

NATO still getting it wrong in Kosovo

*by James Bissett**

In the three years since Kosovo, urged on by the United States, declared its unilateral independence, there has been no final resolution of this long-festering wound in the heart of the Balkans.

After the expulsion of the Serbian military from Kosovo in 1999 there was a systematic purging of the non-Albanian population and a rampage of revenge killing, and destruction.

In March, 2004, the Albanian mobs burned or dynamited more than 204 Christian churches and monasteries - some of them heritage structures dating back to the 14th century. This veritable orgy of devastation was accomplished under the watchful eyes of NATO troops who did nothing to stop the violence.

On Sept. 15, the Secretary General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, visited Pristina, the capitol of Kosovo, and again repeated the usual refrain that NATO was there to maintain a secure and safe environment and emphasized that "We will continue to do so - firmly, carefully, and impartially."

Less than two weeks after his departure from Kosovo on Sept. 27, his impartial NATO troops opened fire with live ammunition on a crowd of Serbian civilians demonstrating against the establishment of Kosovo customs posts along the border between Serbia and northern Kosovo, effectively cutting them off from Serbia proper. At least six of the demonstrators were wounded.

The standoff continued over the weekend. This incident took place at the same time our NATO leaders were vigorously protesting the shooting of protesters in Syria and Yemen. So far, there have been no apologies from the NATO leadership and no demands for a full inquiry.

Kosovo, since its so-called liberation from Serbia, has become a failed state with massive unemployment, crime and corruption prevalent, and a leadership deeply involved in the importation of heroin and arms, and human smuggling - not to mention serious allegations about the harvesting of human body parts.

Nevertheless, Kosovo is the stepchild state of the U.S.-led NATO powers, and therefore must be seen to be a success. NATO cannot admit to failure. After all, we are told 80 countries have recognized its independence. Little mention is made that there are 113 countries of the United Nations who refuse to do so - including Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Slovakia - all members of NATO.

There is a larger than life statue of president Bill Clinton in Pristina. Shortly after the occupation of Kosovo the Americans constructed the enormous Camp Bondsteel. Kosovo is their baby and at all cost it must be accepted as a sovereign state. Unfortunately, the costs are high and may well spell the demise of NATO as a respected champion of the rule of law and democratic freedom.

Canada was involved in drafting Article 1 of the North Atlantic Treaty that stated that NATO would never use or threaten to use force in the resolution of international disputes and would always act in accordance with the principles laid down by the United Nations Charter. Alas, we never hear anything more about Article 1.

After the collapse of the Soviet empire, Article 1 came to be seen by the United States as an obstacle in preventing NATO (read the United States) from intervening in out-of-area disputes and in using force to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives, frequently under the guise of humanitarian intervention.

The first opportunity of doing this was the bombing of Serbia on the false grounds that Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic was planning to ethnically cleanse Kosovo of its majority Albanian

population and that genocide was taking place there.

Without consulting the United Nations and in violation of its own treaty, NATO bombed Serbia for 78 days and nights and was successful in tearing away an integral part of that country's territory.

The United States and some of the NATO countries, including Canada, have gone further by recognizing the declaration of independence of Kosovo, despite UN Resolution 1244 that reaffirmed Serbia's sovereignty over that province.

By doing so they have opened Pandora's Box and issued an open invitation to the many groups and tribes around the world aspiring for their own state to do so by simply declaring independence. Can anyone really blame the Palestinians for expecting anything less?

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