

Kosovo: Agim Ceku, the War Criminal Not Wanted by Canada

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Since the Conservative government decided in mid-July to publish the identity of suspected war criminals living in Canada, there have already been seven of the 30 fugitives turned in to authorities. A couple of months ago I bumped into a high-profile alleged war criminal at a European defence exhibition. Unfortunately, he is not on Canada's wanted list.

Not only was Agim Ceku wandering about freely at the trade show, as the current minister of Kosovo security forces, he was actually in the market to buy new weapons systems. An ethnic Albanian from Kosovo, Ceku had a successful career in the former Yugoslavian Army.

In 1991, when Yugoslavia began to break apart, Ceku was eager to fight Serbs and he was quick to join the fledgling Croatian army.

Canadian peacekeepers first encountered Ceku in September 1993. At that juncture, the ethnic Serbian population in the region, known as the Krajina, was hoping to secede from Croatia following the country's 1991 declaration of secession from Yugoslavia.

In an effort to crush the Serb secessionists, the Croats mounted an offensive against the Krajina in the Battle of the Medak Pocket. These attacks were initially successful and the Croats quickly captured four villages from the weak Serbian militia.

But after the successful intervention by the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and French peacekeepers, under the UN banner, the Croat forces withdrew from the Medak.

However, as the Canadians advanced they soon found the grisly remains of those Serbs unfortunate to have been caught by the Croats in the pocket. Men, women, children, and even livestock and pets, had been butchered before the Croats withdrew. During this engagement, Canadian soldiers engaged the Croatian forces in the biggest battle fought by Canada since the Korean War.

Agim Ceku was not just on the planning staff for the Medak Pocket, he was actually on the front lines supervising the ethnic cleansing first-hand. We know this because he was wounded in the village of Gospic — possibly by a Canadian soldier — and spent the next few months recovering from his injuries in a Zagreb hospital.

By summer of 1995, when Croats launched the massive offensive, code-named Operation Storm, to fully reclaim the Krajina, Ceku had completely recovered, been promoted to brigadier-general and was the commander of all Croatian artillery.

Nearly 200,000 ethnic Serbs, who were all too aware of the massacre in the Medak, fled before this Croatian onslaught. Once again, Canadian military officers bore witness to Ceku's handiwork as the Croatian artillery ignored UN directives and deliberately shelled the fleeing columns of unarmed Serb civilians.

Unfortunately, all of the evidence collected by Canadians and their demands for indictments resulted in nothing, because the U.S. and U.K. senior leadership saw in Ceku a useful resource.

In 1999, when NATO was preparing to intervene in Kosovo, despite full knowledge of his alleged war crimes in Croatia, Ceku was appointed to command the Kosovo Liberation Army.

After NATO's occupation of Kosovo, and on its decade-long struggle to achieve the status of an independent state, Ceku has remained a top political figure, including having served a brief stint as the prime minister.

Based on evidence submitted by the Serbian government, there is a longstanding Interpol warrant for the arrest of Ceku on war crime charges. Over the past decade, several countries, including Slovenia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, have actually detained Ceku, based on the Interpol warrant, but in each case the U.S. State Department has exercised its clout to have him sprung.

Given the strong Canadian connection as eyewitnesses to his crimes, if Canada is serious about bringing such villains to justice, let's set our sights on putting Ceku behind bars. Those Canadian soldiers who bore witness to his atrocities deserve no less.

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