

The Prosecution of Washington's Kosovo Clients for War Crimes

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The United States and its NATO allies launched a military intervention in 1999 that helped the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) win its secessionist campaign against Serbia. U.S. officials justified that intervention on the grounds that Serbian security forces were committing pervasive war crimes against the Kosovar insurgents. American supporters of the KLA also asserted that the secessionists were staunch Western-style democrats mounting a noble resistance against Slobodan Milosevic's corrupt, brutal regime, and that America had a moral obligation to support them. Speaking at a pro-Kosovo march in Washington D. C., Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) [stated](#) that 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."

There was abundant evidence at the time that KLA leaders did not embody such values. Shortly after Kosovo became independent, KLA-supported mobs [destroyed Serbian religious sites](#) and waged [a campaign of ethnic cleansing](#) that expelled thousands of Serbs, as well as Roma and other minorities. Years later, [evidence of utterly barbaric behavior](#) during and after the war emerged. In 2010, [an investigative report](#) for the Council of Europe confirmed long-standing rumors that the KLA was involved in the trafficking of human organs, including killing Serb prisoners of war to harvest their kidneys and other organs. The lead investigator and author of the report was Swiss Senator Dick Marty, a highly respected champion of human rights. One of the suspects specifically named was Kosovo prime minister (currently president) Hashim Thaci. Yet U.S. leaders in the Bush, Obama, and Trump administration continued to back the KLA alumni who dominated Kosovo's politics. The flow of foreign aid money from Washington continued unabated.

It now will—or at least should—be very difficult for Washington to persist in that policy. On June 24, Thaci and nine other former separatist military leaders [were indicted](#) on a range of crimes against humanity and war crimes charges by an international prosecutor probing their actions against ethnic Serbs and others during and after Kosovo's 1998-99 war for independence against Serbia. The prosecutor for the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, a court based in The Hague, said Thaci and the nine others "are criminally responsible for nearly 100 murders" involving hundreds of Serb and Roma victims, as well as Kosovo Albanian political opponents. At the time of his indictment, Thaci was about to depart on one of his many trips to Washington to consult with U.S. officials on Balkan affairs.

This case is yet another shameful episode in which U.S. leaders have embraced thuggish geopolitical clients and portrayed them as committed democrats. At times, the United States has even [gone to war on behalf of such odious clients](#). Washington's support for

Ahmed Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress played a major role in America's decision to wage the ill-advised military crusade in that country. More recently, Obama administration officials and many of their allies in the media have portrayed Islamic jihadists in Syria as freedom fighters seeking to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime, and, therefore, are worthy of U.S. backing.

Such chronic misrepresentations should not only cause U.S. leaders acute embarrassment, there needs to be a fundamental reexamination of America's foreign policy to prevent such fiascos in the future. A good place to start is with a repudiation of the leaders Washington helped bring to power in Kosovo.

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