

Was CNN involved in a NATO effort to assassinate the Serbian information minister?

Chris Marsden
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On Friday, July 2 the *Independent* newspaper in Britain ran an article by its Belgrade war correspondent Robert Fisk entitled “Taken in by the NATO line”. The article presents a devastating picture of the role of the press corps in the war against Yugoslavia.

Fisk shows how, with rare exceptions, reporters abandoned any standpoint of objectivity and adopted uncritically the official rationale for the war. For the most part infected themselves with the anti-Serb hysteria of US, British and NATO officials, they sought to justify the bombing campaign by reporting NATO propaganda as fact and accepting without question the statements of NATO spokesman Jamie Shea, President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair.

He cites the example of a CNN reporter in Belgrade who “astounded one of his English colleagues after NATO had bombed a narrow road bridge in the Yugoslav village of Varvarin, killing dozens of civilians, many of whom fell to their death in the River Morava. ‘That’ll teach them not to stand on bridges,’ he roared.”

Fisk notes, “This was not the kind of language he used on air, of course, where CNN’s report on the bridge killings was accompanied by the remark that there had been civilian casualties ‘according to the Serb authorities’—all this when CNN’s own crew had been there and filmed the decapitated corpse of the local priest.”

The *Independent* correspondent goes on to suggest that the collaboration of major media outlets with the NATO military campaign went beyond dishonest and unethical journalistic practices. At the end of the article he suggests that CNN and the network’s Larry King Live show may have been complicit in an attempt to assassinate Serbian Information Minister Aleksander Vucic.

Fisk writes: “Two days before NATO bombed the Serb Television headquarters in Belgrade, CNN received a tip from its Atlanta headquarters that the building was to be destroyed. They were told to remove their facilities from the premises at once, which they did.

“A day later, Serbian Information Minister Aleksander Vucic received a faxed invitation from the Larry King Live show in the US to appear on CNN. They wanted him on air at 2:30 in the morning of 23 April and asked him to arrive at Serb Television half an hour early for make-up.

“Vucic was late—which was just as well for him since NATO missiles slammed into the building at six minutes past two. The first one exploded in the make-up room where the young Serb assistant was burned to death. CNN calls this all a coincidence, saying that the Larry King show, put out by the entertainment division, did not know of the news department’s instruction to its men to leave the Belgrade building.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* has sought to obtain a response from the Larry King Live program in Washington and CNN headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia to the description of events provided by Fisk. The publicist for Larry King Live and the press spokesperson for CNN News have failed to return repeated calls.

Meanwhile, Fisk has come under attack from sections of the British media. On July 4 Henry Porter of the *Observer*, one of the newspapers most fervent in its support of NATO’s war, published a reply to Fisk’s piece, all but accusing the *Independent* reporter of being a stooge of Yugoslav President Milosevic. Porter asserts that Fisk “was undeniably aided by the Serb authorities” and filed reports on the war “refracted through the lens of Serbian interest.”

Porter grants there was “almost universal concern among editors and reporters about the level of accuracy of NATO briefings” and admits there is good reason to conclude that “the alliance was bent on an almost racist crusade against the Serbs”. This, however, does not prevent him from indulging in a bit of anti-Serb racism of his own, noting that Fisk was given the sobriquet “Fiscovic” by some of his colleagues.

Porter is outraged that Fisk appears to believe “NATO is motivated by congenital imperialist tendencies,” but even more intolerable is Fisk's decision to bring a dispute within the media to the attention of the public.

The attack on Fisk indicates that his exposure of the deplorable performance of the press corp has hit a raw nerve, and, in particular, his revelations concerning CNN's role in the bombing of the Serb TV center have provoked considerable concern in high places.



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