

Kosovo: Lies, Half-truths & Omissions

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The official justification for the NATO bombing Yugoslavia in March 1999 was

“to avert an impending humanitarian catastrophe by disrupting the violent attacks currently being carried out by the Yugoslav security forces against the Kosovar Albanians, and to limit their ability to conduct such repression in future” [\[1\]](#)

to quote Defence Secretary George Robertson in the House of Commons on 25 March 1999 the day after the bombing began.

In reality, what was going on in Kosovo at the time was a military campaign waged by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to separate the overwhelmingly Albanian Kosovo from Yugoslavia and Yugoslav military action to suppress that campaign. And the deaths as a consequence of KLA military action were on a par with those as a consequence of Yugoslav military reaction. We have that on the authority of no less a person than George Robertson, who told the House of Commons Defence Select Committee the previous day (24 March 1999) that

“up until Racak [15-16 January 1999] the KLA were responsible for more deaths in Kosovo than the Yugoslav authorities had been” [\[2\]](#)

It was never obvious how bombing Belgrade would inhibit the action of Yugoslav forces on the ground in Kosovo. It didn't. A few days later, with hundreds of thousands of Albanians streaming out of Kosovo, it was obvious that far from averting a humanitarian catastrophe NATO had provoked one. NATO then changed its war aims, claiming that the purpose of the bombing was to return to their homes the Kosovo Albanian refugees, most of whom were in their homes when the bombing began.

The official story ...

“I think it is fair to say that Milosevic honoured the commitment which he had made to General Clark and myself on 25 October 1998. He withdrew the forces and he withdrew the police. There may have been some difference as to whether there were 200 or 400 policemen more or less but that really does not matter. More or less he honoured the commitment. Then the UJK or KLA filled the void the withdrawn Serb forces had left and they escalated. I have stated this in the NATO Council in October and November repeatedly. In most cases, the escalation came from the Kosovar side, not from the Serb side.”

Those are the words of General Klaus Naumann, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee before and during the conflict in Kosovo. He was giving evidence to the House of Commons Defence Select Committee on 7 June 2000 as part of its inquiry entitled *Lessons of Kosovo* [\[3\]](#).

General Naumann was commenting on events on the ground in Kosovo after the agreement between US envoy Richard Holbrooke and Slobodan Milosevic on 12 October 1998, which provided for a ceasefire in Kosovo. Following on from this, on 25 October 1998, Naumann and Wesley

Clark, the NATO Supreme Commander, made an agreement with Milosevic to reduce the Yugoslav forces in Kosovo to pre-war (that is, pre-March 1998) levels. Naumann is referring to that agreement in his remarks to the Defence Select Committee.

It is the West's contention that Milosevic failed to keep his side of the Holbrooke agreement: that he did not reduce his force levels as agreed (or if he did he soon increased them again) and that his forces continued to engage in arbitrary, unprovoked, slaughter of Albanian civilians in the period from October 1998 to January 1999, culminating in the alleged massacre of 45 Albanian civilians at Racak on 15-16 January 1999.

Driven by humanitarian concern for Albanian civilians, the West was forced to act, first to summon Yugoslavia to a conference at Rambouillet in late January and, when Milosevic refused to accept the reasonable terms offered there, to start bombing Yugoslavia on 24 March 1999. The West's war aims were entirely humanitarian. So the story goes.

In the words of Defence Secretary George Robertson in the House of Commons on the day after the bombing of Yugoslavia began, the West's war aims were:

“to avert an impending humanitarian catastrophe by disrupting the violent attacks currently being carried out by the Yugoslav security forces against the Kosovar Albanians, and to limit their ability to conduct such repression in future” [\[1\]](#).

It was never obvious how bombing Belgrade would inhibit the action of Yugoslav forces on the ground in Kosovo. It didn't. A few days later with hundreds of thousands of Albanians streaming out of Kosovo it was obvious that far from averting a humanitarian catastrophe NATO had provoked one. NATO then changed its war aims, claiming that the purpose of the bombing was to return to their homes the Kosovo Albanian refugees, most of whom were in their homes when the bombing began.

The humanitarian excuse

The bombing of Yugoslavia was carried out without the sanction of the UN Security Council. In those circumstances it was essential that the humanitarian excuse be credible in the eyes of the world. That depended crucially on how events on the ground in Kosovo could be presented to the world in the period after the Holbrooke agreement was signed in October 1998.

There is now ample evidence that the picture presented by the West to justify the war was false. The crucial fact, stated by General Naumann above, that the KLA took advantage of the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces in fulfilment of the Holbrooke agreement in order to prosecute their military campaign, was suppressed at the time. The full extent of this was first revealed in a BBC programme made by Alan Little entitled *Moral Combat: NATO at War* broadcast on 12 March 2000 (transcript here [\[4\]](#)), where a variety of witnesses, including KLA witnesses, confirmed that it happened all over Kosovo.

Not only was this crucial fact missing from the West's account, but also in late 1998 and early 1999 the picture given was one of arbitrary, largely unprovoked, Yugoslav slaughter of Albanian civilians. The KLA activity to which the Yugoslav forces were responding was barely mentioned. One event, the alleged massacre of 45 Albanian civilians by Yugoslav forces at Racak on 15-16 January 1999, gave credence to that and provided the West with the excuse for summoning Yugoslavia (and the KLA) to Rambouillet. But what actually happened at Racak may not be quite as presented by the West. The BBC programme said of the events at Racak:

“Even now, more than a year on, important questions about what happened here remain unanswered”.

The very least that can be said about it is that it was carefully presented so as to justify subsequent NATO actions.

But, aside from Racak, what is remarkable is that in early 1999 up 24 March 1999, when NATO bombing commenced, there were very few incidents of Albanian civilians being arbitrarily killed by Yugoslav forces. There were deaths arising from fighting between the KLA and Yugoslav forces (on both sides) and sporadic inter-ethnic killing but there were few attested incidents of Albanian civilians being arbitrarily killed by Yugoslav forces prior to the NATO bombing.

(All this is on the record in contemporary reports by the OSCE monitors who were on the ground in Kosovo until their withdrawal on 20 March 1999. These were available on the OSCE web site and most of them are available on the UN web site as addenda to Kofi Annan’s reports to the UN Security Council on Kosovo in the period November 1998 to March 1999. Information gathered by OSCE monitors in this period is also available in its report *Kosovo/Kosova: As Seen, As Told* [5], published in December 1999.)

The break-up of Yugoslavia

A popular separatist movement in Kosovo presented the West with a difficult problem because acceding to it would conflict with the strict rule the West applied to the break up of Yugoslavia. That was that the boundaries of the successor states had to conform precisely to the boundaries of the republics of the former Yugoslavia. Never mind that (apart from Slovenia) these republics were ethnically diverse and therefore unlikely to be politically stable within their existing boundaries and with their existing ethnic mixes. The inevitable result of insisting that the successor states must be the administrative units of the former Yugoslavia was ethnic cleansing on a large scale.

In Croatia political stability has been achieved by driving out large number of Serbs, perhaps as many as 300,000 (this feat was achieved by Croatian forces armed and trained by the US at a time when there was supposed to be an international embargo on arms entering the territory of the former Yugoslavia).

Bosnia, with its three minorities, none of which was strong enough to drive out the other two, was a very unlikely independent state. And now after widespread ethnic conflict and population movement it exists as two hostile sub-states (one Serb and one Muslim/Croat) held together under a UN protectorate.

If the West acceded to the separation of Kosovo, or any part of it, from the Yugoslav Republic of Serbia, then the golden rule was broken. And if that part of Serbia with an overwhelming Albanian majority is allowed to cede, there is no justification for insisting that the part of Bosnia with an overwhelming Serbian majority (Republika Srpska) remain part of Bosnia. That would not be the end of it, of course. Republika Srpska would most likely join up with the Serbia proper creating a Greater Serbia, a concept which is anathema to the West. Likewise, an independent Kosovo would probably not long remain separate from Albania, with destabilising consequences for Macedonia with its large Albanian majority.

Therefore, despite the fact that there was an overwhelming majority in Kosovo for independence from Yugoslavia (and that was the objective of all Albanian political organisations), the objective of Western policy had to be a semi-autonomous Kosovo within the Serbian Republic and thus still an integral part of Yugoslavia. That was what was proposed at Rambouillet and is nominally the case now after the war, even though Belgrade’s writ does not run in Kosovo at all.

The war in 1998

Before 1998, the KLA military campaign was a sporadic affair but in 1998 it took off dramatically. Before 1998 there might have been 100 KLA attacks in total; in 1998 there were of the order of 2,000. The KLA attacked Yugoslav police, on patrol and in barracks, Serb civilians, and Albanian civilians who were deemed to be collaborators.

The Yugoslav response was not gentle but it was certainly no more heavy-handed than Turkey's response to the Kurdish PKK guerrillas, in a war in which 30,000 lives were lost, 4,000 villages were razed to the ground and 3 million Kurds were driven from their homes. And Turkey is a member of NATO, which participated enthusiastically in NATO's "humanitarian war" on Yugoslavia.

Albanian villages in Kosovo were shelled and destroyed or partially destroyed and the villagers fled or were chased. But, generally speaking, this was done in response to KLA attacks. While there was some arbitrary killing of Albanian civilians, it was not widespread. There was also a certain amount of inter-ethnic killing but this cut both ways.

Given the intensity of the KLA assault in 1998, the Yugoslav response was surprisingly moderate. Remember: up until January 1999 Yugoslav forces had killed fewer people than the KLA had done. We have that on the authority of no less than George Robertson, who told the Defence Select Committee on 24 March 1999 that

“up until Racak [15-16 January 1999] the KLA were responsible for more deaths in Kosovo than the Yugoslav authorities had been”

(See the Minutes of Evidence to the Committee, which is included in a report on the future of NATO dated 13 April 1999 [\[2\]](#)).

As for the number of deaths, that is difficult to be certain about. The Serb Ministry of the Interior said that the KLA killed 287 people in 1998 up to 27 December (out a total of 326 killed by the KLA in the whole campaign up to that time). Of those killed, 115 are said to be police and 172 civilians, of whom 76 are said to be ethnic Albanians “loyal to the Republic of Serbia”. [This information was taken from the Interior Ministry website, www.serb-info.com, which is no longer functional]. There is no way of being sure of the accuracy of these figures but it is reasonable to assume that the Yugoslav Government did not understate the number of deaths attributable to the KLA.

A reasonable guess is that around 600 people were killed in Kosovo in 1998, about 50% by the KLA and about 50% by Yugoslav forces. In addition, large numbers of Albanians were displaced within Kosovo, perhaps 200,000 by the autumn of 1998, of which an estimated 50,000 were in the open. By the autumn also, Yugoslav forces had the upper hand.

The Holbrooke agreement

While the war went on in 1998, the West barely reacted. My impression at the time was that Western governments were quite happy to see the separatist KLA being put down by the Yugoslav military, since they couldn't be allowed to achieve their political objective. During that period, occasional stories of KLA atrocities appeared in the British media, which is a sure sign that the Foreign Office was hedging its bets as to who were the bad guys.

But in the autumn the West did react. The story the West likes to tell now is that faced with this terrible picture of Yugoslav oppression of Albanians and with the possibility of large numbers of them dying in the hills over the winter, the West was forced to act. In his book, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, Tim Judah suggests a different trigger for the West's action:

“On September 12 Azem Hajdari, a close aide to the former Albanian president Sali Berisha, was assassinated. Over the next few days Tirana was in tumult with Berisha supporters storming parliament and the Albanian government subsequently announcing it had crushed a coup. As rumours circulated that Kosovars were involved in helping the Berisha supporters, alarm bells rang in the West, as pessimists warned that unless the situation in Kosovo was brought under control, the doomsday scenario of chaos engulfing Albania and Macedonia too might have already begun.” (page 178)

Whatever about that, shortly afterwards the West took a series of initiatives on Kosovo. On 23 September, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1199 [6] which demanded, amongst other things, that

“all parties, groups and individuals immediately cease hostilities and maintain a ceasefire in Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which would enhance the prospects for a meaningful dialogue between the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership and reduce the risks of a humanitarian catastrophe”

Early in October, NATO approved a plan for bombing Yugoslavia in the event of Milosevic refusing to comply with this resolution. Armed with this threat, US ambassador Richard Holbrooke went to Belgrade accompanied by US General Short, who was to be in operational charge of the NATO bombing if it happened. On 12 October 1998, Holbrooke reached an agreement with Milosevic for the implementation of Resolution 1199. Later (25 October 1998) General Klaus Naumann and General Wesley Clark went to Belgrade representing NATO and it was agreed that the Yugoslav military and police presence in Kosovo be reduced to pre-war levels.

In addition, 2,000 international inspectors, the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), were to be allowed in to monitor the ceasefire, under the auspices of the Organisation for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and NATO was to be allowed to make aerial reconnaissance flights over Kosovo.

It should be noted that no attempt was made to bind the KLA to the ceasefire provisions of Resolution 1199 by a similar agreement. When asked why not, the usual excuse from ministers is that the KLA was an unstructured organisation without a proper hierarchy, with which was difficult to negotiate. Strange that the West managed to negotiate with the KLA at Rambouillet.

Note also that, by virtue of Security Council Resolution 1160 [7] passed 31 March 1998, all UN members were supposed to be applying an arms embargo to Yugoslavia including Kosovo and to be doing their best to “prevent arming and training for terrorist activities there”. Resolution 1199 also requested UN states to prevent funds collected on their territory being used to contravene Resolution 1160. Judah suggests (ibid, page 188) that one reason for Milosevic doing a deal with Holbrooke was

“because he was given to understand that Western countries would now move to throttle the KLA’s sources of arms and finance”.

If so, he was misled: despite the provisions of these UN resolutions, there is no evidence that any effort was made to inhibit KLA training in Albania and their entry with arms into Kosovo from Albania, or their fund raising in the Albanian diaspora, chiefly in Switzerland, Germany and the US.

William Walker

The Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), the OSCE monitoring group, was supposed to be an independent international body, providing impartial information about what was happening on the ground in Kosovo. But the head of the KVM was William Walker, a US career diplomat. He was selected by US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, to head the KVM – Richard Holbrooke said so in the BBC programme referred to above.

Walker was the US Ambassador to El Salvador in the 80s at a time when the US was assisting the government there to suppress leftist rebels while simultaneously supporting Contra guerrillas against the Sandanista government in Nicaragua next door. In his past, therefore, he must have had a close relationship with the CIA. Understandably, the Yugoslav authorities were deeply suspicious of him.

A Canadian member of the KVM, Roland Keith, who served under Walker in Kosovo, said the following of him in the BBC programme:

“Ambassador Walker was not just working for the OSCE; he was part of the American diplomatic policy ... which had vilified Milosevic, demonised the Serb administration and generally was providing diplomatic support to the KLA leadership.” [\[4\]](#)

As we shall see, Walker was to play a crucial role on the road to war in Kosovo.

After Holbrooke

It is the contention of the West that Yugoslavia did not stick to the terms of the Holbrooke agreement, that as a result the West was forced to take further measures to attempt to protect Albanian civilians, which led to the Rambouillet conference and eventually to the bombing of Yugoslavia.

This authorised version of events is told in a Foreign Office memorandum entitled *Kosovo: History of the Crisis* [\[8\]](#), submitted to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee as evidence to its inquiry *Lessons of Kosovo*. The memorandum, dated 20 April 2000, states (Paragraphs 51ff):

“In practice, neither Belgrade nor the KLA (which had not been a party to the agreement) proved committed to making the agreement work, but the package provided a breathing space for renewed diplomatic activity. Also, General Clark and General Naumann (Chairman of NATO’s Military Committee) secured an undertaking from Milosevic to reduce the number of forces in Kosovo to defined pre-March 1998 levels, and to limit VJ [Yugoslav Army] deployments within Kosovo. Although Milosevic never implemented these undertakings fully, they became a useful yard-stick by which his actions rather than words could be measured.

“The deployment of verifiers to implement the Holbrooke package initially reduced tensions and temporarily helped keep Serb repression in check. ... There was some evidence of withdrawals by Belgrade’s security forces, although not to the levels to which they had agreed: VJ withdrawals were offset by the illicit redeployment of Serbian security forces. ...

This was contradicted by General Neumann who said:

“I think it is fair to say that Milosevic honoured the commitment which he had made to General Clark and myself on 25 October 1998.” [\[3\]](#)

in evidence (quoted above) to the Defence Select Committee on 7 June 2000.

The Foreign Office memorandum continued:

“Despite verifiers on the ground, violence continued on both sides. By mid-November 19 members of the security forces and 15 members of the KLA had been killed. Belgrade was out of compliance with the October agreement, but the KLA were also committing murders. The killing of six Serb teenagers in Pec in early December provoked particular Serb rage. Over the Christmas period Belgrade launched an offensive north of Pristina against a KLA build-up in the area, causing new flows of IDPs. 5,500 Kosovo Albanians fled from their homes in the Podujevo area alone.

“The 15 January Racak massacre of 45 Kosovo Albanians provided incontrovertible evidence that Belgrade was ignoring the will of the international community and that an unarmed verification mission could not ensure compliance with the October agreement.”

Curiously, in Annex A to the Foreign Office memorandum, which gives a diary of events from the end of 1997 to the end of the war in June 1999, a rather different story is told: for example the entry for 8 October 1998 says:

“KLA declares cease fire. But KLA continues to carry out attacks against security forces; kidnap and execute ‘collaborators’ during October, November and December.” [\[9\]](#)

This Foreign Office account is the justification for the eventual bombing of Yugoslavia. It is not much of a justification. It relies almost entirely on what is supposed to have happened at Racak on 15-16 January 1999. As we shall see, there are serious doubts as to whether the picture of events at Racak as presented by NATO governments is accurate.

Cook’s story

It is an account which is significantly at variance from the reports on Kosovo to the House of Commons in late 1998 by Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook. For example, on 19 October 1998 reporting on the Holbrooke deal, he said:

“We also expect the Kosovo Liberation Army to abide by its commitment to honour a ceasefire. Over the weekend, there have been several breaches of the ceasefire by the Kosovo Liberation Army, including the murder of four policemen. Such continuing acts of hostility serve only the interests of those who wish to undermine the political process and return to war.” [\[10\]](#)

And on 27 October 1998:

“Since my statement to the House last week, Britain has remained fully engaged in efforts to implement the Holbrooke package. At the weekend, after hours of intensive negotiation, President Milosevic gave a detailed commitment to reduce the levels of army, police and heavy weapons in Kosovo to their levels before the conflict. Diplomatic observers in Kosovo report that several thousand security troops have left over the past 24 hours.

“There has been a significant return of refugees to settlements in the valleys, and the UN estimates that numbers on the hillsides have fallen from 50,000 to around 10,000.” [\[11\]](#)

A month later, on 27 November 1998, he made a statement which included the following:

“In Kosovo, there has been steady progress on implementing some elements of the Holbrooke package. There has been a marked improvement in the humanitarian situation. Within two months, the number of refugees on the open hillside has fallen from 50,000 to a few hundred. There has been a substantial reduction in the presence of the Serbian security forces, which have been cut, as agreed, to the level that existed before the conflict began.” [\[12\]](#)

His statement was silent about KLA activity but in response to a later question he had to admit:

“The killing continues in Kosovo. I regret to report that most of the killings since the Holbrooke agreement have been carried out by the Kosovo Liberation Army. Since the Holbrooke package was signed, 19 members of the Serbian security forces have been killed. Five Kosovo Albanians are known to have been killed – all of them in the full uniform of the Kosovo Liberation Army. I cannot stress too strongly that a ceasefire will hold only if both sides cease firing.” [\[13\]](#)

His next report to the House of Commons was on 18 January 1999 when happily for the Foreign Secretary he was able to return to the more comfortable theme of Yugoslav forces butchering innocent Albanian civilians. However, he went on to acknowledge that the KLA was holding up discussions on new political arrangements for Kosovo:

“Despite intensive pressure and repeated mediation, it still has not been possible to get agreement even on the composition of the Kosovo negotiating team. The main obstacle has been the refusal of the Kosovo Liberation Army to take part in any team that includes Dr. Rugova, the elected leader of the Kosovo Albanians.” [\[14\]](#)

And that the KLA was responsible for more killing than Yugoslav forces:

“On its part, the Kosovo Liberation Army has committed more breaches of the ceasefire, and until this weekend was responsible for more deaths than the security forces. It must stop undermining the ceasefire and blocking political dialogue.” [\[14\]](#)

Robin Cook’s reports to the House of Commons in late 1998 gave a hint of what was actually happening on the ground in Kosovo at the time. The Foreign Office memorandum is thoroughly misleading. The fundamental reality which is completely absent from it is that, as General Naumann said, when Yugoslav forces were withdrawn in accordance with the Holbrooke agreement, the KLA moved forward to fill the void left and proceeded to escalate their campaign. According to Wolfgang Petritsch, the EU’s special envoy to Kosovo, speaking on the BBC programme in March 2000:

“The KLA basically came back into old positions that they held before the summer offensive.” [\[4\]](#)

If Tim Judah is correct, the KLA had been rescued by the agreement:

“In fact the Holbrooke agreement had come at just the right time for the guerrillas. They were hard pressed and were holed up in the hills; now the agreement gave them a reprieve, time to reorganise and rearm and, as they told anyone who cared to listen, to prepare for their spring offensive. The Serbs were listening. As soon as they had begun drawing down their forces in accordance with the agreement, they began putting them back in again.” (Judah, *ibid*, page 189)

During the past year, both the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees of the House of Commons have taken voluminous evidence from political and military figures on Kosovo. None of them, apart from General Naumann, drew attention to this crucial fact that the KLA took advantage of Yugoslav actions in fulfilment of the Holbrooke agreement. British political and military figures who knew the truth – since General Naumann had told them as long ago as October 1998 – chose to keep quiet about it for the obvious reason that it undermines the humanitarian excuse for going to war.

Foreign Affairs Select Committee

The Foreign Affairs Select Committee report *Lessons of Kosovo* [15] published on 23 May 2000 famously concluded that NATO's military action was illegal but was "justified on moral grounds", a defence we look forward to seeing deployed in courts throughout the land.

The moral justification advanced by the Committee was that "a humanitarian emergency existed before NATO intervened", which required intervention to avert "a humanitarian catastrophe" (Paragraph 138 [16]). One might have thought that such a conclusion would require a meticulous examination of the alleged "humanitarian emergency" on the ground in Kosovo after the Holbrooke agreement and prior to NATO intervention. But all the Committee had to say about this period in a massive report is as follows (Paragraph 52):

"According to the FCO [Foreign & Commonwealth Office] 'neither Belgrade nor the KLA (which had not been a party to the agreement) proved committed to making the [Holbrooke] agreement work'. The Serb Christmas offensive led on to Racak, and then to further military threats, and the decision to push for a comprehensive settlement at Rambouillet—crucially, one which included the Kosovo Albanian side. While the Holbrooke agreement can be criticised for not bringing the KLA into the agreement, the KLA has always been an unstructured organisation, based on family and personal links rather than a rigid hierarchy. This made it difficult both to understand, and to negotiate with, even if Western diplomats had wished to do so." [17]

Their reticence is understandable. The truth, as told by General Naumann, was that, broadly speaking, Milosevic honoured the commitments he entered into under the Holbrooke agreement and reduced Yugoslavia forces in Kosovo but that the KLA took advantage of this to advance and go on the offensive. Telling that truth would blow a large hole in the justification for NATO intervention, which then relies solely on what took place at Racak.

The Committee is obviously aware that the KLA did not "immediately cease hostilities and maintain a ceasefire in Kosovo" as required by Security Council Resolution 1199 but went on the offensive. Why else would the Committee feel the need to criticise the West for not "bringing the KLA into the [Holbrooke] agreement"? The KLA must have needed restraining.

In the next breath, the West is excused for not bringing the KLA in on the remarkable grounds that it "has always been an unstructured organisation ... rather than a rigid hierarchy", with which it was difficult to negotiate. The author of this obvious nonsense seems to have forgotten that in late January 1999 the KLA supplied representatives to the Albanian delegation at Rambouillet and, in the person of Hasim Thaci, took over the leadership of the Albanian delegation. The West negotiated with the KLA at Rambouillet. The West chose not to negotiate with the KLA in the autumn of 1999.

Walker has amnesia

General Naumann also made telling contributions to the BBC programme in March 2000. In describing what was happening on the ground in late 1998, the programme quoted from confidential minutes of the North Atlantic Council, NATO's governing body. These talked of the KLA as "the main initiator of violence" and said that the KLA "has launched what appears to be a deliberate campaign of provocation".

These opinions were arrived at on the basis of information supplied by William Walker, the head of the KVM, who according to Naumann told the Council that "the majority of violations was caused by the KLA". But, when Alan Little put it to Walker that he reported thus to the Council, he looked shifty and pretended he couldn't remember.

It was not politic to admit that the KLA was the aggressor in late 1998 when UN Resolution 1199 required them to be on ceasefire. It doesn't fit in with the subsequent story of Yugoslav forces engaging in arbitrary, unprovoked, aggression against Albanian civilians, a story which was necessary to justify the eventual war.

Racak

On 15-16 January 1999, it is alleged that Yugoslav forces massacred 45 Albanian civilians at the village of Racak. In the days before that, the KLA was using Racak as a base to launch operations against police and had killed 4 policemen in the general vicinity.

According to the account in the BBC programme, by the time the police attacked the KLA at Racak on 15 January 1999 most of the villagers had fled. A battle ensued in which 15 KLA personnel were killed and the KLA withdrew from the village. All this was observed by international monitors from safe high ground and when the battle was over, and the KLA had withdrawn, KVM personnel who came down to the village reported nothing unusual. It was not until the following morning, after the KLA had retaken control of the village, that the civilian bodies were discovered.

(This BBC account is broadly in line with that of French journalist, Christophe Chatelot, who was in Racak on the afternoon of 15 January 1999 after the Yugoslav forces withdrew from the village and observed nothing out of the ordinary. He reported this in an article, entitled *Were the Racak dead really massacred in cold blood?*, published in *Le Monde* on 21 January 1999. See [\[18\]](#) for an English translation.)

The head of the KVM, William Walker, made a visit to Racak on the morning of 16 January 1999 and later that day in Pristina, without waiting for any forensic examination, he announced that a massacre by the Yugoslav forces had occurred. However, before making his announcement, Walker had contacted both US envoy Holbrooke and US General Wesley Clark, the NATO commander. Given that Walker is a career US diplomat, the suspicion is that he was consulting his government to see how the events at Racak should be best presented, with a view to using them, as they were used, to ratchet up the pressure on Yugoslavia.

Was there really a massacre of Albanian civilians at Racak? The suspicion remains that some of the dead men might not have been civilians. Or that some of the dead might have been killed in the fighting and that the bodies were moved by the KLA in order to look as if they had been executed. The question remains: why if the Yugoslav police were responsible for the massacre, the bodies were not discovered by the KVM on the afternoon of 15 January 1999?

The KLA was conscious that they couldn't win without Western intervention and that the killing of large numbers of Albanian civilians by Yugoslav forces was a necessary condition for that intervention. Then the humanitarian excuse for intervention would become credible. Albanians interviewed on the BBC programme were very frank about this. For example, Dugi Gorani (who is not KLA) explained:

“The more civilians were killed the chances of intervention became bigger and the KLA of course realised that. There was this foreign diplomat who once told me: unless you pass the quota of 5,000 deaths you'll never have anybody permanently present in Kosovo from the foreign diplomacy.” [\[4\]](#)

As it turned out, the 45 dead at Racak, attested by US diplomat William Walker to be the victims of a Yugoslav massacre, were sufficient.

Aside from Racak

Aside from Racak, what is remarkable is that in early 1999 up to 24 March 1999 when NATO bombing commenced there were very few incidents of Albanian civilians being arbitrarily killed by Yugoslav forces.

A report to the UN Security Council by Kofi Annan dated 17 March 1999 (S/199/293) [19] based on information supplied by the OSCE gives an overview of the situation on the ground in the previous two months after Racak. It speaks of “persistent attacks and provocations by the Kosovo Albanian paramilitaries” and “disproportionate use of force, including mortar and tank fire, by the Yugoslav authorities in response”.

It also refers to the displacement of Serbs within Kosovo, which was noticeably absent from media reports of that time:

“February was also marked by the continuing departure of the Serbian population from towns and villages where they had been in the minority, or where clashes between Kosovo Albanian paramilitary units and security forces occurred. According to information provided by the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees, some 90 villages in central and western Kosovo have lost their entire Serbian population in recent months, while towns like Podujevo and Kosovska Mitrovica have seen a reduction of the Serbian population. The estimated number of displaced Serbs within Kosovo is 10,000 while 30,000 more have moved to other parts of Serbia.”

As for specific incidents which might be interpreted as arbitrary killing of Albanian civilians by Yugoslav forces, the OSCE report *Kosovo/Kosova: As Seen, As Told*, published in December 1999, highlights three incidents in Chapter 5 during this period. The first is at Racak, the second at Rogovo and the third at Rakovina.

At Rogovo 24 were killed. From the account in the section on Djakovica (in Part V of the report) it appears that this was a military incident involving a truck load of KLA in uniform but followed by the arbitrary killing of two civilians. At Rakovina five Albanians were killed. It is not clear who killed them but the incident's inclusion in the above group suggests that the OSCE blames Yugoslav forces.

Taking these three incidents together (but not counting those killed in the military encounter at Rogovo) a figure of seven is arrived at, in addition to Racak.

(There were a number of clashes between the KLA and Yugoslav forces in the period with fatalities on both sides. There were also other individual killings, for which the OSCE is unable to attribute guilt with any certainty. Plainly, both sides were responsible.)

False picture

The picture of events on the ground in Kosovo presented by the West in order to justify going to war with Yugoslavia was false. Leaving aside the events at Racak over which there is a question mark, the incidents of arbitrary execution of Albanian civilians by Yugoslav forces are few and the total number killed is small. Yet this was why NATO went to war. So the story goes.

In fact, what happened was that the Holbrooke agreement allowed the KLA, which had been under severe pressure in the autumn of 1998, to retrieve its position as Yugoslav forces withdrew in fulfilment of the agreement. Instead of maintaining a ceasefire as required by UN Security Council Resolution 1199, the KLA went on the offensive. Yugoslav forces responded.

For that, Yugoslavia was bombed and a humanitarian catastrophe was provoked. Hundreds of thousands of Albanians streamed out of Kosovo. NATO's war aims then became to return to their homes these refugees, most of whom were in their homes when the bombing began.

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