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Empowering the Body Snatchers: Washington's Appalling Kosovo Policy

The revelations just keep coming, and the evidence mounts that Washington's policy since the mid-1990s regarding Kosovo has been stubbornly obtuse. The latest blot on America's diplomacy is [an investigative report](#) for the Council of Europe released just before Christmas confirming long-standing rumors that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was involved in the trafficking of human organs, including killing Serbian prisoners to harvest their kidneys and other organs. Two aspects of the report were especially damning. First, the author and lead investigator was Swiss Senator Dick Marty, a highly respected champion of human rights. Second, the report specifically named Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci as an accomplice in those atrocities—as well as being involved in other criminal activities, including drug trafficking and politically motivated murders. Thaci, of course, has vehemently disputed the Marty report, but people who have followed his career since his guerrilla days, when he was known as “The Snake,” find the allegations all too credible.



This thoroughly distasteful situation might be a parochial issue if it were not for the high-profile role that the United States and its leading NATO allies played in the two-stage process of securing Kosovo's independence from Serbia. During the first stage in the mid and late 1990s, Clinton administration officials and their cheerleaders in Congress, the think tank community, and the news media [portrayed the KLA's secessionist war as a stark melodrama](#) featuring noble Albanian Kosovars and their evil Serb oppressors. The most notorious expression of that view was Senator Joseph Lieberman's [assertion](#) that the United States and the terrorist KLA shared the same goals and values.

That grotesque oversimplification of a bitter ethnic struggle eventually led to a NATO air war against Serbia in 1999, which killed well over 1,000 Serbian civilians, and a subsequent NATO-led military occupation of Kosovo under the nominal auspices of the United Nations.

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Пише: Ted Galen Carpenter
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Stage two of the amputation of the province from a now fully democratic Serbia was the decision by the United States and the leading European Union powers to recognize Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in early 2008. That action was taken despite vehement criticism from Russia and China about ignoring the UN Security Council, which was officially responsible for policy regarding Kosovo.

As I've [written elsewhere](#), the West's arrogant bypassing of the Security Council (and, thereby, a certain Russian veto) set a bad precedent on several levels. At the time, the Russian foreign minister warned that the logic the NATO powers used regarding Kosovo could be applied to numerous situations around the world, including Georgia's secessionist provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. [Moscow made good on that implied threat](#) later in the year during its war with Georgia.

The Obama administration should use the Marty report as an opportunity for a comprehensive reassessment of U.S. policy regarding the Kosovo issue. From the beginning, Washington has been the principal advocate of Kosovo's independence, and has worked closely with Thaci and other KLA leaders. The outcome has been unsatisfactory at best and shameful at worst. One of the first actions of the victorious KLA following NATO's intervention in 1999 was [to drive more than 200,000 non-Albanians](#)—not just Serbs, but other ethnic minorities as well—out of the province. Such ethnic cleansing took place on NATO's watch, yet Alliance (including U.S.) forces did nothing at the time or in the years since to reverse it.

U.S. and other Western policy makers persist in portraying the Kosovo intervention as a great success. But Kosovo is an [economically dysfunctional international ward](#) with an unemployment rate exceeding 45 percent. Indeed, the legal economy—absent the extensive financial inputs from foreign would-be nation builders—is scarcely relevant at all. Instead, political corruption is rampant, and the country is now a haven for various mafia criminal enterprises. The Marty report merely lifts the lid on one aspect of an odious situation that has gone on for more than a decade.

Governments are notoriously reluctant to acknowledge being responsible for a major policy blunder. But the United States and its principal NATO partners need to make such an admission regarding Kosovo. Pretending that the policy has been justified, much less that it has been successful, will not make the unpleasant reality go away.