

West demands release of four accused of spying on Serbia

Julie Hyland
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The British and Canadian governments have reiterated their demands for access to four men being held in Yugoslavia, accused of espionage and planning terrorist activities.

The four—Canadians Shaun Going (45), and his 19-year old nephew Liam Hall, and Britons John Yore (31), and Adrian Pragnell (41)—were seized August 1 in the sensitive border area between Kosovo and Montenegro.

Going is the part-owner of a construction firm in Kosovo. Yore and Pragnell are British police officers working in Kosovo as part of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) mission, training the province's police force. If tried and found guilty the men could face up to 20 years in prison.

According to the Yugoslav army, which regularly patrols the border area, the men had left the main Montenegro to Kosovo road and were found attempting to cross the Mount Cakor pass late at night.

The Yugoslav authorities allege that the four were carrying explosives and mining gear. They claim to have evidence the men were training Montenegrin police in demolition tactics, to be used for sabotage purposes. There is an increasingly tense standoff between Serbia and Montenegro, its last remaining partner in the disintegrating Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). President Milo Djukanovic is seeking greater autonomy, if not outright independence for Montenegro from the FRY. Ever since he defended the NATO bombardment against Yugoslavia last year, his tiny republic has become the centre for Western-backed intrigues against Slobodan Milosevic's regime in Belgrade.

The four men have denied the charges, and claim they were holidaying in Montenegro when they were arrested. On Wednesday they appeared before a closed

session at Belgrade's military court, which is expected to rule before the weekend on whether to bring formal charges against the four. A legal advisor from the British interest section in Belgrade was allowed by Yugoslav authorities to attend the court hearing and has also agreed that the four will be allowed to appoint their own lawyers. A likely choice of lawyer for the two Britons is Djordje Djuricic, who has previously defended Westerners accused of spying and was approached to defend the men by the British consul.

Yugoslavia's claims brought a string of denials and condemnations from the West. Both the United Nations and OSCE rejected the charges. Canada and Britain have claimed that the arrests are part of an attempt to stir up anti-Western sentiment in advance of the Yugoslav presidential and parliamentary elections on September 24. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy said that the arrests were “another example of the kind of tactics of a thug to get his way.” He went on, “We're taking this seriously and we're not going to take this lying down.” Dragisa Burzan, Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro, echoed this charge, stating that, “Milosevic is deliberately kidnapping Westerners to try and prevent NATO interfering and brand it the aggressor”.

British pronouncements were more circumspect. A spokesman for the Foreign Office said that it was in “urgent touch with our international partners” to press for the four's release. On Tuesday, Foreign Office Minister Keith Vaz met with Rade Dobrac, the Yugoslav ambassador in London, to discuss the case. The Yugoslav authorities have so far ignored pleas for discussions with a UN liaison officer.

Yugoslavia is currently holding eight Westerners whom it accuses of spying and terrorist activities. Earlier this month four Dutch citizens were arrested in

Serbia, accused of plotting to kidnap Milosevic. Like the Britons and Canadians, the Dutch captives were shown on Serb television, with one making the bizarre admission that the group had intended to present the Yugoslav leader dead or alive to President Clinton when he attended the G8 summit. If they could not take him alive, the Dutch captive was heard to say, they had intended to “cut off his head” and deliver it in a box.

Whatever the truth of the charges laid against specific individuals by the Yugoslav authorities, claims of Western spying cannot be without foundation. The US-led NATO forces carried out a ferocious bombing campaign against Serbia last year and made clear that the removal of Milosevic is their aim. The Hague War Crimes Tribunal has indicted the Serbian president as a war criminal. After the US government pledged a “reward” of \$5m for information leading to the arrest of any wanted Serbian war criminals, Yugoslavia charged NATO with hiring mercenaries to snatch war-crimes suspects. On at least two occasions in the last six months indicted individuals have been kidnapped from Serbia and delivered for trial at The Hague.

Two officers in Montenegro's Special Police, the *Spezijalni*, have also recently alleged that Britain was involved in training their units. The Serbian regime has long accused Western governments of funding and training the *Spezijalni*, personally built up by Djukanovic, with a view to providing military backing in the event of action against the FRY army, which is controlled by Milosevic. In an interview with *Crossing Continents*, Velibor, a 23-year old *Spezijalni* officer, told how the elite British SAS regiment had helped train his unit. SAS involvement in training Montenegro's special forces began after the NATO bombing campaign, he said. London's Defence Ministry declined to comment on Velibor's remarks.

The two Britons arrested August 1, Pragnell and Yore, were both members of a team of 200 international police instructors working at an OSCE police training school in Vucitrn. Pragnell, a detective with the Hampshire Constabulary, and Yore, a traffic officer with the Cambridge Constabulary, were attached to the liaison unit, based in Pristina. The OSCE claim that its trainers are helping create a “strong and credible” police service, but the vast majority of the newly created force are former members of the paramilitary Kosovo Liberation Army.

The OSCE has said that the two had violated the organisation's rules by taking their “short holiday” without official permission. Similarly, the Canadian Foreign Affairs department said that Going and Hall had been travelling in Montenegro without a visa, which is still officially required under Yugoslav entry requirements.

Going runs Meridian Resources, which has a contract with NATO for construction work. He was previously arrested in Albania in the early 1990s—described as the result of “being in the wrong place at the wrong time.” According to Canadian new sources, Going is such a familiar face in Balkan hot spots that he earned a mention in a book on the Balkans, *The Fracture Zone*, by author Simon Winchester. Referring to Going's reconstruction expertise Winchester writes that, “He seemed to take so positive and optimistic an attitude to it ... that it would seem churlish to suggest he was a man who exploited human misery.”

Yugoslavia's spying allegations are no doubt intended by President Milosevic to whip up anti-Western sentiment. This has heightened anxiety in Europe and America that he could succeed in winning another four years in office. Efforts to unite pro-Western opposition parties received a further set back this week, when it became clear they would run competing candidates, splitting the anti-Milosevic vote.

The ultra-nationalist Serbian Renewal Movement, the largest opposition party, reversed its previous decision to boycott the September elections, nominating Belgrade's opposition mayor Vojislav Mihailovic as its candidate. Two other main contenders are Vojislav Kostunica, leader of the smaller right-wing Democratic Party of Serbia and Tomislav Nikolic, who from the Serbian Radical Party, another extreme nationalist grouping. Even before the opposition split became apparent, an internal European Union analysis had predicted Milosevic would win the elections.



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