
Die Drohungen der neuen paramilitärischen Gruppen - wie real sind sie?

(Montag, 05 Dezember 2005) -

Der kosovoarische Journalist Alma Lama untersucht für das Internetmagazin Transitions Online (TOL) die Bedrohung, die von paramilitärischen Gruppen wie der "Kosovo Unabhängigkeitsarmee" ausgehen. Diese hatten in den letzten Monaten mit Anschlägen und Attentaten gedroht, sollte die vollständige Unabhängigkeit Kosovos nicht in absehbarer Zeit erreicht werden. Wir dokumentieren den Text in voller Länge (engl.).

A new armed group threatens violence if Kosovo does not become independent
– but are they for real?

PRISTINA, Kosovo - N.K. is a 32-year-old from Decani in western Kosovo who describes himself as being "close" to the masked gunmen of the self-styled Kosovo Independence Army, or UPK. He doesn't want to see his full name in print.

Pristina media have widely reported that black-clad and masked UPK fighters appeared on some roads in the Peja region, which includes Decani, erecting roadblocks to search cars and check passengers.

As the international community gears to start direct talks between Pristina and Belgrade on the status of the province, the security situation for Kosovo's minorities remains volatile. Just this past weekend, a bus on its way from southern Kosovo to Belgrade was attacked by someone with a grenade launcher. Luckily, the grenades pierced the bus but did not explode. The incident prompted Kosovo's UN administration (UNMIK) to raise security measures once again.

OUR FRIENDS FROM THE UPK

N.K., himself a former member of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), smiles and says the UPK "are our friends." He says they are former UCK members who now feel abandoned by the politicians, including former UCK leaders, amid a very difficult economic situation.

But is the UPK for real? It emerges rather like a ghost from the tales of people with "contacts" to the rebels and investigations by the local police and the NATO-led peacekeepers (KFOR).

Even N.K. thinks the Pristina media are exaggerating a bit when covering his buddies of the UPK. "Decani is a small town, less than five thousand inhabitants, and we know each other very well," he says, implying that the locals would have a pretty good idea of who's a member and who's not.

N.K is unable to say how many people might belong to the UPK, but there seem to be a sufficient number of them to have disturbed the peacekeeping forces in Kosovo. After international forces started overflights with helicopters and unmanned aircraft in the region around Decani and Peja, where some of the fiercest fighting against Serbian forces took place in 1998-1999, the gunmen disappeared from the streets and have since switched to communications through the Internet.

But just because they've gone virtual hasn't made them any less threatening.

On 9 November, the UPK threatened the international community with "events a hundred times more dramatic than those of last March [2004]," when thousands of Serbian houses and historical and religious monuments were destroyed by mobs.

In one of their media statements, the UPK called on the Kosovo assembly to declare independence, or else deputies would have "a hard time in future days."

On 16 November, they threatened to launch a military operation on Pristina if independence was not declared immediately. They then seemed to have accepted a resolution passed by the Kosovo parliament the next day which, although it did not declare independence, made clear that independence was the only acceptable outcome of status talks.

The UPK has used similar, though rather less subtle, language with people they stopped on the road.

"We'll kill all the traitors of the nation and the members of the Kosovo negotiation team if they won't behave in the right way," two people wearing military-style uniforms with UPK insignia and black facemasks told D.S., a man from the village of Rogova in Rahovec municipality. The "team" is the Kosovo delegation to the talks on the province's final status that are about to get under way.

Former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, who is the UN's envoy to the status talks, said last week he hoped direct

negotiations can begin early in the New Year.

D.S. said the gunmen stopped him and his nephew in Rogova and forced them to show identity papers. He too doesn't want his name used because he's afraid for his safety. "I don't want any problem with them," he said.

ONLINE ONLY?

Another source interviewed by TOL had asked a UPK gunman for an interview but was told that the group weren't interested in giving statements other than those they disseminated on the Internet.

There are good reasons to suspect that the UPK is more of a virtual group than a military formation.

Two years ago, another force called the Albanian National Army also sent threatening communications to politicians via the Internet. But after a short burst of activity the organization seems to have died out.

According to another former UCK rebel from Decani, what is happening in this area is a form of blackmail. "It's a hidden political issue, nothing else," he said. "Everything depends on the status of Kosovo; if independence will not be given, the problem [of armed bands] will spread and become very serious," he said, pointing to what he described as an increasing number of extremists in Kosovo.

KFOR confirmed that armed individuals had been spotted in the Peja region but excluded the possibility they might be part of an organized military group.

The Belgrade daily Vecernje Novosti on 27 October accused Ramush Haradinaj, the former UCK commander of the region and a former Kosovo prime minister currently facing charges at the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, of being behind the mysterious paramilitary UPK, calling him "the sponsor and main ideologue of this terrorist army."

Haradinaj stands accused of crimes against Serbian civilians during the ethnic Albanian rebellion against Belgrade's rule in 1998-1999. He was released by the ICTY last June, pending trial.

But according to a TOL source in Decani, the armed men in the area are very angry at Haradinaj because he failed to help them after the war.

The UPK appeared on the scene just a few days after an article in the Kosovo daily Koha ditore, in which Mikan Velinovic, a former wrestler and writer of aphorisms, claimed to be the commander of the Serbian Antiterrorist Liberation Movement, or SOAP, a group he claimed had 7,500 members that were unarmed but ready to act if necessary. "Every Serb is a member of this organization, because we are threatened by terrorists," the paper quoted Velinovic as saying.

Fears are flying high that the opening of status talks will provide incentives for extremists on both sides to make trouble.

Ramadan Qehaja, a security adviser to Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi, is concerned that the situation might be exacerbated by foreign secret services present in Kosovo, especially from Serbia. "Elements of the Serbian Interior Ministry are active in Kosovo, especially in the northern part," he told TOL, saying that the fact that Kosovo did not have a regular secret service made it very difficult to monitor the presence of other secret services.

Political analyst Shkelzen Maliqi also told TOL that the threat of extremism was a convenient pretext that the sides could use to their advantage, but that the threat by these groups was real. "I fear the organized groups of Serbs and Albanians that are out of control. Serbs especially, because they have much more motivation and discontent. But Albanians at the same time may be determined to get their revenge if there's a domino effect."

For UNMIK spokesman Neeraj Singh, messages, real or fake, like that the UPK delivered to Kosovo's status negotiators are to be expected given what's at stake in the status talks.

"Despite the comments in the media, the threats, electronic messages, and other forms of pressure, the status of Kosovo will not be decided on the street or through the Internet, neither from Pristina nor from Belgrade," Singh told a press conference in remarks that were echoed by KFOR commander Giuseppe Valotto.

Alma Lama is a journalist for the public Radio Television of Kosovo and a correspondent for Osservatorio sui Balcani.

Quelle: <http://www.tol.cz>