

Who Is Bombing The Kosovo Democratic League?

Author: [Imer Mushkolaj](#)

The Kosovo Democratic League - the Kosovo Liberation Army's chief challengers for rule over the breakaway province - has been hit by a series of bomb attacks. Some blame deranged individuals, others see political method in the madness.

A series of bomb attacks targeting the Kosovo Democratic League has been attributed to Kosovo Serbs, or private individuals with a grudge - but an organised campaign by Kosovar Albanian forces has not been ruled out, as the province's political situation teeters towards elections.

The international administration is struggling to maintain authority in Kosovo, and claims that the security problem is being addressed, but its presence can do nothing to ease the bitter divides within the Albanian political establishment.

Vitriolic attacks on parties like the KDL in the media have often been followed by violence. In the small western town of Decan alone, the local KDL offices in the town centre has been bombed three times.

"The attacks have been carried out by stupid people who do not even know the aim of their actions" - said Isuf Hutaj, the local KDL leader in Decan, one of the Kosovo towns most badly hit during the NATO offensive prior to the Serbian government withdrawal.

Others blame former members of the KLA and still others blame the remaining Serbs in the province. "I can't see how Serbs can be behind these attacks, there is hardly any Serb left in the area," said a Decan resident, Salih. Another, Ibrahim, 50, takes the opposite view. "I do not believe that these attacks are carried out by Albanians. I think it's some Serbs."

Nevertheless, since the last attack the KDL party officials spend only a few hours in the office during the morning, and continue their activity in a café nearby or at home. The sign 'Kosovo Democratic League - Decan Office', in Albanian and English, has been removed from the building.

Tensions have been exacerbated by a standoff between the KDL and the KLA - between pre-conflict advocates of peaceful and armed resistance respectively - that is recreated at town and village level across the province.

A transitory Kosovo Government formed in April, headed by KLA chief Hashim Thaci, was never recognised by the international community, but has nevertheless established local administrations in every commune.

The KDL in Decan and other towns consider the KLA-led transitory authority as illegitimate and are refusing to serve on their local administrations. "We do not participate in the local government, but this does not mean that we do not want to collaborate with them," said Hutaj.

On the other side local officials say that all who 'helped' during the war were playing their part. "Hard working people are participating in our government," said Ibrahim Selmanaj, prefect of the Decan commune, appointed by Thaci. "Many of them were members of KDL."

Yet several KDL members report harassment. Agim Maka, a KDL activist in Junik, a village close to Decan,

was badly beaten by several unknown assailants. Bombs have exploded in KDL offices in Malishevo and Suhareka.

In Suhareka, in southern Kosovo, KDL activist Uke Bytyci was attacked even before the NATO offensive and forced to suspend KDL party activity in the region. Sinan Gashi, a member of the KDL presidency in Glogoc was beaten up, while Haki Ymeri, a local official of the KDL in Skenderaj was killed earlier this month in an attack branded as "political" by his party colleagues.

Selmanaj, 30, rejects talk of KLA involvement in the violence, and blames "a third party". The attacks were carried out "by irresponsible people, aiming at creating a tense situation in Decan," he said. "I think a third party is behind the attacks. We are on very good terms with the KDL."

Despite the problems the local KDL presidency is working hard to consolidate the party locally, with general elections due within months and local elections possibly sooner. Hutaj, speaking in front of his house, burned down during the war, said, "the party is being reorganised properly".

Ibrahim Rugova, the chairman of the KDL, was reelected 'president' of Kosovo in March of last year, after elections contested by several other Albanian political parties but still not recognised by the international community. He remains the most widely regarded political figure in Kosovo, and is thought better equipped to lead a party to conventional political power than Thaci.

The inhabitants of Decan have different views about what is happening in their town. Some think that the violence is purely personal, between old pre-war foes. Others say the attacks only generate public sympathy for "the poor KDL," as a group of high school students put it.

"It's wrong to act like this against the former largest party in the province," said one student. "Let's wait for the elections first and see who will win." The Kosovo Democratic League was formed in December 1989 and until before the war it numbered 700,000 members.

Some claimed the KDL was staging the attacks themselves. "It's the KDL members who throw the bombs," said a local government official, formerly a member of "the private party of Rugova," as he called the KDL. "They do it in order to win some sympathy."

A former KLA member, speaking anonymously, claimed to know the people behind the attacks, but would not reveal names.

"The attacks are carried out by a group of youngsters who do not like the idea that the KDL still acts as a party in the province," he said. He will not say if this group has contacts with other groups in other towns. "Bombs are only a warning to them (the KDL members). The Group can even kill them".

Most locals will only say, "nowadays, it is better to keep silent". The attacks are further aggravating the already messy Kosovar political situation and they all hope that things will get better soon. The former KLA fighter, however, noted only that "it can still get worse".

Most Kosovars are preoccupied by preparations for the coming winter and its grim privations, but all are aware of the threat of violence. Large quantities of arms, explosives and grenades are still in the hands of the public. Bomb blasts and bullets do not distinguish between party members when the target is a town or a farm.

Syla, 70, busy trying to fix a roof on a stall for his only cow, summed it up. "Others," he said, "can suffer from these bombs".

Imer Mushkolaj is a journalist in Pristina

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