

1999: NATO's War Against Yugoslavia in Kosovo

In 1999, the discovery of bodies in the Kosovo village of Racak helped push NATO into war. New evidence casting doubt on claims that the bodies were civilian victims of a massacre has stirred debate in the European media – but there has been a virtual blackout on this in the U.S. press.

In January of 1999, the American head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Kosovo, U.S. diplomat William Walker, condemned the killings as “horrendous.” He stated that the dead were all civilians who had been brutally executed, many of them mutilated after death.

Once the massacre story was reported in heart-wrenching detail by media across the globe, pressure for war intensified and previously reluctant European allies took a major step toward authorizing air strikes. A *Washington Post* article (April 18, 1999) reconstructing the Kosovo decision-making process found that “Racak transformed the West’s Balkan policy as singular events seldom do.”

Troubling questions soon emerged, however, about whether or not there had actually been a massacre at Racak, or whether the incident had been manipulated to push NATO into war – questions almost completely ignored by the U.S. media at the time.

Front-page news articles by veteran Yugoslavia correspondents questioning William Walker’s account were published in French newspapers like *Le Figaro* (January 20, 1999) and *Le Monde* (January 21, 1999). The German daily *Berliner Zeitung* (March 13, 1999) reported that several European governments, including Germany and Italy, were pressing the OSCE to fire William Walker based on information from OSCE monitors in Kosovo that the Racak bodies “were not – as Walker declared – victims of a Serbian massacre of civilians,” but were mostly KLA fighters killed in battle.

After the massacre, the European Union hired a Finnish team of forensic pathologists to investigate the deaths. Their report was kept secret for two years. The U.S. media ignored the story, despite the report’s finding that although people did die at Racak, there

What Happened at Racak?

By Armen Georgian, writes for *Agence-France Presse* in London, and Arthur Neslen, International Editor for *Red Pepper*, London.

On the alleged day of the killings, a fierce battle between besieging Serb forces and Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) units was fought around Racak, “a fortified village with lots of trenches,” according to *Le Figaro*’s Renaud Girard. That morning, Serb police invited journalists to accompany them. As fighting raged in the nearby woods, *Le Monde*’s Christophe Chatelet went to Racak with Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) monitors in search of civilian casualties at the time Serb

forces were allegedly slaughtering villagers. He found four wounded and was told of one dead.

The next day however, the OSCE team discovered up to 18 bodies in the deserted village, and KLA units guided the press to a gully where corpses were laid out. Later that day, William Walker arrived to announce the “horrendous massacre” to the world. Few press reports mentioned that, at the time the massacre was supposedly taking place, the Information Press Centre in Pristina received independent reports that 15 KLA fighters had been killed around Racak.

Source: Excerpt, *The New Statesman*, April 5, 2001. <www.balkanpeace.org/rs/archive/apr01/rs135.shtml>

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is no evidence of a massacre.

According to the *Berliner Zeitung* (January 16, 2001), the Finnish investigators could not establish that the victims were civilians, whether they were from Racak or even exactly where they had been killed. Furthermore, the investigators found only one body that showed traces of an execution-style killing, and no evidence that the bodies had been mutilated.

These findings were completed as early as June 2000, but their publication was blocked by the UN and EU.

Except for one brief wire story from *United Press International* (January 18, 2001), not one U.S. media outlet ran a story on the Finnish team’s findings. News outlets continue to refer to the Racak massacre without qualification, despite the cloud of uncertainty hanging over the story.

A *Chicago Tribune* report (January 23, 2001) speculated that the Serbs might “revert to form and respond to an Albanian provocation with a Racak-style retaliation.” The *Trib-*

une made no mention of any questions surrounding the Racak incident.

A *Philadelphia Inquirer* story (January 23, 2001) claimed that “Serbs refuse to accept the world’s vision of them as aggressors,” and noted that Yugoslav president Vojislav Kostunica “alleges the killings [at Racak] were staged to look like a massacre to embarrass Yugoslavia.” The Finnish team’s findings about Racak, which prompted Kostunica’s recent allegations, went unmentioned.

An *Associated Press* article (January 18, 2001) did elliptically note the new report’s existence, saying that Kostunica wants to discuss with The Hague “reports attributed to Finnish pathologists saying there was no evidence of a Serb massacre” at Racak.

Source: “Doubts on a Massacre: Media Ignore Questions About Incident That Sparked Kosovo War,” *Media Advisory, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*, February 1, 2001 <www.fair.org/press-releases/racak.html>

The Hoax that Started a War

By Peter Worthington, founding editor,
Toronto Sun and syndicated columnist.

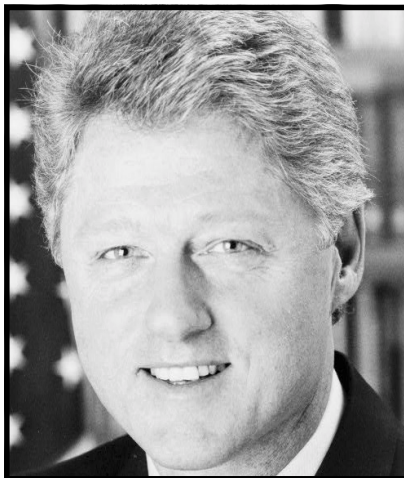
Back in March, 1999, what tipped the scales for then-U.S. president Bill Clinton to launch an air war against Serbia, were reports of a massacre of 45 Albanian civilians by Serb security forces in Racak, in southern Kosovo.

Clinton told the world on March 19, 1999: "We should remember what happened in Racak... innocent men, women and children were taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt and sprayed with gunfire." Photos circled the world. NATO bombing began March 24, and lasted 78 days.

White House press secretary Joe Lockhart said of Racak: "A strong message will be brought to President Milosevic about bringing those to justice who should be punished for this."

U.S. Foreign Secretary Madeleine Albright, eager to make war against then-Yugoslavia and speaking on CBS' *Face the Nation*, cited Racak where, she said, there were "dozens of people with their throats slit." She called this the "galvanizing incident" that meant peace talks at Rambouillet were pointless and "humanitarian bombing" was the only recourse.

German Foreign Minister,



**President Bill Clinton
(1993-2001)**

"Planning for a U.S.-led NATO intervention in Kosovo is now largely in place. The only missing element seems to be an event - with suitably vivid media coverage - that could make the intervention politically saleable... That Clinton is waiting for a 'trigger' in Kosovo is increasingly obvious."

**U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee
(August 12, 1998)**

**"We should remember what happened in Racak... innocent men, women and children were taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt and sprayed with gunfire."
U.S. President Bill Clinton (March 19, 1999)**

NATO bombing campaign began (March 24, 1999)

Joschka Fischer said Racak "became the turning point for me" and war was the only answer.

Canada's then foreign minister, Lloyd Axworthy, called the event "a disgusting victimization of civilians."

Human Rights Watch reported the dead had fingernails torn out - evidence of torture.

On January 16, William Walker, the veteran U.S. diplomat who headed peace verifiers for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), was taken to Racak by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. He declared that the dead "obviously were executed where they lay."

His OSCE report spoke of "arbitrary arrests, killings and mutilations of unarmed civilians" at Racak.

Canada's Louise Arbour, special prosecutor for the war crimes tribunal (hand-picked by Albright), vowed retribution for Racak, urging that "international troops on the ground" were the only way to effect arrests.

When Milosevic was indicted as a war criminal, the massacre at Racak was cited as evidence. The *London Times* wrote that victims had their eyes gouged out, heads smashed in, faces blown away at close range, all "farmers, workers, villagers, aged 12-74, men, women, children."

Source: Excerpt, "The hoax that started a war: How the U.S., NATO and the western media were conned in Kosovo," *Toronto Sun*, April 1, 2001.

William Walker: CIA Operative?

By Richard Sanders, Coordinator,
COAT; Editor, *Press for Conversion!*

As Deputy Assistant to indicted Irangate criminal, Elliot Abrams (the Assistant Secretary of State), William Walker worked with Colonel Oliver North. Among other crimes, Walker set up a phony humanitarian operation at an air base in El Salvador that funnelled arms and ammunition to the U.S.-backed contras terrorizing people in Nicaragua (1985-1988).

As the U.S. ambassador to El Salvador (1988-1992), Walker was at the forefront in facilitating U.S. policies to finance, arm and give diplomatic support to country's ultraright-wing, military government. Walker even

helped cover for U.S.-backed death squads when they massacred Jesuit priests in El Salvador.

It seems that Walker was still working for the CIA when he played a decisive role in turning the Racak incident into a pretext for war with Yugoslavia. Many believe that the sole purpose of Walker's OSCE observer team was to push NATO into war. The *Sunday Times* of London (March 12, 2000) reported that "European diplomats then working for the OSCE claim it was betrayed by an American policy that made air strikes inevitable." The *Times* described Walker as "inextricably linked with the CIA" and his team was seen as a 'CIA front group' giving logistical and technical support to the Kosovo Liberation Army.