

Kill thy neighbour: Kosovo's Balkan nightmare goes on
Stephen Coates, *Agence Presse France*, 8/19/03

Former British and Canadian police officer Derek Chappell had just finished saying how peaceful Kosovo had become when the phone rang on his desk at the United Nations police headquarters here. Two Serb youths had been killed in cold blood and four others injured by a gunman, a suspected ethnic Albanian, who opened fire at them while they were swimming in a river near the northwestern town of Gorazdevac.

Four years after international intervention stopped the 1998-99 civil war in Kosovo, the killing goes on despite the presence of a UN administration, an international police force and some 20,000 NATO peacekeepers. Now the roles are reversed and it is the Serbs who are appealing to the United Nations to save them from Albanian bullets.

Serbian Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic has said last week's attack was "tragic confirmation that the UN and NATO have failed" to lay the basis for a tolerant, multi-ethnic democracy in Kosovo. Deputy Prime Minister Nebojsa Covic, who was scheduled to address a special sitting of the UN Security Council on Monday, went as far as to accuse the UN-backed Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), made up of former ethnic-Albanian guerrillas, of supporting "terrorist" groups in the province.

He said the so-called Albanian National Army (ANA), a shadowy militant organisation, was a front for members of the KPC who dreamt of creating a 'Greater Albania'. The ANA emerged a year ago and has claimed responsibility for a series of armed attacks in Kosovo, Serbia proper and Macedonia. But Chappell, the chief spokesman for Kosovo's UN police force (which is separate from the KPC), said he doubted whether the ANA posed a real threat. "They have been classified as a terrorist organisation but we don't believe they can seriously threaten the stability of Kosovo," he told AFP.

He said the group was funded by the Albanian diaspora abroad and carried out small-scale attacks to maintain the interest of its patrons. "This is an organisation that probably has not much more than 70 members. They don't have training camps or guerrillas that can carry out civil war," he said. Nevertheless, Chappell admitted that the time was ripe for inter-ethnic violence in Kosovo ahead of the first ever dialogue between the ethnic-Albanian authorities in Pristina and the Serbian government in Belgrade. Kosovo is technically still a part of Serbia, although it has been a UN protectorate since NATO drove Serbian forces out of the province in 1999.

The Albanians, who are the majority in Kosovo, demand independence but the Serbian government refuses to concede anything more than maximum autonomy, saying the province is the heartland of the Serb culture and religion. The UN insists that the "final status" question will not be resolved until European benchmarks of human rights and democracy are achieved, which could take many more years given the festering ethnic hatred here.

The proposed dialogue, which would avoid the status issue and tackle matters like electricity supplies and refugees, could prompt elements opposed to reconciliation to take drastic action,

Chappell said. "We've always said that we don't believe there are any large-scale terrorist organisations in Kosovo but there are always people who are capable of carrying out terrorist acts," he said. "Kosovo is still awash with explosives, hand grenades and military weapons and it is certainly true that there are people here who do not want reconciliation and want to create instability. "They wouldn't hesitate to use violence to drive the communities apart. I think that is a very serious threat ... "

But he said the extremists' failure to generate a popular uprising against the international police and judiciary following the recent war-crimes conviction of an ethnic-Albanian guerrilla commander showed that most people, whether Serb or Albanian, wanted to bury the past. Chappell said there had been a dramatic decrease in ethnically related murders since the immediate aftermath of the war, and the biggest challenge facing police here now was organised crime.