



Kosovo War at 25: Blair's secret invasion plot to 'topple Milosevic' revealed

Description

WORLD : Declassified British Ministry of Defence (MOD) files reviewed by The Grayzone reveal that officials in London conspired to embroil US troops in a secret plan to occupy Yugoslavia and “topple” President Slobodan Milosevic during NATO’s 1999 war on the country.

Though the crazed scheme was never implemented, details of the plot reveal precisely how British officials successfully shaped Washington into a blunt force instrument of their vanquished empire in years to come.

March 24 marks the 25th anniversary of Operation Allied Force, NATO’s 78-day-long bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. Still venerated in Western mainstream as a successful “humanitarian intervention” conducted to prevent an impending “genocide” of Kosovo’s Albanian population, the war was in fact a wantonly destructive, illegal assault on a sovereign, multiethnic country, based on lies and atrocity propaganda.

Belgrade had in fact been engaged in a counterinsurgency battle against the CIA and MI6-backed Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), an Al Qaeda-linked extremist group.

The KLA—funded by the narcotics trade and organ harvesting—explicitly sought to maximize civilian casualties, in order to precipitate Western intervention.

In May 2000, a British parliamentary committee concluded all purported abuses of Albanian citizens by Yugoslav authorities occurred after NATO’s bombing began, finding that the alliance’s intervention had actually encouraged Belgrade to aggressively neutralize the KLA. Meanwhile, in September 2001, a UN court in Pristina determined that Belgrade’s actions in Kosovo were not genocidal in nature, or intent.

These findings are largely overlooked today. A February Politico investigation into the West’s post-war pillage of Kosovo axiomatically asserted that NATO intervened in Yugoslavia “to halt an unfolding genocide against the ethnic-Albanian population.” Similarly forgotten is just how close leading NATO states came to invading Belgrade during that chaotic spring.

British proposals for US invasion of Yugoslavia

By April 29, 1999, NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia had entered its fifth week. On that date, Richard Hatfield, then-Policy Director of Britain's Ministry of Defence, dispatched a "Strategic Planning Group discussion paper on Kosovo ground force options" to London's military, security, and intelligence apparatus.

In a document marked "Secret – UK eyes only," Hatfield demanded an "immediate" decision on whether to formally invade Yugoslavia:

"If we are to influence US thinking on ground force options, we need to pass the paper to them very quickly...Our planning is ahead of the US, other allies and [NATO HQ]...We believe the US may be developing its initial thinking on ground force options this week.

Our paper could exercise significant influence on their conclusions. The [Chiefs of Staff] therefore agreed we should pass it to the US privately (through military and policy channels) as quickly as possible."

According to Hatfield, London had to "overcome" a "great deal of reluctance and scepticism" in Washington regarding a formal ground invasion, so "decisions need to be taken quickly if we are to launch an operation before Winter."

Evidently, a firm timeline for action had germinated in London. It was simultaneously vital to "make clear" to then-Prime Minister Tony Blair that "although we can influence planning for a possible ground campaign, we cannot expect the US or NATO to accept British views easily or unreservedly."

Therefore, an "early agreement in principle to a ground campaign" was considered "more important than the details," the document states. In other words, securing US commitment to putting boots on the ground trumped all basic technical concerns.

After all, Blair's invasion fantasy hinged entirely on Washington dispatching hundreds of thousands of US soldiers to Yugoslavia. London would by contrast deploy just 50,000—most of the available British Army at the time. This disparity was likely a key source of American "reluctance and scepticism."

London therefore drafted four separate scenarios for the war. This included invading Kosovo alone and "liberating" the province from Belgrade's control. This option would limit "overspill into other areas of Serbia", while guaranteeing "no permanent military presence elsewhere" in the country.

Another proposal, dubbed "wider opposed," would see NATO invade Yugoslavia outright, with the aim of "defeating the Serb armed forces and if necessary toppling Milosevic." The latter forecast an "organised Serb resistance" at every level in response.

Another source of US "reluctance and scepticism," no doubt, was the fact that every country bordering Yugoslavia—even NATO members and aspirants—were either on the record as having rejected, or being expected to reject, the use of their territory for ground invasion.

For example, two of London's war proposals depended "fundamentally on Greek agreement to use their port facilities and airspace." Without Greece's acquiescence, NATO "would have no choice but to mount a wider opposed operation from Hungary, Romania and/or Bulgaria, which would be even more difficult politically."

Coupled with deep historic and cultural ties, the longstanding record of warm relations between Athens and Belgrade effectively ruled out both plans that were dependent on Greece.

An invasion conducted via the latter countries, on the other hand, meant that "it would be impossible to constrain the scope of war with Serbia."

Meanwhile, Albania, which supported the KLA while serving as NATO's effective headquarters throughout the bombing of Yugoslavia, and Macedonia, "where [NATO] troop levels [were] already causing problems," were said to fear becoming formal belligerents in any conflict due to likely "Serb retaliation."

Blair calls for 'coalition of the willing'

Despite the apparent infeasibility of a ground invasion, British officials—Blair in particular—were completely determined to push ahead in Yugoslavia.

Their bombing campaign was a failure. Limited to the skies, NATO jets relentlessly blitzed Serbian civilian, government, and industrial infrastructure, killing over a thousand innocent people—including children—and violently disrupting daily life for millions.

But Yugoslav forces cunningly deployed decoy vehicles to divert the military alliance, while concealing their anti-KLA operations under adverse weather and deception tactics.

In public, NATO military apparatchiks, political pawns, and media minions exalted their stunning success and inevitable victory on the battlefield.

But the declassified files show Ministry of Defence officials spent much of their time bemoaning the fact that their bombs were neither intimidating Milosevic, nor hindering the Yugoslav army's war on the KLA. Belgrade's forces were said to have consistently deceived NATO "very successfully" via extensive use of "camouflage, dummy targets, concealment and bunkers."

British officials repeatedly expressed concern that the Yugoslav army could actually succeed in expelling the KLA from Kosovo entirely, allowing Milosevic to declare victory and dictate peace terms to NATO.

Blair was reportedly determined to reject any such offer. Moreover, it was well-understood that NATO's bombing had rallied citizens to support their leader. As one paper conceded, alliance airstrikes on Yugoslavia's Interior Ministry "demonstrated to Belgrade citizens just how vulnerable their city is, but achieved little else."

“Forewarned by a target list posted on CNN’s website last week, the Serbs had already moved out of the building. Kosovo has been swept clean in less than a week and in the US, a climbdown may be on the cards, as the costs and dangers of escalation hit home,” the April 4 missive asserted.

The following day, Blair dispatched a personal “note for the record” to senior British government, intelligence and military officials.

He lambasted the bombing campaign’s lack of “vigour,” suggesting the British public “does not have the confidence we know what to do,” before concluding: “we appear not to have a grip.”

Blair then proposed the formation of a “coalition of the willing” to counteract opposition to escalation within NATO and “prosecute this to the end.” In an apparent fit of bloodlust, the Prime Minister proceeded to outline a series of demands:

“We must strengthen the targets. Media and communication are utterly essential. [Attacking] Oil, infrastructure, all the things Milosevic values... is clearly justified.”

“What is holding this back?” Blair fumed. “I have little doubt we are moving towards a situation where our aim will become removing Milosevic. We will not want to say so now, but autonomy for Kosovo inside Serbia is becoming absurd. And plainly Milosevic will threaten the stability of the region as long as he remains.”

The Ministry of Defence subsequently circulated a memo on “targeting,” which warranted “immediate attention,” that noted London had “offered the US three significant targets” identified by MI6: Belgrade’s iconic Hotel Jugoslavia; a Cold War-era Bunker; and the Yugoslav capital’s Central Post Office. While conceding that a strike on Hotel Jugoslavia would mean “some civilian casualties,” the memo insisted that their lives were “worth the cost.”

NATO subsequently hit Hotel Jugoslavia on May 7 and 8 in 1999, damaging its bars, boutiques, and dining halls while killing a refugee who sought shelter inside.

The Washington Post promptly justified the strike by claiming it may have targeted a notorious Serbian paramilitary leader, who allegedly owned a casino housed within the hotel. Asked by the newspaper if he took the bombing personally, the fighter, known as “Arkan,” replied:

“When they hit civilians, I take it personally. You don’t change minds with Tomahawks. If they want to bring me to justice, why do they want to kill me? If they want to get Arkan, send ground troops so I can see their faces.

I want to die in a fair fight. Bill Clinton is in deep you-know-what. He bombs what he can. He says ‘God bless America’ and the rest of the world dies.”

NATO bombing stokes Chinese and Russian fears

Later that April, as per Blair’s personal order to target “media,” NATO bombed the Belgrade headquarters of the Yugoslav TV network RTS. The strike killed 16 journalists and wounded 16 more,

with many trapped under rubble for days.

The Prime Minister personally defended the criminal assault, claiming the station was a core component of Milosevic's "apparatus of dictatorship and power".

The NATO-funded International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia later investigated the RTS bombing. It concluded that while the site wasn't a military target, the action aimed to disrupt Belgrade's communications network, and was therefore legitimate.

Amnesty International branded the ruling a miscarriage of justice. Then-NATO General Wesley Clark, who oversaw the bombing campaign, admitted it was understood that the attack would only interrupt RTS broadcasts for a brief period. Indeed, RTS was back on-air after just three hours.

The RTS strike represented one of several egregious war crimes NATO committed throughout the Yugoslavia campaign with total impunity. Officially, the 78-day-long aerial onslaught destroyed just 14 Yugoslav tanks, while devastating 372 industrial facilities, leaving hundreds of thousands jobless.

The military alliance allegedly took directions on what to target from US corporations, including Philip Morris. NATO's deliberate obliteration of chemical plants polluted soil, air, and water across the Balkans with over 100 toxic substances. Not coincidentally, Serbia today is a world leader in cancer rates.

On the first night that Hotel Yugoslavia was bombed, NATO carried out a simultaneous strike against Beijing's embassy in Belgrade, killing three journalists, wounding dozens sheltering inside, and outraging Chinese and Serb citizens alike.

NATO declared that this was merely an accident, caused by erroneous CIA targeting data. While the declassified Ministry of Defence files conspicuously contain no reference to this highly controversial international incident, they do mention grave Chinese concerns over the wider campaign. Namely, that it would "constitute a precedent for intervention elsewhere."

British officials sought to allay these fears not only in Beijing, but Moscow. Then-Russian premier Yevgeny Primakov learned NATO had launched its campaign against Yugoslavia while he was literally mid-air, en route to the US for an official meeting.

He immediately ordered the pilot to return to Russia. Despite his protest, the Kremlin thereafter attempted to compel Milosevic to cease hostilities in Kosovo via diplomatic channels.

Once it became clear that Russia would not intervene on his side, Milosevic folded and pledged to withdraw all Yugoslav forces from Kosovo on June 3 1999. In turn, NATO would occupy the province.

That same month, a cable dispatched from the British Embassy in Moscow observed the bombing was widely viewed locally "as a blow to [the] UN Security Council and threat to Russian interests... setting an unacceptable precedent for action out of area, circumventing the Security Council if necessary":

"[Moscow's Ministry of Defense] has used NATO's resort to force to argue Russia's new military doctrine should take more serious account of a potential threat from NATO, with all that that means in terms of force levels, procurement and the future of arms control... The

UK's forward position on the use of force has not gone unnoticed... The Kosovo campaign has reinforced the perception here of an expanding NATO as a powerful tool for the imposition of US will in Europe."

Blair reportedly walked away from his destruction of Yugoslavia with newfound confidence. According to veteran British journalist Andrew Marr, the Prime Minister realized "he had tried to bounce [Clinton] too obviously over Kosovo," thus concluding that "American Presidents need tactful handling" to achieve desired results.

Blair also "learned to cope with giving orders which resulted in much loss of life." Directing Yugoslavia's collapse furthermore "convinced him of his ability to lead in war, to take big gambles, and to get them right."

It was this arrogant attitude that guided Blair into the quagmire of Iraq, and to further interventions which wreaked havoc on the globe.

Blair fulfills 'Britain's destiny'

With the Yugoslav army fully withdrawn from Kosovo, the province began to resemble post-World War II Germany, carved into Western occupation zones.

As a November 1999 OSCE report documented in sickening detail, a very real genocide immediately commenced. KLA fighters proceeded to not only purge Kosovo's Roma and Serb population, but also clear out their Albanian political and criminal rivals via intimidation, torture, and murder—all under the watchful eye of NATO and UN "peacekeepers."

The Independent reported that month that the KLA's post-war campaign of "murder and kidnap" in NATO-occupied Kosovo—officially described as an effort "to ensure public safety and order"—reduced Pristina's Serb population from 40,000 to just 400.

A local European human rights worker told the newspaper that over the prior six months, "every single Serb" they knew had "been intimidated—verbally in the street, on the telephone, [or] physically" by the Al Qaeda-tied KLA.

In December 2010, a British "peacekeeper" posted to Kosovo during this time attributed Pristina's modern day status as "an impoverished, corrupt and ethnically polarised backwater" to NATO's "unwillingness to control KLA gangsters."

He recalled how London under his watch consistently "emboldened the KLA to greater brutality." Whenever he captured the terror group's fighters on the streets, heavily armed and "intent on murder and intimidation," his superiors ordered them freed:

"I witnessed... the KLA rampaging like a victorious mob intent on retribution," he explained, adding that "systematic murder of Serbs, often shot in front of their families, was commonplace."

Given that "KLA thugs wielding AK47s, knuckledusters and knives terrified residents of Serbian

apartment blocks, Many Serbs fled,” the former soldier noted.

“The Blair government’s spin machine wanted moral simplicity. The Serbs were the ‘bad guys’, so that must make Kosovo Albanians the ‘good guys’... Prostitution and drug and people trafficking increased as the KLA’s grip on Pristina tightened.”

However, KLA fighters were shielded from ICTY prosecution for their innumerable horrific crimes by direct NATO decree. Only today is justice being vaguely served, to almost total Western indifference.

In many cases, American politicians continue to sing the praises of brutal KLA leaders. In 2010, then-Vice President Joe Biden referred to later-indicted war criminal Hashim Thaci as Pristina’s “George Washington.” Thaci’s 2018 autobiography proudly features fawning promotional quotes from the current Oval Office occupant on its sleeve.

Since 1945, British officials have been overwhelmingly preoccupied with maintaining the bigger, richer, more powerful US Empire’s global dominance, so as to surreptitiously guide it in direction of their choosing.

Rarely is this sinister mission so candidly articulated as in the documents presented here. While Blair’s reverie of “toppling” Milosevic via US force was unrequited, Washington’s calamitous post-9/11 “Global War on Terror” was explicitly British-inspired.

Not long after planes hit the World Trade Center that fateful day, Blair dispatched a bust of Winston Churchill to the White House, evoking the wartime leader’s famed December 1941 address to Congress, which heralded Washington’s entry into World War II.

At the same time, the British premier privately wrote to President George W. Bush, urging him to exploit “maximum” global sympathy produced by 9/11 to launch military interventions across West Asia. This wave of belligerence was foreshadowed during Blair’s 1997 election campaign:

“Century upon century it has been the destiny of Britain to lead other nations. That should not be a destiny that is part of our history. It should be part of our future... We are a leader of nations, or we are nothing.”

A British-steered global Pax Americana was forged in Yugoslavia 25 years ago, in an incendiary baptism of airstrikes and atrocity propaganda, which subsequently inflicted death, destruction, and misery throughout the Global South. Today, untold millions across the world grapple with the painful legacy of Blair’s determination to fulfill London’s “destiny.”

BY KIT KLARENBERG

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