouillet Accord

Selections from the Interim Agreement for Peace and Self Government in Kosovo (Rambouillet Accord) published at <http://www.alb-net.com/kcc/interim.rtf>

Chapter 1, Constitution

Article I. Principles of Democratic Self-Government in Kosovo

1. Kosovo shall govern itself democratically through the legislative, executive, judicial, and other organs and institutions specified herein. Organs and institutions of Kosovo shall exercise their authorities consistent with the terms of this Agreement.

[...]

Article III: President of Kosovo

1. There shall be a President of Kosovo, who shall be elected by the Assembly by vote of a majority of its Members. The President of Kosovo shall serve for a three year term. No person may serve more than two terms as President of Kosovo.

Chapter 7, Appendix B: Status of Multi National Military Implementation Force

6. (a) NATO shall be immune from all legal process, whether civil, administrative, or criminal.

(b) NATO personnel, under all circumstances and at all times, shall be immune from the Parties' jurisdiction in respect of any civil, administrative, criminal, or disciplinary offenses which may be committed by them in the FRY. [...]

8. NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft, and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY including associated airspace and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right of bivouac, maneuver, billet, and utilization of any areas or facilities as required for support, training, and operations.

9. NATO shall be exempt from duties, taxes, and other charges and inspections and custom regulations including providing inventories or other routine customs documentation, for personnel, vehicles, vessels, aircraft, equipment, supplies, and provisions entering, exiting, or transiting the territory of the FRY in support of the Operation. [...]

11. NATO is granted the use of airports, roads, rails, and ports without payment of fees, duties, dues, tolls, or charges occasioned by mere use. [...]

15. [...] The Parties shall, upon simple request, grant all telecommunications services, including broadcast services, needed for the operation, as determined by NATO. This shall include the right to utilize such means and services as required to assure full ability to communicate, and the right to use all of the electro magnetic spectrum for this purpose, free of cost.[...]

16. The Parties shall provide, free of cost, such public facilities as NATO shall require to prepare for and execute the Operation.[...]

17. NATO and NATO personnel shall be immune from claims of any sort which arise out of activities in pursuance of the operation; however, NATO will entertain claims on an ex gratia basis.

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