

Declassified: BBC and MI6 Kosovo War Propaganda Blitz

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On March 24th, this journalist [exposed how](#) London was at the forefront of efforts to launch a ground invasion of Yugoslavia, during NATO's illegal March-May 1999 bombing campaign.

Mercifully, this noxious project never came to pass, but declassified files show there was a further, secret component to Britain's war effort in Kosovo. MI6 covertly sought to manipulate public opinion at home and within Belgrade via wide-ranging propaganda campaigns, manufacturing consent for President Slobodan Milosevic's indictment for war crimes, removal from office, and more.

NATO's criminal bombing of Yugoslavia [was launched](#), and sustained, upon atrocity propaganda. Claims Belgrade's forces were perpetrating a modern-day Holocaust abounded throughout, despite the alliance's air assault ostensibly being launched to *prevent* such carnage.

Western officials' calculations of civilians slaughtered by the Yugoslav army grew ever-wilder. At one stage, a NATO spokesperson [asserted](#) 100,000 were dead. When Yugoslav officials were prosecuted over the conflict by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the total was [revised down](#) to a vague "hundreds."

At every step though, Western media reported as gospel whatever nonsense NATO and Western government officials asserted, while framing the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)—a sadistic, civilian-targeting CIA and MI6-backed jihadist militia with whom the Yugoslav army was truly at war—as courageous [freedom fighters](#).

As we shall see, the BBC, working in close collaboration with British intelligence, was an eager belligerent in this information war.

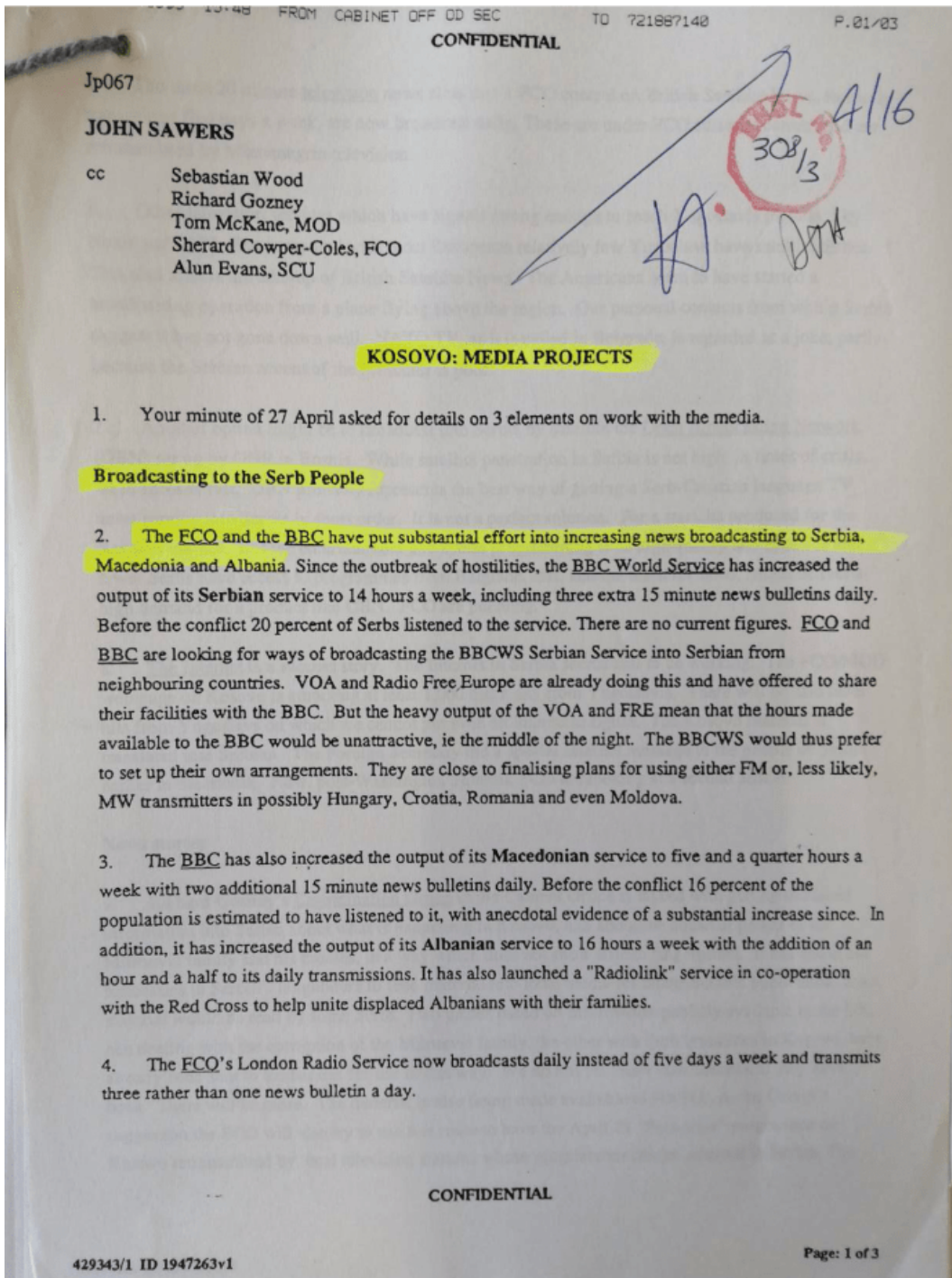
This blitz included a completely bogus Panorama “documentary,” featuring false eyewitness testimony of heinous atrocities, purportedly committed by Belgrade’s forces. Its effects were devastating, by design. The sordid episode’s relevance to future U.S. and British proxy conflicts, in Libya, Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere, could not be clearer, or graver.

“Editorial Control”

Among the declassified British government papers reviewed for this article is an April 29, 1999, memo dispatched from Michael Pakenham, then-head of London’s Joint Intelligence Committee, to John Sawers, Prime Minister Tony Blair’s “foreign policy adviser,” who in 2009 [was appointed](#) MI6 chief. It discussed clandestine “work with the media” since NATO’s aerial assault on Belgrade had already begun five weeks earlier, beginning with a section on “broadcasting to the Serb people.”

The BBC and MI6 were said to have “put substantial effort into increasing news broadcasting” to Yugoslavia, and neighboring Albania and Macedonia, since the bombing began. Due to government restrictions on foreign media during the war, the pair were investigating methods of ensuring broadcasts into Belgrade were not interrupted. U.S. propaganda outlets Radio Free Europe and Voice of America had already identified methods of doing so, and “offered to share their facilities with the BBC.”

Yet, the pair’s “heavy output” meant whatever remaining airtime was made available to the British state broadcaster—such as “the middle of the night”—“would be unattractive.” The BBC “would thus prefer to set up their own arrangements.” One option was to bombard Yugoslav audiences with propaganda via *CNN* and *Sky News*. The memo lamented that, “relatively few Yugoslavs have satellite dishes,” therefore denting the reach of British Satellite News, [branded](#) London’s “global fake news network” by academic propaganda expert David Miller.

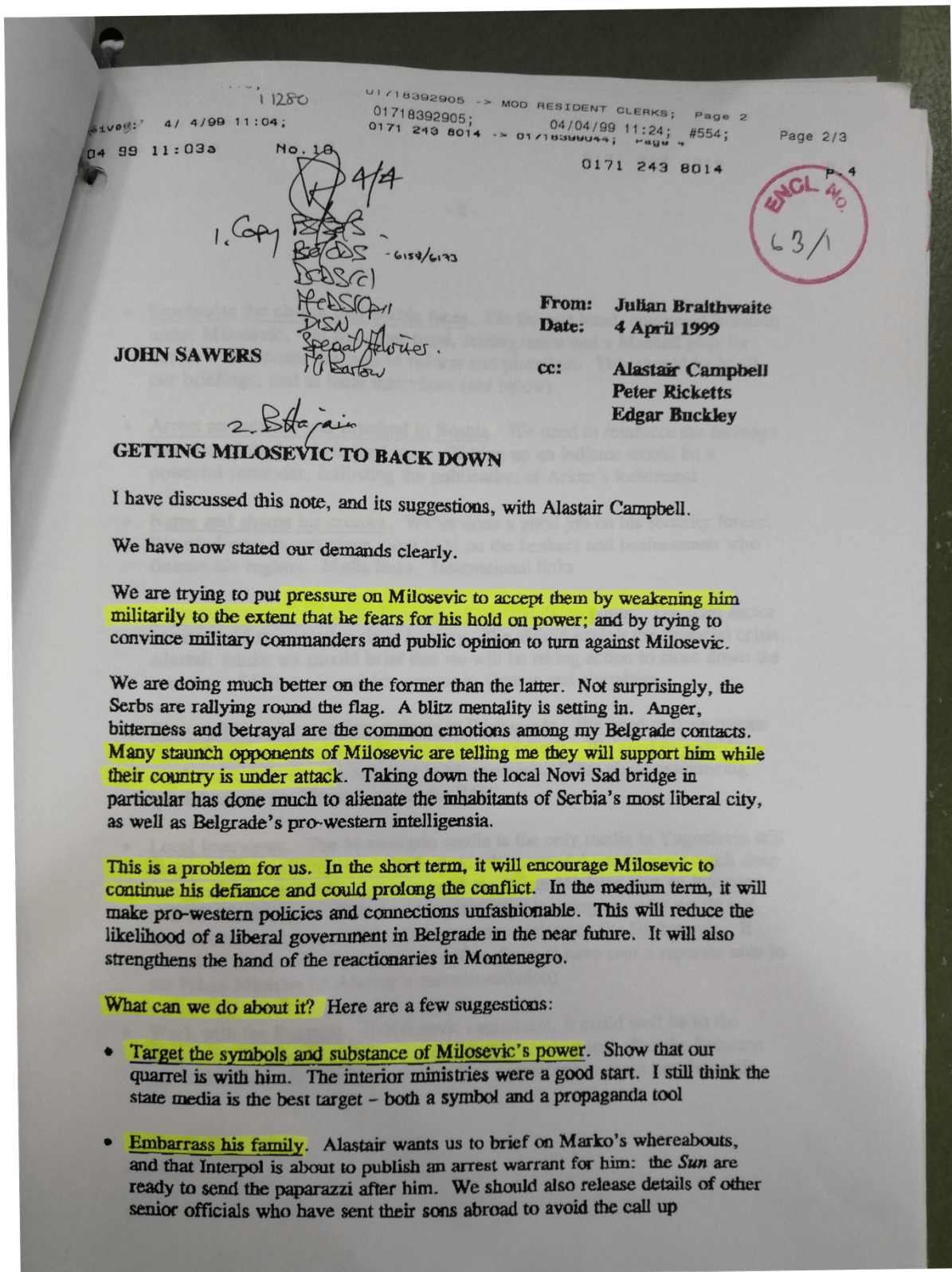


Source: Document courtesy of Kit Klarenberg

Still, Pakenham wrote, "in times of crisis, word spreads fast," meaning that even a small initial impact could have a resultant multiplier effect locally, due to a "thirst for news." In any event, British Satellite News was still managing to broadcast regular news packages, over which the Foreign Office—read: British intelligence—had "editorial control," into Belgrade via Montenegro. The Yugoslav republic was at that time led by [corrupt autocrat](#) Milo Djukanovic, who [covertly coordinated](#) his political activities with MI6.

Earlier that month, a memo authored by [MI6 officer](#) Julian Braithwaite observed that Montenegrin media were ideal to "broadcast criticism of Milosevic," as "its powerful transmitters reach deep into Kosovo and Serbia." He urged Downing Street to express "visible and immediate support to Djukanovic," as "we need to demonstrate that reform pays, and we look after our friends." This could take the form of Blair giving an interview to

local news outlets, explaining "why we do not hold Montenegro responsible," while announcing "assistance" for Djukanovic.



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- **Emphasise the choice that Serbia faces.** On the one hand, continued isolation under Milosevic. On the other hand, reintegration and a Marshall plan for Serbia if it chooses the path of reform and pluralism. This should be in all our briefings, and in local interviews (see below)
- **Arrest an indicted war criminal in Bosnia.** We need to reinforce the message that arm of the law is indeed long. Picking up an indictee would be a powerful reminder, following the publication of Arkan's indictment
- **Name and shame his cronies.** We've done a good job on his security forces. We need now to cast some more light on the bankers and businessmen who finance his regime. Mafia links. International links
- **Put pressure on Cyprus to close down Milosevic's accounts.** The state sector has not paid any salaries since January. We should exploit the financial crisis. Alastair thinks we should brief that we will be taking action to close down the accounts of Milosevic and his cronies in Cyprus and elsewhere
- **Give visible and immediate support to Djukanovic.** We need to demonstrate that reform pays, and that we look after our friends. We need to provide much more help for the refugees in Montenegro. What about announcing special access for Montenegro in the IMF?
- **Local interviews.** The Montenegrin media is the only media in Yugoslavia still able to broadcast criticism of Milosevic. Its powerful transmitters reach deep into Kosovo and Serbia. I recommend the Prime Minister give an interview to RTV Montenegro. This could explain what is going on; why we do not hold Montenegro responsible; and announce assistance for Djukanovic. It should be set up with Djukanovic's office direct (I have sent a separate note to the Prime Minister on Alastair's recommendation)
- **Work with the Russians.** If Milosevic capitulates, it could well be to the Russians. We should make a virtue out of necessity, and offer the Russians the lead diplomatic role in return for their agreement to press our demands

JULIAN

Source: Document courtesy of Kit Klarenberg

Elsewhere in Pakenham's memo, he noted the U.S. was broadcasting propaganda into Yugoslavia from a plane, flying low above the region. Embarrassingly, "personal contacts" in Belgrade suggested to him "it has not gone down well."

Derisively dubbed "NATO TV" locally, it was "regarded as a joke" by viewers, "partly because the Serbian accent of the presenter is poor." By contrast, internet-based propaganda campaigns were considered "a success story."

Official Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence webpages publishing information on the Kosovo War, translated into Serbian, were attracting “at least 1,000 hits a day from Yugoslavia.” Pakenham suggested there would be “other hits from Yugoslavs on which we cannot put even an imprecise figure.” At the start of April, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook authored “a special internet message to the people of Serbia,” and a second was being considered.

“Clobba Slobba”

More sinisterly, a dedicated Cabinet Office “Coordination Group” was compiling a “long list” of Yugoslav internet users, and “some agencies” were “developing ways of exploiting it effectively without any British hand showing.” The Group more widely was concerned with disseminating word of “Serb brutalities” in Kosovo, and “abuse of power of the Milosevic family and his cronies,” into Belgrade, “in a way which does not show British fingerprints.”

As such, the Coordination Group tasked British embassies in Yugoslavia’s neighboring countries “to feed material into local media for unattributable publication, [which] would be read by some Serbs.” Two articles on the Group’s core propaganda themes had already been disseminated in this manner; Pakenham promised “there will be more.” The same material was furthermore “made available to NATO.” Meanwhile, the Group was “trying to arrange for an Interpol investigation to be started into Marko Milosevic.”

In addition to the Yugoslav president’s son, the Group “compiled a list of Serbs outside the Milosevic family who are regime members or supporters important to Milosevic personally, on which it is now looking for usable information on corruption and other publishable behaviour.” This hunt was foreshadowed in Julian Braithwaite’s memo, which stated that Blair’s notorious spin doctor, Alistair Campbell, wanted to brief the British press “that Interpol is about to publish an arrest warrant” for Marko.



Source: felix-edmund.livejournal.com

Meanwhile, *The Sun* was “ready to send the paparazzi after him.” Then the crown jewel of Rupert Murdoch’s global media empire, it boasted a daily circulation in the tens of millions. British newspaper front pages, and reporting more generally, throughout NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia, almost unequivocally cheered the illegal campaign’s success, jingoistically tubthumping for ever-greater aggression. Yet, the declassified files show that the BBC and MI6 propaganda outburst was necessary precisely *because* the airstrikes were an abject failure.

In Braithwaite’s missive, he complained that Britain’s efforts to “convince military commanders and public opinion to turn against Milosevic” were entirely counterproductive. Serbs were “rallying round the flag” and “a blitz mentality” had set in locally. “Anger, bitterness and betrayal” were “common emotions” among his personal contacts in Belgrade. “Many staunch opponents of Milosevic” resolved to support the President, “while their country is under attack.”

Furthermore, the destruction of a prominent bridge in Novi Sad, “Serbia’s most liberal city,” had alienated local inhabitants and “Belgrade’s pro-Western intelligentsia,” making “pro-Western policies and connections unfashionable” in Yugoslavia. “This is a problem for us,” Braithwaite lamented.



A destroyed bridge in the city of Novi Sad, April 26, 1999. More than 1,500 settlements, 60 bridges, 30% of all schools, and about 100 monuments were destroyed in the criminal NATO bombing of Serbia.

MI6 agent Julian Braithwaite worried that the destruction of the bridge created a public relations problem. [Source: felix-edmond.livejournal.com]

Deadly Web of Deceit Weaved

British intelligence got the opportunity to turn Yugoslav citizens, in particular pro-Western liberals, against Milosevic—or try to—by portraying Belgrade’s forces as engaged in

genocide against Kosovo Albanian civilians, at his direct order. This was provided by retransmitting an April 28, 1999, [BBC Panorama](#) “documentary” into the country, via “local television stations” in neighboring states, “whose programmes can be received in Serbia.”

The Killing of Kosovo was never repeated, and cannot be viewed online today. All that remains is an [official transcript](#) from the time. In the program, multiple interviewees, including U.S. General Wesley Clark, who oversaw NATO’s bombing as Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and Kosovo Albanian refugees, accused Milosevic of personally orchestrating the violent, “wholesale expulsion” of innocent civilians from the province, deploying rampaging Yugoslav security and paramilitary forces for the purpose, who left a vast trail of massacred innocents, razed villages, and gang rape everywhere they went.

The tales of alleged atrocities reported by refugee talking heads in the program were almost invariably as lurid as they were ludicrous. One told the BBC she “heard” that Yugoslav forces “caught 20 young women and girls,” then executed “most of their husbands...in front of their eyes.” The surviving women were reportedly forced to “serve” Belgrade’s troops “as if they were their wives”—“they had to serve them during the day and sleep with them at night.”

Meanwhile, several interviewees said they personally saw “Serbs” commit rape and mass murder of their friends, relatives and neighbors. Unbelievably though, they were not only allowed to live to tell the tale, but sent safely over the border to Albania. There, as Yugoslav forces would have known, NATO, Western journalists, and rights groups waited in profusion, ready to amplify their stories to the world. Other talking heads spoke of roads soaked with blood, and littered with dozens of corpses.

Kosovo was at that time subject to intensive, daily NATO [reconnaissance flights](#). Nothing resembling any of the scenes described has ever emerged. Strikingly, Panorama elsewhere cited grainy, barely discernible “satellite imagery” of “what appears to be” mass graves in the province, provided by the military alliance. Why the program producers did not think to ask if those satellites had detected anything to corroborate any of their interviewees’ tales is not clear.

Relevantly, while the bombing was ongoing, British journalist Audrey Gillan interviewed many Kosovo Albanians in a refugee camp in Macedonia, [in search](#) of “real evidence” for the monstrous claims of mass rape and murder in the province emanating from Western officials. She found none. An unnamed OSCE source told her they suspected the KLA “had been persuading people to talk in bigger numbers, to crank up the horror so that NATO might be persuaded to send ground troops in faster.”

Nevertheless, BBC host Jane Corbin did ask some tough questions, namely, “will Mr. Milosevic ever be brought to justice?” and “how can NATO negotiate a settlement with a man they have openly called a war criminal?” She firmly informed ICTY chief prosecutor Louise Arbour, “your credibility is on the line...people must stand trial, those at the very top, to make your job worthwhile at all.” Elsewhere, she demanded assurances from Robin Cook that the Yugoslav President would not be granted amnesty in exchange for peace.

“Patriotic Duty”

The ICTY answered the BBC’s call on May 24, 1999, indicting Milosevic for war crimes, and crimes against humanity, in Kosovo. Mysteriously, not a single “eyewitness” featured in the

Panorama program appeared at his resultant trial, and the “documentary” was not entered into evidence. No wonder—proceedings would have been an even bigger disaster for NATO then. As it was, the tribunal incinerated Western narratives of what transpired in the province, and why the alliance had to “intervene.”

Multiple [Yugoslav officials](#) testified that not only was there no plan to displace, let alone carry out a genocide against Kosovo’s Albanian population, but the army had strict instructions to prevent refugee flows, while protecting civilians from KLA attacks and conscription. In some cases, the separatist militia [forcibly recruited](#) children.

One army colonel, suffering severe health issues due to NATO’s concealed, [illegal use](#) of depleted uranium, [told the ICTY](#) he had urged citizens to stay after the bombing began, but assisted those who wished to flee.

“There is nothing sadder than watching a column of poor people who are moving from their homes on someone’s instructions,” he contemporaneously lamented in his field diary. “Soldiers are the way they are; they give juice and cookies to children in passing.”

Those “instructions” were given by the Kosovo Liberation Army itself. One of the group’s operatives, who “[filmed] the plight of displaced Albanian civilians with a video camera” for Western consumption, admitted to *The Guardian* in [June 1999](#) that “KLA advice, rather than Serbian deportations” prompted the exodus.

His account is corroborated by [ICTY testimony](#) of Eve-Ann Prentice, a mainstream British journalist [almost killed](#) in a May 1999 NATO airstrike, while traveling through Kosovo:

“Ordinary civilian ethnic Albanians...had been told it was their patriotic duty to leave because the world was watching. This was their one big opportunity to make Kosovo part of Albania...NATO was there, ready to come in, and anybody who failed to join this exodus was somehow not supporting the Albanian cause...They were frightened of the bombing, they were frightened of the KLA, they didn’t really want to leave their homes.”

Fear of “being killed or injured” by NATO bombing was, per Prentice, “justified.” While in Kosovo, she “saw many civilians dead and injured, many ordinary homes that were bombed by NATO.” These anxieties were greatly amplified, she explained, by the military alliance’s illegal assault intensifying over time, its aircraft terrorizingly flying ever-lower overhead. School facilities, apartment blocks, and other civilian infrastructure were reduced to total rubble in targeted, repeat strikes along the way.

NATO member states were the ICTY’s [key funders](#) and facilitators. There was no question of the alliance being held accountable for war crimes it committed in Yugoslavia. “You’re more likely to see the UN building dismantled brick-by-brick and thrown into the Atlantic than to see NATO pilots go before a UN tribunal,” a Spokesman for the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives boasted in [May 1999](#). The total number of civilians killed by military alliance bombing that year will likely never be known.

The ICTY [did investigate](#) whether NATO’s April 23, 1999, strike on the headquarters of Belgrade’s RTS TV, [which killed](#) 16 staff and trapped 16 more in rubble for days afterward, constituted a war crime.



Radio Television of Serbia headquarters in Belgrade bombed by NATO on April 23, 1999. [Source: [reddit.com](#)]

The Tribunal concluded that, while the site was not a military target, the action aimed to disrupt the state's communications network, so it was still legitimate. It moreover found NATO warned Yugoslav authorities weeks prior that RTS may be caught in the crossfire, unless six hours of uncensored Western news reports were broadcast daily.

This would, the alliance argued, make RTS an “acceptable instrument of public information,” thus averting its destruction. The ultimatum is rendered considerably more perverse, and duplicitous, given the declassified files reviewed here. All along, NATO and its member states—in particular Britain, leading proponent of Yugoslavia's all-out invasion—had numerous cloak-and-dagger means to transmit whatever they wished into the country they were criminally destroying.

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