

The CIA's Racak 'Massacre' Hoax



KIT KLARENBERG

MAR 05, 2024



123



32

Share

January 15th marked the 25th anniversary of an alleged slaughter in Racak, Kosovo, then a core component of what remained of Yugoslavia. The purported mass killing of Albanian civilians by local security forces was a decisive trigger for NATO's illegal 78-day-long bombing of Belgrade March - May 1999, and subsequent occupation of the province, which endures today. As The Washington Post contemporaneously observed, this incident "transformed the West's Balkan policy as singular events seldom do."

Central to Racak's potency was a publicity stunt staged January 16th by veteran US deep state operative William Walker, then-chief of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM). First, he led Western journalists and European officials up a hill near the village to a site where Kosovo Albanians dressed in civilian clothes lay dead, apparently torn apart unarmed in cold blood by Yugoslav police and military gunfire. At a subsequent press conference, Walker explosively declared:

"From what I personally saw, I do not hesitate to describe the event as a massacre, a crime against humanity, nor do I hesitate to accuse the government security forces of responsibility. The [Yugoslav] government must produce the names of all involved in the police and [military] operations [in Racak]...who gave the orders, who executed those orders."

He warned if Yugoslavia didn't allow international observers to visit the site and "investigate this atrocity" in the next 24 hours, dire consequences would

be forthcoming. Immediately, images of KVM's grisly apparent discovery, and Walker's personal account of what took place, spread round the globe over and again courtesy of mainstream media outlets. Resultantly, hitherto reluctant Western citizens and governments demanded US-led action be taken against Belgrade, laying the foundations for NATO's criminal aerial assault two-and-a-half months later.



William Walker visits Racak

As we shall see, almost everything Western politicians, pundits and journalists said about the Racak “massacre” at the time was a brazen lie. Largely forgotten today, this episode remains hugely significant. It is a palpable, shocking example of how distorted, manipulated if not outright fabricated atrocity propaganda can be weaponised by imperial powers in service of war. Racak's relevance to every NATO-instigated conflict past, present and likely future could neither be more obvious, nor urgent.

‘Having Serb Friends’

By January 1999, Yugoslav authorities had been fighting an ever-brutal counterinsurgency against the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) for years. An Al

Qaeda-connected extremist group armed, funded and trained by the CIA and MI6, it sought to construct “Greater Albania” – an irredentist project uniting Tirana with territory in Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – via insurrectionary violence.

The key was maximising civilian casualties, so Belgrade’s war with the KLA could be misrepresented to Western audiences as an indiscriminate ethnonationalist genocide of innocent civilians. As a Kosovo Albanian independence campaigner, unconnected to the KLA, explained in March 2000:

“The more civilians were killed, the chances of international intervention became bigger, and the KLA of course realised that. There was this foreign diplomat who once told me, ‘Look, unless you pass the quota of five thousand deaths you’ll never have anybody permanently present in Kosovo from foreign diplomacy.’”

The KLA also kidnapped and killed Serb civilians, and pro-Yugoslav Albanians, often harvesting their organs to fund its terror campaign. This meant, as then-British Defence Secretary Geoffrey Robertson admitted to parliament in March 1999, “up until Racak...the KLA were responsible for more deaths in Kosovo than Yugoslav authorities.” KLA chief Hashim Thaci, now indicted for war crimes, remarked two years later that “a stone fell from our hearts” when Walker “without hesitation” branded Racak “a massacre of civilians.”

Thaci’s relief is understandable. In addition to justifying NATO’s impending “intervention” on the KLA’s side, Walker also fundamentally misrepresented the scenes in Racak to remove any suggestion victims were KLA insurgents killed in bitter fighting with Yugoslav forces, or perhaps Kosovo Albanian civilians murdered by Thaci and his fighters themselves, for propaganda purposes. Yet, as KVM chief, he was well-placed to know the actual truth.

KVM was founded in November 1998, to monitor Yugoslavia's adherence to a UN-negotiated ceasefire with the KLA. Under its terms, Belgrade withdrew its military from Kosovo. Yet, no concomitant obligations were imposed upon the KLA, which exploited the Yugoslav army's absence to continue rampaging across the province. KVM had no remit to ensure the terror group didn't provoke violent responses from local authorities. Its only role was to monitor whether Yugoslavia fought back, and how.

Racak was a strategically vital vantage point from which the KLA could attack targets, situated on a mountain range at the terminus of a major highway, linking Kosovo's capital Pristina with other cities and towns throughout the province. Shooting nests were accordingly set up to strike Yugoslav government vehicles driving through the area from on-high, as they often did. It was hoped successful attacks would draw police and security services into direct battle.

The KLA preemptively dug extensive trenches around the village for this precise purpose. In the months leading up to January 1999 too, a KVM report notes the militia carried out numerous provocative acts around Racak, to elicit attention from Yugoslav authorities. This included a shooting ambush of a police convoy, which wounded several Albanian civilians in a taxi nearby, kidnapping "a number of Kosovo Serbs", and "arresting" Albanians for "crimes" such as "friendly relations with Serbs."



Funeral of Racak 'massacre' victims

Shockingly, per KVM's report, the KLA even exploited the funeral of Racak victims - coincidentally attended by Walker - on February 11th 1999 to "arrest" nine Albanian attendees. Their "crimes" included "having a brother working with the police; drinking with Serbs; having Serb friends; having a Serb police officer as a friend." What befell them is unclear. Yet, the 2005 indictment of Kosovo's then-Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and his deputy Idriz Balaj describes the KLA brutally torturing, mutilating and murdering Albanian prey.

'Rigged Scene'

So, what happened in Racak? English-language media wasn't interested in details, dutifully taking Walker's word as unchallengeable gospel. A International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indictment of Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic, issued May 1999, referred to "45 unarmed Kosovo Albanians" murdered in the village. Two months earlier, US President Bill Clinton outlined his grounds for unleashing hell upon Belgrade

from the skies without UN authorisation, at an international press conference:

“We should remember what happened in the village of Racak back in January. Innocent men, women and children taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt, sprayed with gunfire. Not because of anything they had done, but because of who they were.”

Foreign journalists told a very different story. Yugoslav authorities openly advertised they were mounting a “counter-terror” operation in Racak January 15th, in response to the KLA killing four police officers a week earlier. They invited international media to attend. An Associated Press film crew accepted – French reporters reviewed their footage, and interviewed them. Le Figaro duly reported five days later how police entered “an empty village...sticking close to the walls,” before becoming embroiled in a pitched battle:

“Shooting was intense, as they were fired on from KLA trenches dug into the hillside. The fighting intensified sharply on the hilltops above the village...KLA guerrillas, encircled, were trying desperately to break out. A score of them in fact succeeded, as the police themselves admitted.”



Yugoslav forces conduct the Racak “counter terror” operation

Meanwhile, Le Monde similarly recorded how Racak was abandoned by “virtually all” its civilian inhabitants at this time. Taken over by the KLA, “smoke came from only two chimneys” in the vicinity, during a harsh winter. When Yugoslav security forces entered the village “in the wake of a police armored vehicle,” it was “nearly deserted”:

“They advanced through the streets under the fire of [KLA] fighters lying in ambush in the woods above the village. The exchange of fire continued throughout the operation...The main fighting took place in the woods...The [KLA] was trapped in between. [Racak] was a stronghold of Albanian independence fighters.”

Eventually, police fled under a hail of bullets. The KLA tipped off KVM 24 hours later that dozens of dead civilians could be found in Racak. How

Yugoslav authorities dragged “innocent men, women and children” from their homes in a largely deserted, enemy-occupied village, then “forced” them to kneel before execution, all while being relentlessly fired upon by the KLA, isn’t certain. In fact, this scenario was literally impossible - not least because neither women nor children were among the dead.

Graphic images of the purported execution site, captured January 16th by Kosovo-Albanian newspaper KOHA Ditore before Walker et al arrived, exclusively depict males of fighting age. There are strong grounds to believe the scene was tampered with subsequently too. One of the pictured victims, evidently shot in the head, wore a traditional Albanian white cap by the time KVM visited. He markedly lacked that headgear in KOHA Ditore’s photos.

Fast forward to April 2002, Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic was on trial at the ICTY, cross-examining Walker’s personal assistant Karol Drewienkiewicz about the “massacre” scene in Racak. He enquired, “how is it possible for somebody to be hit in the head and have his cap remain on his head?” He added, “forensic experts say that from a shot [and] wound of that kind, your eyes would pop out let alone a cap being displaced from your head.”

Asked if she considered if “this could possibly be a rigged scene for television purposes” at the time, Drewienkiewicz admitted it “certainly was one of the thoughts that went through my head as I was going up the hill.” Later, Milosevic probed whether she knew Racak “was encircled by trenches and bunkers” constructed by the KLA. She confirmed Walker’s motley retinue traversed extensive makeshift military installations and dugouts to reach the “massacre” site.

‘Greatly Complicated’

On January 18th 1999, two days after Walker threatened Belgrade with grave consequences if international investigators weren’t allowed to inspect Racak, another impactful publicity stunt was staged. ICTY chief prosecutor Louise Arbour appeared at Macedonia’s border with Yugoslavia, one hour’s drive from the “massacre” site, demanding entry. Yugoslav authorities denied her

request. International news crews, which she just so happened to have in tow, serendipitously captured this scene in real-time, for global broadcast.

Western journalists barely noticed when later on the same day, Yugoslav police arrived in Racak to collect corpses for forensic examination in Pristina, a task made extremely difficult by KLA militants shooting at them throughout. Once retrieved, Belgrade invited Belarusian and EU specialists to conduct concurrent autopsies on the bodies. Brussels dispatched a team from Finland, led by dentist Helen Ranta, of Helsinki University.

Yugoslav and Belarusian pathologists identified gunpowder residue on almost every body they examined, amply suggesting they were fighters, killed in combat. Finnish investigators did not make their findings available, but on March 17th 1999 - as we shall see, a highly significant date - Ranta gave a press conference in Pristina about what transpired in Racak. Under Walker's watchful gaze, she began by stressing what followed was merely her "personal view", not the EU's official position.



Helen Ranta attends a memorial to Racak 'massacre' victims,
2022

Despite this, Ranta endorsed Walker's account wholesale, repeatedly citing "information obtained" from KVM observers as fact. Straying from the

desired narrative somewhat, she admitted just 22 bodies - all male, no women, no children - were found in Racak. Nonetheless, she asserted “they were *most likely* [emphasis added] shot where they were found.” The dentist unconvincingly based this judgement in large part on no ammunition being found in their pockets.

Ranta conceded her probe was “greatly complicated” by “investigating the bodies” at a Pristina morgue “approximately a week from the estimated time of death of the victims,” without any “chain of custody.” She further conceded, “what may or may not have happened to the bodies” during the intervening time was “difficult to establish...with absolute certainty.” Thus, her team’s findings could not conclusively determine “whether there was a battle or whether the victims died under some other circumstances.”

Of course, Western media made no mention of these details when reporting the press conference. Subsequently, Ranta revealed that shortly prior, she had privately met with Walker, “a very unpleasant experience indeed.” He aggressively pressured her to unequivocally blame Yugoslav authorities for the carnage, while characterising all slain as unarmed civilians. She refused, so he dramatically snapped several pencils, before flinging them onto the table in front of her.

No ordinary diplomat, Walker was a key US operative on the frontline of Ronald Reagan’s murderous Latin American dirty wars, during the 1980s. Formally a person of interest in official investigations into the notorious Iran/Contra Affair, as ambassador to El Salvador at the end of that bloody decade he personally whitewashed a very real slaughter of Jesuit priests by Washington-sponsored death squads. He stated, “in times like this, of great emotion and great anger, things like this happen.”

In March 2000, The Times of London exposed how the CIA penetrated KVM to “[develop] ties with the KLA,” and provide its proxy warriors with “military training manuals and field advice on fighting the Yugoslav army and Serbian police.” Europeans within the OSCE resultantly “questioned the motives and loyalties” of Walker during this period. NATO’s criminal bombing complete,

they were left to ponder whether they were “betrayed by an American policy that made airstrikes inevitable”:

“The American agenda consisted of their diplomatic observers, aka the CIA, operating on completely different terms to the rest of Europe and the OSCE.”

‘Final Warning’

Walker was nominated to lead KVM by then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and routinely reported to her while in the post. When apprised of what he’d found in Racak, she remarked cheerily, “Spring has come early.” Washington’s long-desired bombing of Belgrade could at last be launched, due to the claimed necessity of preventing further massacres of civilians by Yugoslav authorities, if not a total genocide of all Kosovo Albanians. There was just one more publicity stunt to execute.

As NATO’s destruction of Yugoslavia lacked UN Security Council authorisation - making the bombing completely illegal - it was necessary to create a false impression the “international community” had attempted to resolve the “crisis” in Kosovo via diplomatic means. So it was on January 30th 1999, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana dispatched a strongly worded “final warning” to Milosevic, summoning him and representatives of his government to Rambouillet, France, for a “peace conference” with the KLA’s leadership.

In reality, Rambouillet was always intended to be a “war conference”. State Department officials drew up wide-ranging proposals amounting to total NATO occupation of Yugoslavia, and complete political and economic independence - read: neoliberal rape and pillage - for Kosovo. Under the non-negotiable terms - Milosevic had the choice of accepting or being bombed - NATO personnel and vehicles would enjoy “free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access” throughout the country, “including associated airspace and territorial waters.”

NATO would also be permitted to commandeer “any areas or facilities” it wished in Yugoslavia, “as required for support, training, and operations,” and be “granted the use of airports roads, rails, and ports without payment of fees, duties, dues, tolls, or charges.” If the military alliance needed “to make improvements or modifications to certain infrastructure” locally, Belgrade had to foot the bill. Meanwhile, NATO personnel would be immune from arrest or prosecution if they committed *any* crime.



Press photo of the Rambouillet “peace conference”

It was an agreement no government anywhere in the world could or would ever willingly accept. Which was precisely the point, as US officials widely admitted subsequently. Albright’s assistant James Rubin explained a year later, “publicly, we had to make clear that we were seeking an agreement... privately we knew the chances of the Serbs agreeing were quite small.” Ranta’s press conference was convened as the “talks” were nearing their end. The next day, Milosevic formally rejected NATO’s derisory non-deal.

Claiming to have exhausted all diplomatic avenues, and with public focus on the Racak “massacre” renewed, NATO’s assault on Yugoslavia was announced on March 19th 1999 for five days hence, permitting OSCE observers to flee. The bombing’s first week focused exclusively on Belgrade, and areas of

Yugoslavia outside Kosovo. If the military alliance was truly blitzing the country to prevent a planned, looming genocide, it's rather odd Milosevic was not only effectively handed a 12-day-long grace period to begin executing it, but also didn't.

Nonetheless, to this day NATO's criminal destruction of Yugoslavia is widely touted in the West as a righteous "humanitarian intervention", which prevented another Holocaust. There was indeed a mass exodus of Kosovo Albanians during the bombing. Some fled the military alliance's terror and destruction. As a KLA operative who "[filmed] the plight of displaced Albanian civilians with a video camera" for Western consumption admitted to The Guardian in June 1999 too, "KLA advice, rather than Serbian deportations" was also a major motivating factor.

Political scientist Babak Bahador has written a book about Racak's propaganda value, explaining how "unexpected and emotive images" published in the media can "rapidly open policy windows of opportunity" for Western powers. Of course, the CIA and Pentagon are well-aware of that, so routinely exploit such displays for this precise purpose. Given the Empire covertly influences content of Hollywood movies, it's somewhat surprising Yugoslavia's bombing has not been committed to celluloid since.

This may be because the facts of Racak are very clear, even if hidden in plain sight. To reiterate the time's established narrative might open easily provable and admitted lies to re-exposure. That NATO destroyed an independent country on the basis of false atrocity propaganda and fraud, in which all the West's journalists, rights groups, and politicians were intimately complicit, simply cannot be countenanced. After all, that might mean they can't get away with it again.

All my investigations are free to read, thanks to the generosity of my readers. Independent journalism nonetheless requires investment, so if you took value from this article or any others, please consider sharing, or even becoming a paid subscriber. Your support is always gratefully received, and will never be forgotten.



123 Likes · 21 Restacks

32 Comments



Write a comment...



TheRooster Mar 5 ❤️ Liked by Kit Klarenberg

Absolutely unbelievable. Balkans are very complex good job you are the first person to write about it in a way that I can follow

♡ LIKE (21) 💬 REPLY ↗ SHARE ...

1 reply by Kit Klarenberg



Weihan Xing Mar 5 ❤️ Liked by Kit Klarenberg

FABULOUS essay here! This is a must-read expose of just one of the vile propaganda ploys implemented by the US and its NATO allies to justify the rape and slaughter of Yugoslavia. Please COPY and PASTE the link and send to all your friends and family. This is a must-read.

♡ LIKE (14) 💬 REPLY ↗ SHARE ...

30 more comments...