

West Supported KLA; Milosevic Directed Arkan, Witness Testifies

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Franz-Josef Hutsch, military professional and freelance journalist, completed his testimony today in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic. Under cross examination, he revealed his view that preparations for a NATO war against Serbia were begun in Bosnia by at least 1996 when a US-government funded company (MPRI, Military Professional Resources, Inc.) recruited and trained officers to provide the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) with capabilities it didn't have at the time. The officers were to act as spotters on the ground for NATO airstrikes.

This contradicts Prosecution evidence that the KLA was a small rag tag bunch of disaffected individuals until Serbia's excessive use of force gave it credibility among Kosovo Albanians and precipitated an outpouring of support. It also contradicts evidence that states and international institutions were slow to intervene in an escalating crisis in Kosovo, repeatedly deferring to Milosevic's empty promises.

Hutsch testified that NATO's goal in the Kosovo War was not only to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe, but to bring down Slobodan Milosevic. He compared the situation to Iraq, where stated goals for the US-led invasion changed from time to time to include removing Sadaam Hussein from power. (In the Kosovo War, however, the coalition of NATO countries authorized NATO to attack Serbia.) Hutsch said NATO couldn't remove Milosevic without ground troops, and seemed to imply that planning for a ground attack had long been underway. General Sir Michael Jackson, he claimed, told him it would take only three weeks to prepare an attack by ground troops. (In his book, General Wesley Clark, leader of the NATO alliance, wrote it would take much longer. He repeatedly advocated with his superiors for the use of ground troops -- not as a way to catch Milosevic, but as a way to win the war more quickly.)

Addressing the witness's oft-repeated statement that the KLA provoked disproportionate attacks by Serbian forces, Prosecutor Geoffrey Nice asked if another way to view it was that 'Serbs used relatively small acts [by the KLA] to bring huge suffering to [nearby] villages.' Hutsch replied that he had a problem with calling the killing of a Serb policeman a 'small act' but would otherwise agree.

He also agreed that Serb forces were considerably larger than KLA forces in April 1999: 20,000 Yugoslav Army (VJ) and 30,000 Serbian police (MUP). He disputed the accuracy of the latter figure since he contended that many Serb police did double duty as paramilitaries in their off hours and days. Their superiors, he said, turned a blind eye. Indeed, he testified that the VJ, MUP and paramilitaries worked together in operations in Kosovo. He blamed both the VJ and MUP for using Kosovar Albanian civilians as human shields, by billeting troops and military equipment in the lower stories of houses occupied by civilians.

As for paramilitaries, he told of an interview with Zelko Raznjatovic 'Arkan' in which Arkan said he had been 'dumped' by Milosevic because he knew too much. According to the warlord, Franko Simatovic (Frenki) replaced him in overall command of paramilitaries in Kosovo. Arkan also told him that everything he did he did under the command of the Serbian Army and Milosevic. Hutsch said he was unable to verify Arkan's statement so could not say whether it was 100% clear that instructions to use paramilitaries came from Milosevic or from the paramilitary leaders themselves. Arkan was assassinated in a Belgrade hotel after the war.

Nice returned to questioning the witness about Bosnia and his interview with General Ratko Mladic. The prosecutor referred to an article Hutsch published on 21 October 2000 in which he said that 'Slobodan Milosevic let his bloodhounds Karadzic and Mladic off the leash.' The witness confirmed he wrote that and said he relied on Western European Security Services for his source material. 'It was extremely plausible and had been corroborated by documents.'

Referring to his March 1996 Mladic interview and his statement yesterday that it took place in Sarajevo 'where Mladic still is,' Nice asked hopefully, 'I don't suppose you are suggesting you know where he is now?' To which Hutsch responded, 'Let's put it like this. There are more than rumors on where he's staying. NATO and SFOR have information on where he's staying.' When asked whether he was aware that efforts had been made (in 1995 - 96) to free Mladic from ever having to surrender to the ICTY, the witness said he would prefer answering the question in a more 'intimate atmosphere.'
Given his suggestive testimony, one might expect the prosecutor and Mr. Hutsch will meet again.

In the interview with Hutsch, Mladic said he was completely unaware of the figure of 7000 Muslims dead in Srebrenica and attributed deaths on both sides to heavy fighting. When Hutsch pressed him about stories

circulating of men separated from women and taken to be shot, he called them 'fairy tales.' He had gone through town, he said, and assured people they would be treated according to the Geneva Conventions (he brought his own video photographer to record that 'heroic' moment).

Hutsch also confronted him with allegations that Srebrenica could not have been taken without Belgrade's agreement. 'Don't you think we Serbs could solve our own problems in Bosnia?' Mladic answered, insisting in answer to a follow up question that 'I do not accept orders from Milosevic. We are grown up enough to solve our own.'

When Nice pointed out that Mladic 'never says whether the Accused spoke to him at the time or sought to give instructions; just that he wouldn't take orders from him,' the witness agreed, 'Precisely.'

As CIJ wrote yesterday, Hutsch's testimony did not entirely favor or disfavor either side. Certainly, the Prosecution must welcome additional evidence that the VJ, MUP and paramilitaries operated together in Kosovo, that they attacked civilian villages, used civilians as human shields, responded to KLA provocations with excessive force (often against civilians), and that Arkan claimed to take orders from Milosevic. The witness's testimony about the strength of the KLA, its early support from outside sources, its role in evacuating villages and creating a humanitarian crisis to exploit will have to be evaluated with the Prosecution's contrary evidence and anything more the Defence puts forward.

Location: Balkans
Kosovo
Macedonia
Serbia

Topic: War crimes

Focus: Coalition for International Justice (CIJ) Trial Reports Archive

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