



Episode 740: Kosovo: A Military Intervention Bernie Sanders Supported

Guest: Jim Jatras

WOODS: I got a lot of requests for this particular topic, and then I just finally said if you can't beat 'em, join 'em; we're going to talk about this. Even though it's 17 years later after the bombing of the Serbs over Kosovo it still interests people, because it's another case of military intervention based around propaganda that a lot of people still believe. There are still people who think Saddam Hussein was behind 9/11. You darn well better believe there are people who still believe that NATO prevented a genocide in Kosovo through the bombing. So let's start from the very beginning. Tell us what is it about Kosovo that would make this such a contentious place.

JATRAS: Well, Tom, I'm glad to hear that people are still asking this question, because not only is it something that's sort of gone down the memory hole as a great success, "we stopped genocide," etc., etc., but it's become the template for all the other R2P, responsibility to protect themes we get for places like Libya and Syria and so forth. So it's a lie that keeps on giving. It's sort of the granddaddy of all the successful interventions that we keep getting pushed into.

Why did it become such a contentious place? In a way it was kind of like the last episode of the breakup of Yugoslavia, which itself is a larger question: what were the forces pushing for intervention in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, really in the beginning of the 1990s, almost as soon as the Cold War ended? And that's a very complex mix. It has to do with the ascension of the neoconservatives to power in Washington; it has to do with the various ethnic lobbies, what I sometimes call them the World War II Losers Associations, that had their very powerful voices within Congress. And it also I think had just sort of the muscular attitude of the United States needs to now lead in a very specific way, to impose order or what we claimed to be order on the rest of the world, and somebody had to be made an example of. That turned out to be largely Serbia. The rule and the breakup of Yugoslavia was all the other entities there. The Croats, the Muslims, the Albanians had legitimate claims, but the Serbs had no legitimate claims, and that was the watchword going forward in Yugoslavia.

I would say the main reason that we ended up focusing on Kosovo was that the notion in Washington that we couldn't end the breakup of Yugoslavia until Kosovo had been detached from Serbia, and that was largely a function of making NATO the supreme, unchallenged voice within European security arrangements, and also appeasing our friends in the Islamic world, particularly the Saudis, the Pakistanis, the Egyptians, and others, who wanted to make a case example of the United States coming to the rescue of Muslims to show how much we love the Islamic world. In fact, you'll see people like

Tom Lantos, as late as 2008, on the question of independence for Kosovo, "making an example." We want every jihadist in the world to see, here is the United States foursquare behind the creation of another Muslim country in the very heart of Europe. As if somehow that's going to impress them very favorably. So there was that mentality that was at work there too, so it was a multifaceted thing. But it all came together in Kosovo to say, yes, we have to do this; yes, we can.

WOODS: All right, the next ingredient then is the Kosovo Liberation Army, the KLA. It's interesting that they were listed as a terrorist group in the Bill Clinton White House as late as 1997, and then in 1999 when the bombing began in March, *The New York Times* writes an editorial about the situation and somehow manages not to mention the KLA at all. So fill in that blank for us.

JATRAS: As far as I know, the KLA was never formally listed on the list of terrorist organizations that the State Department keeps; however, Robert Gelbard, who was one of the top officials in the Clinton administration at that time, did say in public that, let's face it, the KLA is a terrorist organization. So he used that characterization.

WOODS: Okay, that may be what I'm thinking of. Okay.

JATRAS: Well, it's what everybody's thinking of. There was that one comment, and some people then reasonably then infer that they must have been listed as a terrorist organization. But to the best of my knowledge, they never were. And as you know, we play very, let's say, inconsistent games when it comes to who is designated a terrorist organization and who is not.

WOODS: Oh, you don't say?

JATRAS: You don't say. I mean, look at the groups that we supported in Libya, the ones we're supporting now in Syria. Basically a terrorist is somebody that is against our current policy. But somebody's who for a current policy? Well, they're freedom fighters. And in the case of the Kosovo Liberation Army, it's a group that had its origins from many directions. Some of them actually were diehard communists from the communist era in Albania. Others had very strong roots in the fascist movements in the area during World War II, the Skanderbeg Division, the SS group that was sponsored by the Germans in Kosovo during World War II.

But I would say the main organizing principle of the Kosovo Liberation Army was the Albanian mafia, which is actually based not so much in Albania proper but in Kosovo. In fact, if anybody has ever seen the *Taken* movies, the bad guys -- you know, with Liam Neeson -- the bad guys in the come from a place called Tropojë in northern Albania. That was the staging area for the Kosovo Liberation Army right across the border from Serbia, into the Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

And if you look at all the top leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Hashim Thaçi, the so-called prime minister of Kosovo, now nicknamed "The Snake"; you've got Ramush Haradinaj; you've got Agim Çeku. All of these people are kingpins in the Albanian mafia: you know, drugs, sex slaves, weapons, all of that. And obviously people in Washington just turned a blind eye, and as we know, unfortunately when we're talking

about some of the covert actions the United States has taken over the decades, working with terrorists, working with organized crime, that's stock-in-trade, unfortunately.

WOODS: All right, so here within Serbia you have a place that has a lot of Albanians in it, and in particular, a lot of Albanian Muslims. So I don't know if you would know the numbers offhand, but how heavy is this Albanian population, and how heavily Islamic is it?

JATRAS: It's a little hard to know sometimes because the numbers fluctuate. In fact, a lot of people even since Kosovo was declared independent in 2008 have left there because the place is an economic basket case. Other than criminal activity, there isn't much in the way of a viable economy. And of course, a lot of international aid from the United States and the European Union has just gone down the rat hole, as it usually does in these cases. The conventional numbers are somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million people total, of which today approximately 95% are going to be ethnic Albanians depending on how you count them, because you have some people who are maybe Albanian speakers but don't consider themselves Albanians. Like for example, you have gypsies there; you have people called Gorani, who are Serbian-speaking Muslims, but sometimes they're counted as Albanians because they're Muslim. So it's a complex stew. But I would say about 90, 95% of the people left in Kosovo since most of the Serbs have been driven out are Albanians and probably 90%+ of them are Muslims. There's a small minority of Roman Catholics and even smaller minority of Orthodox Christians, but fairly small.

But I think you put your finger on the main point. Any number of countries in the world have ethnic minorities that are concentrated in one corner or one part of the country. We don't normally consider those minorities to be "majorities" because they are concentrated in one part of the country. That was the line coming from the United States and the so-called international community about Kosovo: Albanians are a "majority" in Kosovo. No they're not; they're an ethnic minority in Serbia. They are concentrated in Kosovo. And over the decades, and really for a process going over centuries, what was once a majority Serbian and Christian area has been increasingly Albanized and Islamicized with the aid of various foreign sponsors, whether it was the Turks or the Germans or then the communists and now NATO.

WOODS: So what then -- and now we'll get to the civil war that broke out -- what was the KLA's aim?

JATRAS: The KLA's aim was what the NATO ended up wanting to give them, which was independence, creating their own state that they controlled. I mean, if you were the kingpin in an organized crime family, what better situation could you imagine is to create your own state where your criminal organization is the "government"?

WOODS: And this particular episode has really complicated things in my mind, because in general I favor secession. I favor the withdrawal of smaller entities from larger ones. I favor this generally across the board, but yet in a case like this when I know that the result is going to be a lot of people are going to be oppressed, it's a little trickier for me to figure out exactly where to stand -- and certainly in observing how it was brought about with basically the idea being that NATO's going to provide air cover

for the KLA. And it was based all on propaganda. We were getting these absurd numbers of people who had allegedly been killed by the Serbs. The whole thing stinks on some level.

JATRAS: Well, that's right, and you know, that's sort of inherent to the whole concept of intervention for human rights. I mean, obviously when they claimed responsibility to protect or there's an impending humanitarian disaster in Benghazi or we just saw very recently with all the saturation of coverage of "Aleppo boy," supposedly targeted by Russian or Syrian or wherever airpower -- but they don't of course show us the video of the kid getting his head sawed off by Harakat al-Zenqi, a US-supported group. It's very, very selective when they say this is a terrible crime and we have to stop it, and because it would be a crime against humanity if we do not stop this. The only thing that's almost as bad is the crimes that are sometimes alleged are the false allegations of such crimes in order to legitimate an intervention or what really amounts to an aggression, which we know from the Nuremberg Trials is sort of the first of all war crimes. Waging aggressive warfare then sums up all the other war crimes.

On the question of secession, I understand the point of view that smaller is better, but you also end up with the problem that that means that no country, no nation can have its own state, can have a national home of any sort, because there's always going to be a national minority that says, well, we want our own country, we want to break away. Okay. And then in that breakaway portion there's presumably other smaller groups or maybe members of the majority nations who don't want to belong to that breakaway part. Do they get to break away from that? And so on and so forth.

For example, in northern Kosovo is the last remaining area that is inhabited by a majority -- I would say a predominantly Serbian population. Are they allowed to break away from Kosovo the way supposedly Kosovo broke away from Serbia? Oh no, no. That would be a violation of the territorial integrity and international borders of Kosovo as recognized by the United States and its allies. Why is one secession okay but another one is not? You could replicate the same thing in Bosnia, for example. Bosnia under its plurality of Muslims and Croats wanted to break away from Yugoslavia. Great, they have an absolute right to do that. But if the Serbian population in Bosnia wants to break away then from Bosnia, no, that cannot be allowed. They must be required to stay in Bosnia. So you see it's sort of a "heads you win, tails you lose" kind of analysis.

WOODS: So what was going on then that would -- well, whether it was exaggerated is another matter, but what were the activities taking place that provided cover for the US to say intervention is required?

JATRAS: Well, we're not going to go all the way back to 1389, the Battle of Kosovo and the Turkish conquest and all that, but if we just take the immediate modern period, which is when Tito died, when Yugoslavia started becoming increasingly dysfunctional, what you had was a secessionist movement within Kosovo and also increasing, I would say, low-level hostility pressure from ethnic Albanians against the Serbs in Kosovo or an intensification of pressure that had been going on for some time under communist rule.

I mean, by the way, that's one way that Milosevic got his start in Serbia and later on in Yugoslavia, because he was the only communist leader that ever spoke up for

the Serbs in Kosovo, because up until the mid 1980s, the Albanians as part of the communist structure of Yugoslavia controlled Kosovo: the police, the courts, everything was controlled by the Albanians, and the Serbs were increasingly marginalized and being forced out under a constitution that gave them total control of Kosovo and the nominally superior authorities of the Serbian Republic almost no control. So one thing Milosevic did is he downgraded the autonomy status of Kosovo to what it had been under an earlier constitution, gave Belgrade stronger control over Kosovo.

This was rejected by the Albanians, who insisted we must have independence. At that point you started to have the outside powers -- the Americans, the Germans, the British -- starting to feed weapons and guns and money into a violent organization, what eventually became the KLA, to do what we see over and over again in these cases: you launch attacks against the government authorities, against police stations, against post offices, you kill people, and naturally then the government reacts. The government reacts, and they can say, ah, look what they're doing; they're attacking their own people; we must do something.

So it was essentially a set-up job to reach what was a preconceived outcome, which was we need to secure independence for these people because they're being subjected to these horrible attacks. What they don't talk about is that this was being supported by the outside, by the intelligence services of these countries. And also, by the way, increasingly inviting in outside jihad terror groups to go on into Kosovo to fight the good fight, as they see it. The former head of the Albanian intelligence, the sheik, a guy named Fatos Klosi, said he saw twice Osama bin Laden in Tirana meeting with Hashim Thaçi and other KLA leaders in order to propagate the jihad war in Kosovo.

WOODS: All right, let's take a brief moment to thank our sponsor and come right back.

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All right, now let's get into, the actual bombs start falling I believe March 1999. Actually, no. Let's back up before that. The US government tried to say that it and NATO were trying to come up with a peaceful resolution to what was going on there, and I believe it was called the Rambouillet Agreement. And what I read about it, and it's been a while, was that it's one of these typical things where they set the bar higher than they would possibly expect from their enemy, in this case the Serbs, to accept, and in fact, even Henry Kissinger said this was just an excuse to start bombing; this was not really a serious agreement. What can you tell us about that?

JATRAS: Well, let's go back a few months. In August of 1998, I wrote a report at the US Senate Republican leadership there about the Clinton administration's policy toward Kosovo, and even from open sources at that point in August of 1998, it was clear that they planned to attack Serbia over Kosovo, and all they were doing was waiting for a trigger. And one anonymous government official said that in so many words: "a trigger." We were looking for an atrocity that would allow us to intervene. That occurred in, I believe it was in January, a place called Račak, where 17 years later we still don't know what happened. A bunch of people were killed, all of them adult men, except for I think one teenage boy and one woman. The Serbs said it was a

fight with KLA terrorists. The Albanians, of course, their foreign sponsors said it was a massacre by Serbian forces. But that was the smoking gun.

That was going to be the "weapons of mass destruction," so to speak, that allowed for the intervention. That's what gave rise to the Rambouillet negotiations that Madeleine Albright, the Secretary of State, undertook at the time, and by numerous accounts they did exactly what you just described: they set the bar too high. In fact, Madeleine Albright was quoted by one anonymous source as having said in the course of those discussions, "The Serbs need some bombing, and that's what they're going to get." And the real key to that was the so-called Annex B, which essentially not only provided for the independence of Kosovo, but the occupation of all of what was then still Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, by NATO forces. Now, what country is going to accept that? We're talking about an ultimatum that was 10 times worse than the one the Austro-Hungarians gave to Serbia in 1914 at the beginning of World War I. So they had to reject those terms, and of course then that "justified" the NATO attack.

WOODS: What did the NATO attack look like? How long did it last, and what kind of damage and casualties are we looking at?

JATRAS: It lasted over 70 days, and let's remember, at the time the Western governments, Jamie Rubin at the State Department, who was the spokesman at the time -- coincidentally of course Christiane Amanpour's husband -- and Jamie Shea, the spokesman for NATO, were making these extravagant claims of, you know, 10,000 Albanians massacred by the Serbs, 100,000 of them being held at the Pristina stadium and so forth. All in all, it turns out that there were probably about 3,500 people killed in Kosovo during the course of the war, proportionately more Serbs than Albanians, if you look at the proportions of the population. There were probably another -- again, the numbers vary on this -- somewhere between 3- and 5,000 people killed elsewhere in Serbia, mostly civilians. You'll hear from many Serbian sources -- and again, these were discounted by the Western media -- things like cluster bombs, depleted uranium, and also that we would bomb places like a bridge or a road or a railroad; a bunch of people would be killed, and then when the first responders would come, another wave of attacks would come and kill a lot of them as well. Now, these are disputed by the Western governments, but the people there swear this is the kind of thing that would happen. But we're talking about several thousand people. The numbers were disputed. There were no of course NATO personnel who lost their lives, so it goes down as a great success.

WOODS: Yeah, the numbers that had been thrown around before the bombing by reputable -- well, you know, reputable by their standards -- US sources were in the six figures. Even Clinton said there were 100,000 people who were still missing, and then his Secretary of Defense said they may have been murdered. Well, yeah, anything "may" have happened to anybody, but it turns out this figure is exaggerated. And then there were different sites where supposedly mass graves would be found, and inspectors went, and they found nothing at all, or they found a handful of people. So I mean, it's an unbelievable case of propaganda, which is why the whole Bernie Sanders thing kind of burns me up, because here he is congratulating himself on not having supported the Iraq War, but if anything, this war was, I don't know, at least as preposterous in terms of propaganda, and he swallowed this whole.

JATRAS: That's right, and it's kind of unfortunate, because there is something in the progressive mind, I guess, that just has to believe that truth, justice, and the NATO way really embody everything that is good. And this also relates to the question of what we were talking about with Rambouillet and setting the bar too high. I don't know how well known this is; I was called as a defense witness at Milosevic's trial at the Hague, and some people consider that rather controversial. How could I defend Milosevic? Well, you know, you're called to the trial, you have relevant information, you give it.

And so I asked him about Rambouillet and the ultimatum that was put there by NATO, and he pointed out that in June of 1999, the way the war ended is when the former Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and Ahtisaari, a former Finnish official, came to him, they essentially took off the table the two conditions that were placed on at Rambouillet as the condition for stopping the war. And he said okay, that these were terms that could have been had back in February, even without the war, but it was only then that NATO took them off the table. But what they were afraid was the alliance was on the verge of cracking, that one of the member countries was going to pull the plug on the authorization to use war, because it was just dragging on and on. In fact, there was even discussion that by July 4th -- you know, obviously the American Independence Day -- the Clinton administration might have had to back down because they thought it was only going to take a few days. They did not have any reason to think it was going to take 78 days.

WOODS: Let's talk about ethnic cleansing. It was after the bombing began that the Serbs started expelling Albanians. Now, let's talk about that, and then let's talk about what happened after the bombing, what did the Albanians do to the Serbs.

JATRAS: As you might expect in a circumstance like this where you've got a very messy, what amounts from the government side as a counterinsurgency war, happening under the bombs of the most powerful alliance ever in world history, it's going to be a little difficult to sort out exactly what happened on the ground, who's doing what. The Serbian side claims they never expelled Albanians on an ethnic basis. They conducted operations against the terrorist organization, the Kosovo Liberation Army, and under wartime conditions that's not going to be a neat process. Some civilians are going to be hurt or killed; some are going to flee. Take a look at, say, Turkish operations against the Kurds in Kurdistan, which evidently are perfectly fine. These things don't happen with Marquess of Queensberry rules.

At the same time, you have a terrorist organization, the Kosovo Liberation Army, launching attacks not only against military and police, but against civilians as well, in the course of the war. And you also have reports -- and I don't know how much credibility to give them -- that the refugee flight was itself used as a part of the propaganda meme during the war, with Albanian tribal leaders telling their people to flee to Macedonia, flee to Albania, because this also helps further the narrative behind the war. So you did have several hundred thousand people who went to the neighboring countries.

In any case, as soon as the war ended under the terms that were agreed to in June 1999, and what was supposed to be under the terms of the UN Resolution 1244 a non-NATO force coming into Kosovo, NATO came into Kosovo and set itself up as the ruling

authority in concert with the KLA. And they just sat back. Just sat back and watched as the KLA attacked the Serbian communities, drove them out of Kosovo, killed many civilians, burned down churches, things of this sort -- something that goes on sporadically even to this very day. That's why any Serbs left in Kosovo really have to live in little, tiny-armed, protected compounds, because if they go out into the general society they risk their lives and their safety.

WOODS: What was the disposition of Kosovo after the NATO campaign was complete? What happened to it? What is its status internationally?

JATRAS: Well, under the agreement -- again, it was very specific in Resolution 1244 that Kosovo was to be given the broadest possible autonomy within then Yugoslavia; since Yugoslavia broke up, then Serbia, the successor state. Well, that was clearly a lie on the part of the NATO powers. They never had any intention of respecting that. And by the way, this also then relates to our relationship with the Russians, because the Russians were very keen to say, look, we're going to get it in writing this time. We're not just going to trust you on things like whether you're going to expand NATO after Germany's reunified and so forth. We want it in writing. It's going to be "autonomy." So that's what it says.

And that was immediately disregarded by the Western powers, who made it clear from the outset that the only possible status for Kosovo was independence. And so we're going to have negotiations between the Albanians, mainly the KLA, and Belgrade over what the status of Kosovo is going to be. But Belgrade must understand there's only one possible outcome, and if they don't agree to it they're just being obstinate. So that was the nature of the negotiations that took place.

Since obviously under those terms no agreement can be reached, in February of 2008, with the cheering on of the Western powers, particularly the United States, Kosovo declared its independence and was recognized by a few dozen countries. Now there's somewhere up over 100 countries that recognize Kosovo, most of them very small, although it includes most of the European Union countries, although there are still even five countries in the European Union that don't recognize Kosovo: Spain, for obvious reasons having to do with Catalonia, Romania, and a couple others. And you also take into account that obviously Russia doesn't recognize it, China, India. A lot of the major countries in the world don't recognize Kosovo's -- of course Serbia does not recognize it. So it really is one of these situations where you have a country that claims to be a country but is unrecognized by a large part of the world.

WOODS: All right, a couple more things I want to ask you. What you said about what happened to the Serbs and them being driven out, maybe this is a rhetorical question, but how much media attention did that get?

JATRAS: Very little, and to tell the truth, Tom, what attention it did get was almost like, yeah, payback's a bitch, isn't it. That somehow because the Serbs were by definition the "bad guys," the fact that they were being driven out by the Albanians was somehow they had it coming. And there was a lot of that at the time. You know, it's interesting too that a lot of the Serbs in Kosovo that were driven out were also themselves refugees from Krajina, what is now Croatia, that they were driven out of in 1995 with US assistance as well. So you have people who have been made refugees

two, sometimes three times that were being driven out, as well as a lot of the indigenous Serbian population in Kosovo, and also attacks on other non-Albanians in Kosovo as well. There's a small Croatian community in Kosovo; most of them were driven out. Almost all of the Jews have been driven out; there was a small Jewish community there.

But it was primarily the Serbian population that was driven out. I would say about two-thirds of them were driven out of their homes. Some of them took refuge in northern Kosovo, which is still a majority Serb area that's not totally under the control of the authorities in Pristina. Sort of an armed truce that goes on there. But most of them ended up in the rest of Serbia.

WOODS: And then finally, we did hear some commentators talk about how the result of all this has been the creation of a majority Muslim, it's true, state, but a place where there's tolerance shown to others, and it's kind of a model of multiculturalism. How accurate is that?

JATRAS: It's complete bunk. I don't want to be too strident in this regard, but there is a very intolerant strain of Albanian nationalism, tribalism, that also coincides to some extent with an Islamic notion toward an inferior demi population. The Christians used to be called "the raeae," "the cattle" under the Ottoman Empire. Remember, that state of affairs only ended in 1912. It was partly reinstated during World War II under German auspices. There's not a whole lot of tolerance that comes from that side. And I think you also see this reflected, that if you look at what are some of the main breeding grounds for Islamic radicalism in Europe, it's Kosovo and also to some extent Bosnia, where if you -- just Google it. Google "Kosovo and ISIS." You will see that it's one of the hotbeds of ISIS activity in Europe. And if you look at Europeans that are volunteering to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Albanians from Kosovo are on a per capita basis among the most highly represented. So the notion that there's this secular, moderate, yes Islamic but modern and European and tolerant social identity in the new, wonderful Kosovo is simply not true. And if anything, to the extent to which there was the kind of secularism and moderation, it was a holdover from the old times of communist Yugoslavia when you did have kind of a secularization and Europeanization of culture and society and attitudes that is simply not applicable anymore.

WOODS: Can you recommend any further reading on this subject for people who would like to get to the bottom of it?

JATRAS: That's a good question. I do have some good material. It's not much of an active site anymore, but there's a lot of historical information people can pull up from a site when I was working more intensively on this on SaveKosovo.com. That's a lot of material posted from a number of different sites. But if somebody simply researches my name, "Jatras and Kosovo," I think they'll find a lot of information there. Just Google it.

WOODS: Okay, we'll do that, and I'll link to everything, including JimJatras.com also, at TomWoods.com/740. Well, Jim, this has been extremely informative and helpful, and I'm so glad you're able to take this time with us today. Thanks so much.

JATRAS: Thank you, Tom; I appreciate it.