

**SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE  
OUTREACH AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**



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# Peace in Sierra Leone, a project under construction

## UN seeks to coordinate support for post-war development

### DEVELOPMENT

By Kingsley Ighobor and  
Michael Fleshman

*Panning for diamonds: Sierra Leone's rich natural resources can help spur economic growth, but amidst widespread poverty managing that wealth will be vital...*

"The war is over, go and enjoy life," Sierra Leone's former president, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, declared at a January 2002 symbolic burning of weapons and ammunition to mark the end of the country's civil war. As thick smoke from the weapons of war spiralled away at Lungi, in eastern Sierra Leone, he added: "The curfew is hereby lifted." Thousands of jubilant Sierra Leoneans filled the streets to celebrate the formal interment of a decade-old war that had killed 150,000 people and wrecked most of the country's social infrastructure.

A massive UN peacekeeping operation involving 17,000 troops (at the time, the largest in the world) had disarmed 45,000 combatants, including 6,774 child soldiers. In 2006, UN troops began to withdraw, despite concerns that Sierra Leone's weak national institutions could not undertake the huge task of reconstruction

on their own. The UN Security Council referred these concerns to the new UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Then in December 2006 the PBC approved \$35 million to support programmes in Sierra Leone for capacity building, democracy, good governance, justice, security, youth employment and other tasks.

Sierra Leone was one of the commission's first beneficiaries. Established by the Security Council in December 2005, the PBC has a mandate to coordinate with international donors, financial institutions, governments and troop-contributing countries in helping to "marshal resources" and develop "integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery." The commission is also expected to highlight any "gaps that threaten to undermine peace." It currently supports

nearly 100 projects in 15 countries.

Countries that are emerging from conflict need peacebuilding, argues Michael von der Schulenburg, the executive representative of the UN Secretary-General in Sierra Leone and head of the country's peacebuilding programme. "Peacebuilding is access to water, to education, to basic health care - access to opportunities," Mr. von der Schulenburg explains in an interview with Africa Renewal.

The transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding is often difficult, notes Mr. von der Schulenburg. But it is essential to enable the UN to better align its priorities with the socio-economic and political needs of a country after war.

Mr. von der Schulenburg believes that Sierra Leone has had an exemplary peacebuilding programme since the UN operation became a wholly civilian mission. A key achievement is security. "We don't have armed groups," he says. "They are all integrated. And the combatants have not become criminals, as so often happens." The UN has also successfully implemented a community small-arms collection programme, to gather up weapons not handed in during the formal disarmament exercise. Other achievements, he adds, include a vibrant free press and the entrenchment of democracy - as demonstrated by periodic elections - as well as a growing economy.

According to a 2009 evaluation of peacebuilding projects commissioned by the Sierra Leonean government, the UN Integrated Office for Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone and the Peacebuilding Support Office in New York, many of the key goals have been met. It reports that the UN Development Programme, which managed most of the projects, achieved an 87 per cent completion rate. "Measured on the scale of budget delivery, this is clearly a remarkable performance," states the evaluation.

An emergency programme to support the energy sector, for example, brought an increase in power capacity from 25 megawatts to 31 megawatts in the capital, Freetown, and from 0.5 megawatts to 5 megawatts in Bo and Kenema, two of Sierra Leone's larger cities. A project aimed at promoting youth empowerment through micro-credit benefited 4,500 young women, placed 1,000 unskilled youths in training institutions and 300 others in apprenticeship programmes in official institutions.

To enhance capacity in the justice system, another project supported the training and hiring of senior barristers, legal officers, state counsels, clerks and support staff. As a result, a backlog of 700 cases was cleared within two years, and current court cases are being heard much faster.

Mr. von der Schulenburg has recommended that peacebuilding operations in Sierra Leone conclude in 2013. A decision on the end date will be taken by the Security Council. But even if the peacebuilding activities

wind down, regular UN agencies will continue their support for the country's development efforts, he adds.

The general elections in 2012 will be a litmus test for Sierra Leone's nascent democracy. There are concerns that the elections could lead to violence. The 2007 parliamentary and presidential polls were generally peaceful, although there were isolated cases of violence, according to a report by European Union observers. Those observers also noted that the UN Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) played an important role in providing technical and logistical support.

Mr. von der Schulenburg maintains that concerns about violence and other irregularities in the next elections are justified, but manageable. He cites the success of a recent by-election in a diamond district with high unemployment.

There is a huge unemployment challenge in Sierra Leone, however. In 2010 the World Bank estimated Sierra Leone's unemployment at 80 per cent. During a visit in 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also raised concerns about the country's high unemployment.

Sierra Leone's main income-generating sources are in the extractive sector - gold, diamonds, bauxite and rutile. But as a 2011 report by experts of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union pointed out, investments in Africa have been mainly in the extractive sector, which produces few jobs.

Mr. von der Schulenburg believes that managing the economy, especially the proceeds from the country's abundant natural resources, is Sierra Leone's greatest challenge. "Gold, iron ore, diamonds, titanium, bauxite, you name it. Now oil and gas, potentially," he notes. "So this country could become very rich suddenly. And how do you manage these?"

Preparing Sierra Leone for an economic boom will be vital for preventing future conflicts. Currently, the data on the country's untapped wealth contrasts starkly with the poor state of its social development. According to a 2011 World Bank report, life expectancy in Sierra Leone is 48 years, while the adult literacy rate is only 41 per cent. If used properly, the proceeds from Sierra Leone's natural resources can help alter such indicators.

If the Peacebuilding Commission closes shop in 2013, as Mr. von der Schulenburg anticipates, the UN can lay claim to a number of achievements: disarming ex-combatants, supporting the consolidation of democracy and promoting a growing economy. Next year, the World Bank forecasts, the economy will grow by another 8.8 per cent. With the right preparations, the anticipated economic boom may hold more lessons for countries that were once torn apart by civil strife.

## Reuters

Thursday, 4 August 2011

### **Factbox: Fallen leaders on trial**

Here are details of some other fallen leaders who have faced trial in the last 30 years.

- \* ARGENTINA - Leopoldo Galtieri and other junta leaders were tried for human rights crimes shortly after democracy was restored to the country in 1983. He was cleared of rights charges but jailed for his handling of the Falklands conflict and later pardoned. Galtieri died in January 2003.
- \* BOLIVIA - Bolivian strong man Luis Garcia Meza was ousted in a counter-coup after 13 months of strong-arm rule. He was jailed in 1995 for 30 years for genocide, torture and murder of political opponents during his 1980-81 regime.
- \* EAST GERMANY - Erich Honecker fell from power in East Germany after 18 years. He fled to Moscow to escape manslaughter charges linked to deaths of defectors at the Berlin Wall but was extradited back to Germany. The trial collapsed in 1993 due to his terminal illness. Honecker died in exile in Chile in 1994.
- \* EGYPT - Egypt's Hosni Mubarak was wheeled into a courtroom cage in a hospital bed on August 3 to face trial for killing protesters. Mubarak was ousted on February 11 after 30 years in power by an 18-day popular revolt which resulted in the deaths of 840 demonstrators. He denied all the charges.
- \* IRAQ - Former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was executed by hanging in December 2006 after being convicted of crimes against humanity for the killing of 148 Shi'ite men and boys after a 1982 assassination attempt.

Saddam's power crumbled when U.S. tanks swept into Baghdad. Fleeing in early April 2003, he was captured in December that year by American soldiers who found him hiding in a hole near his hometown of Tikrit.

- \* LIBERIA - Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia was one of Africa's most feared warlords. Taylor, who fled Liberia in 2003, is on trial in The Hague for suspected war crimes committed during Sierra Leone's civil war -- though not directly for any crimes in Liberia or Ivory Coast. Taylor is the first African ex-ruler to stand trial for war crimes and he has pleaded not guilty to all charges.
- \* PANAMA - Manuel Noriega, who muscled his way to the top of Panama's military and took de facto power before he was overthrown in a 1989 U.S. invasion, is in a French prison following his conviction for laundering millions of euros into bank accounts and properties in the 1980s.

-- He had already served 20 years in the United States for drug trafficking, money laundering and racketeering before being extradited to France in 2010, where he

was sentenced in absentia in 1999 to seven years in jail. Panama has also requested Noriega's extradition.

\* ROMANIA - Following an anti-Communist uprising in the Romanian city of Timisoara, dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, were executed after a summary trial in 1989.

\* TUNISIA: Earlier this month, a Tunisian court sentenced former president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in absentia to more than 15 years in prison for illegal possession of drugs and weapons. Ben Ali and his wife Leila Trabelsi had each been given 35 years in prison in June, after being found guilty of theft and illegally possession of jewelry and large sums of cash.

Widespread protests in Tunisia forced out Ben Ali on January 14, after 23 years in power, sparking the Arab Spring.

\* FORMER YUGOSLAVIA - Slobodan Milosevic was on trial at the U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague at the time of his death in March 2006. He had been charged with masterminding ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. The former Serbian and Yugoslav president dismissed the U.N. war crimes tribunal as a venue for "victor's justice."

Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic is on trial at the ICTY on 11 charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and violating the laws and customs of war stemming from the 1992-95 Bosnian war. He has denied them all.

## Reuters

Thursday, 4 August 2011

### **Hezbollah hands over material for Hariri UN tribunal**

AMSTERDAM - The UN-backed Lebanon tribunal's prosecutor said he is studying documents and a video provided by Hezbollah, some of whose members are accused of killing former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) issued indictments and arrest warrants for four men, who Lebanese officials identified as Hezbollah members. Last week the tribunal released their names, photographs and details in the hope of speeding up the arrests.

Hezbollah, both a political movement and guerrilla army, denies any role in the huge explosion in Beirut which killed Hariri, a Sunni Muslim who served several terms as prime minister, and 21 others in February 2005.

It accuses the tribunal of being political and an Israeli tool.

Last month the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, gave a televised speech in which he dismissed the indictments as a failed attempt to sow strife and bring down Lebanon's new Hezbollah-backed government.

He also showed documents and videos aimed at portraying the investigation into Hariri's killing as both corrupt and biased against Hezbollah.

He displayed a document which he said showed that when the tribunal transferred equipment from Lebanon to the Netherlands in 2009, it sent a consignment of 97 computers via Israel rather than ship them directly from Beirut.

His statement was intended to imply that Israel was either driving the investigation or tampering with the evidence. He also showed a video which claimed that one of the tribunal's investigators accepted a bribe.

The prosecutor asked Hezbollah to hand over the video and documentary evidence for the investigation.

"As part of its continuing investigation, the office of the prosecutor received material hand-delivered by Hezbollah officials through the prosecutor general of Lebanon on 13 July," said a statement from the STL's office of the prosecutor.

"This material was provided in response to a request made by the office of the prosecutor," it added.

The suspects named last week were Mustafa Amine Badreddine, a senior Hezbollah figure and brother-in-law of slain Hezbollah commander Imad Moughniyeh, as well as Salim Jamil Ayyash, Hussein Hassan Oneissi and Assad Hassan Sabra.

Nasrallah has said the authorities would never arrest members of the Shi'ite militant group.

The 2005 killing plunged Lebanon into a series of political crises and assassinations that led to clashes in May 2008.

The tribunal has deepened the political division in the country, leading to fears that the indictments could revive sectarian tension in a country still scarred by the 1975-90 civil war.



The ICTY was denied the satisfaction of sentencing its biggest catch, Milosevic, who died in his prison cell in 2006.

But its tally of completed cases and trials in progress included more than 100 Yugoslav war criminals, ranging from politicians to generals and warlords.

Among the biggest names were Croat fugitive Ante Gotovina, who was sentenced to 24 years in prison in April, and Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic, who was arrested in Serbia in 2008 and who is currently on trial in The Hague, facing 11 charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide related to the 1992-1995 Bosnian war.

"It has earned the right to be remembered by posterity for conducting a large number of major prosecutions, under difficult circumstances," said Eli Richardson, a former legal advisor to Serbia with the U.S. Department of Justice.

Some of those on the wanted list remained at large for years, protected by sympathisers among the political establishment and law enforcement officers.

Karadzic's military chief, Ratko Mladic, indicted in 1995 for the 43-month siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre, was only captured in May, amid heavy European Union pressure on Serbia. The EU has insisted that Serbia arrest all wanted war criminals before it grants candidate status for membership.

"It seems more than a coincidence that three of the 'biggest fish' (Karadzic, Mladic, and Hadzic) have been arrested at a moment when it was politically and economically suitable," said Geert-Jan Knoops, a Dutch-based international criminal law attorney.

## **RECONCILIATION**

Reconciliation in the Balkans remains difficult, with the injustices of the 1990s wars, World War Two and even ethnic conflicts from centuries before still remembered by many.

Many Serbs feel the international community unfairly singled out their wartime leaders, and in a May poll prior to Mladic's arrest, a little more than half of those Serbs asked said they would not send the general to The Hague.

Croatia objected to the April conviction of army general Gotovina, and Bosnians have expressed frustration over the slow pace of justice.

A "sense of reconciliation, even at the more realistic and minimal levels of people feeling justice has been done, remains wanting in Bosnia and Kosovo, the most deeply affected places," said Gow, who used ICTY records to help document his book on the Yugoslav wars "The Serbian Project and Its Adversaries".

"There is a real feeling of disillusion with the ICTY, despite some respect for it, among Muslims, who do not feel that justice has been done, even if the trials have been successful."

However, the tribunal has at least provided foundations on which to build. It has established an important case file, including a ruling in 2004 that genocide occurred at Srebrenica where Bosnian Serb forces killed about 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in July 1995.

The judgment was confirmed by the International Court of Justice in 2007 in a case lodged by Bosnia against Serbia.

The tribunal also developed an important legal precedent, that of command responsibility, whereby military commanders can be held accountable if they fail to prevent or punish their subordinates for committing war crimes.

Civil society groups now hope to set up a regional truth commission to use the court's legacy of facts, compile a list of victims' names and promote regional reconciliation and combat denial across the Balkans region.

"The ICTY established the facts about the horrible crimes," said Natasa Kandic, at Serbia's Humanitarian Law Center. "Reconciliation comes with the facts."

(Editing by Sara Webb and Sonya Hepinstall)

The Guardian (UK)  
 Wednesday, 3 August 2011

### The hunt for the former Yugoslavia's war criminals: mission accomplished

Until last month, Goran Hadžić, once leader of Croatia's Serb minority, was the last free man on the list of 161 people indicted for war crimes in the former Yugoslavia. His capture has brought an end to one of the most successful manhunts in history



*Serbian war crimes suspect Goran Hadzic after his in Fruska Gora national park close to the village of Krusedol, 60km west of Belgrade, 20 July 2011. Photograph: Politika/EPA*

The man who walked into a forest clearing in northern [Serbia](#) did not look like a wartime leader who had spent seven years on the run. There was no face paint or camouflage – just a chubby, balding man in a sky blue T-shirt decorated with what appeared to be a modernist rendering of an ice-cream cone.

It is hard to imagine a more perfect embodiment of the banality of evil. The man in the forest was Goran Hadžić, the leader of [Croatia](#)'s Serb minority during the Balkan wars of the 90s. The former warehouse worker is charged with playing a leading role in the destruction of the Croatian town of Vukovar in 1991 – the first time a major European town had been destroyed since the second world war. It was carried out with a barbarity reminiscent of the Nazi era. At least 264 Croats and other non-Serbs were taken from Vukovar hospital to a nearby pig farm and tortured before being shot and dumped in a mass grave.

Before his capture on 20 July, Hadžić had spent seven of the past 20 years living under a false name in Russia, where he was hidden by diehard ultra-nationalist priests who still populate the Serb Orthodox church. But he started running out of money, and it was his apparent desperate attempt to flog a Modigliani portrait (it is so far unclear whether it was real or forged, or whether he even owned such a portrait) that got him noticed by the Belgrade authorities, who put a 24-hour tail on the contacts they thought he might go to for help.

On 20 July, Hadžić broke cover to collect some cash from a friend in some heavily wooded hills in an area of the northern Vojvodina, where many of his relatives live. As the meeting began, Serbian commandos emerged from the undergrowth in black balaclavas and surrounded them. There is some dispute over whether Hadžić was armed, but in any case he did not resist, meekly admitting his identity as he gave himself up.

The arrest was a pathetic and long-overdue finale to the age of the Balkan warlord. Of the 161 [war crimes](#) suspects indicted by the international tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Hadžić's court appearance in The Hague last month, besuited and glumly responding to the South Korean judge, marked the end of a hunt that began with the tribunal's creation in 1993.

It has been a long time coming, but with every name now crossed off the list of Hague indictees, it has arguably been the most successful manhunt in history. The search for the former Yugoslavia's war criminals involved the US National Security Agency's latest spy satellites at one end of the technological scale and, at the other, a couple of SAS soldiers lying in a trench for weeks watching their quarry.

It involved subterfuge, counter-subterfuge and car chases straight out of *The Italian Job*. It is a story that unwound in the shadows cast by the Balkan conflict, and which has been largely untold. With the Hague hit-list now behind bars or dead, the details are only just coming to light and some of the diplomats and soldiers who have talked to the Guardian were speaking about the hunt for the first time.

The tribunal for the former Yugoslavia – and its twin for Rwanda – represents the first concerted attempt to deal with crimes against humanity since the Nuremberg trials after the second world war. Unlike the purely victor's justice at those trials, the UN tribunal sought to hold to account all parties to the Yugoslav horror. And while Nuremberg missed Martin Bormann and Adolf Eichmann, The Hague finished the job. On top of that, the ex-Yugoslav and Rwandan tribunals have paved the way for the creation of a permanent tribunal for judging mass murder, the International Criminal Court (ICC).

None of these achievements was pre-ordained or even seemed likely when the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was set up in 1993, largely as a sop to the western conscience at the height of the Bosnian war, in lieu of actual intervention. It was then promptly ignored by those who had created it.

Even after the worst atrocity in Europe since 1945, the Serb massacre of 8,000 Bosnian men and boys at Srebrenica in 1995, there was no international effort to bring the perpetrators to justice. Those primarily responsible, President Slobodan Milošević of Serbia and the Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladic, all acted as if the court in The Hague did not exist. So too did the world powers whose long-awaited intervention helped bring the war to an end. The immediate focus of the world's diplomats was hammering out a peace deal in Dayton, Ohio.



*Goran Hadzic (in beret) arriving at a session of the Serb republic of Krajina's parliament, April 1993. Photograph: Ranko Cukovic/Reuters*

In the summer of 1996, months after the Dayton peace agreement was signed, little had changed. Karadžić was able to drive across Bosnia, through four international checkpoints, waving insouciantly at the [Nato](#) troops on guard, whose orders – dictated by a nervous Clinton administration – all but precluded them from taking action. "The rules of engagement said in effect: 'Don't pick him up, unless you actually trip over him,'" recalls Charles

Crawford, who was UK ambassador to Bosnia at the time. "Anything that involved going off the road even 10 yards was regarded as 'not being in the course of your normal duties'."

In April 1996, just before being sent to Sarajevo as ambassador, Crawford attended a meeting in the magnificent map room at the Foreign Office, at which the issue was not whether to arrest Karadžić but whether to let his party run in the coming post-Dayton elections. "The Brits and other Europeans were wriggling about banning the autumn election posters of Karadžić and Mladic, saying it's all very difficult," Crawford says. "I thought it was ghastly. The Europeans were evincing a disconcerting feebleness, brooding on the supposed downsides of being tough. The Americans were saying we were dealing with a bunch of hillbillies and we had 70,000 troops. The Americans won the argument hands down."

In fact, the Americans were keener on the Europeans arresting war criminals than they were on doing it themselves. Clinton was fearful any US casualties could cost him his re-election in November 1996. It was the US president who had insisted on the restrictive rules of engagement for Sfor, the Nato "stabilisation" force in Bosnia.

But the US special envoy to the Balkans, Richard Holbrooke, saw it as American humiliation. In June 1996, he wrote to the president: "The implications of Karadžić's defiance go far beyond Bosnia itself. If he succeeds, basic issues of American leadership that seemed settled in the public's eye after Dayton will re-emerge. Having reasserted American leadership in Europe, it would be a tragedy if we let it slip away again."

It was only once Clinton had secured his re-election, and appointed Madeleine Albright – a former refugee from Nazi Europe who insisted US military might should be used to prevent a repeat of such atrocities – that Washington began to focus seriously on catching war criminals.

And as the war criminals' impunity grew more and more blatant, several British officials came round to the same point of view. Towards the end of 1996, Crawford wrote a telegram from Sarajevo to the head of the Foreign Office's Balkan desk, in which he recalls arguing: "We have to arrest these people and pull out the poison, because we can't expect the Bosnians to take us seriously if they think these people are still running the show. We are shooting ourselves in the foot."

In the last months of John Major's government, steps were taken to prepare for action. War crimes suspects in British-occupied western Bosnia, who had been named in sealed indictments issued by the tribunal, began to be shadowed by the SAS. Lawyers drew up detailed procedures for handing captives over to The Hague, under which an ICTY doctor and lawyer would be on hand for each arrest. But it was left to Tony Blair's new Labour government, elected in May 1997, to give the green light to the first capture operation. "Blair, and [foreign secretary Robin] Cook in particular, were much more forward and much more willing to take risks in the name of stability and morality than their predecessors had been," recalls a senior European diplomat.

The first war-crimes arrests in former Yugoslavia were carried out on 10 July 1997 in an operation codenamed Tango. For the preceding four weeks it had involved SAS soldiers lying in a shallow trench beside a lake near the town of Prijedor, watching a man called Simo Drljaca. During the war, Drljaca had been Prijedor's police chief, and had organised the "ethnic cleansing" of the town's Muslims, who were driven into a string of horrific concentration camps at Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje. Many of the inmates were beaten or starved to death.

In peacetime retirement, Drljaca had relaxed, spending a lot of time fishing at the lake, and on this particular summer morning he had brought along his son and brother-in-law, unaware that his impunity had run its course.

In the clipped account of one British official: "It was a hardcore SAS operation. The SAS came out of the undergrowth saying: 'We are here to arrest you.' Drljaca pulled out a pistol and fired at them and they shot him."

At exactly the same time, another SAS team entered Prijedor hospital, posing as Red Cross officials, and arrested its director, Milan Kovacevic, who as the town's wartime mayor had given the orders for the round-up of Muslims. Kovacevic did not resist and within a few minutes found himself on a helicopter bound for a US army base, on the first leg of a journey to The Hague.

Operation Tango triggered an outcry. The Serbs accused the British of executing Drljaca in cold blood, and the Muslim government in Sarajevo, somewhat perversely, accused Cook, on his first visit to the region, of deliberately creating a martyr as part of a "pro-Serb" plot. But, crucially, Tango did not spark the feared conflagration. "What Prijedor did was show it could be done. And the blowback was not as bad as people had thought," a senior European diplomat says. The US, German, Dutch and French contingents in Sfor started carrying out their own capture operations and the restrictive rules of engagement, ignored anyway by the SAS in Operation Tango, were relaxed, allowing the troops to go hunting for suspects.

Chastened by Drljaca's fate, the likely targets in the British zone went to ground. The next SAS operation, codenamed Ensue, did not take place until September 1998, when a team crossed into Serbia and grabbed a suspect called Stevan Todorovic – wanted for war crimes in the town of Bosanski Samac – in a log cabin hideaway in the middle of a forest. According to Todorovic's lawyer, whose account was privately confirmed by a British official, Todorovic was bound and hooded and bundled into a car, and then taken over the Drina river on a rubber Zodiac boat, into Bosnia, before being extradited to The Hague.



*The ruins of Vukovar, November 1991. It was the first large European town to have been destroyed since the second world war. Photograph: Art Zamur/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images*

While deciding to go after the criminals, the Nato powers had chosen the more cautious course of going after the smaller fry first, on the grounds that they would be less well-protected, a decision many later regretted

because it allowed the bigger fish to go into hiding. In fact, Sfor officers remained discreetly in touch with Mladic, the Bosnian Serb general, on the grounds that – in the words of one British official – he was still "honcho numero uno" in the military and could therefore deliver results.

Back in Sarajevo, Crawford, the British ambassador, offered to drive to the nearby Bosnian Serb stronghold of Pale to try to talk Karadžić into giving himself up. "There was a chance that, speaking to him in Serbian, I might have got him to sit down and think about it and maybe just surrender. Maybe a slim chance, but a chance worth taking," he says. Cook thought it was a good idea, but submitted the plan to the US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, who overruled him.

The Americans had their own plans for Karadžić and were at that time putting together an operation to seize him. But the operation was abruptly called off when it was leaked to the Bosnian Serb leader. US

officials quickly blamed the French, and in particular a dashing and aristocratic young major called Hervé Gourmelon, who was discovered to be holding secret meetings with Karadžić.

Gourmelon, who has since retired from the army, could not be reached for comment. The defence ministry in Paris said at the time he had been part of an independent French bid to persuade Karadžić to surrender quietly. Ministry officials denied he had given away the US plan but swiftly transferred him back to France because his contacts "might have appeared questionable".

The Gourmelon affair drove a deep rift between Paris and Washington, and the Americans started conducting their own operations in the French zone of control without telling their distrusted allies. On one such operation in 2002, Karadžić's wife opened her door at one o'clock in the morning to find a group of US special forces soldiers in balaclavas, led by an urbane major general in a beret asking politely if they might come in for tea. The major general was David Petraeus, later US commander in Iraq and Afghanistan and now soon to start work as the head of the CIA. He was doing what his officers called his "Eddie Murphy routine" after the role Murphy played in the movie 48 Hrs as a convict who used a broad smile and easy charm to go after a ruthless murderer.

It worked in the movie, but not in real life. Ljiljana Karadžić turned out to be a match for the future spy-chief and his men. The night-time visit, and others that followed, were intended to rattle her into making contact with her husband while under constant surveillance by satellites, aircraft and ground reconnaissance teams. But she took elaborate precautions against being followed. On one occasion, a former Sfor officer recalls: "We saw her bags go out in front of her house. A black Audi drew up and she got in. We followed her but she went into a covered car-park while we waited outside. Six different black Audis, all the same, came out. She was in one of them, but we couldn't follow them all and we lost her."

The Nato hunting teams tried everything they could think of to pick up the trail. They looked out for satellite dishes on houses in remote locations and found out who was subscribing to Belgrade newspapers in out-of-the-way villages, on the grounds that war crimes suspects would have a greater appetite for news of the outside world than their country neighbours.

It was all to no avail. Sfor had picked up some of the low-hanging fruit, but those suspects with connections to the governments in Belgrade and Zagreb found havens among their friends and sponsors there. Nato, meanwhile, was drawing down its troops in the Balkans and the war crimes operations were handed over to the intelligence agencies, who could watch their quarry but had to rely on the deeply unreliable Serbian and Croatian governments to carry out arrests.

Ultimately, it took a political upheaval to bring any real progress. Milošević was overthrown in October 2000 and handed over to The Hague the following June by the man who replaced him, Zoran Djindjić, in a dramatic, fatal, gamble that the west's gratitude would outweigh the hatred of his fellow Serbs. What is less well known is that Djindjić simultaneously offered the British the opportunity to grab Mladic.

"On the night Milošević went to The Hague in 2001, the Serbs invited us to send out a team to get Mladic, saying they reckoned they knew where he was," says Crawford, who by that time was serving as the UK ambassador in Belgrade. "My conclusion, as the guy on the spot, was I didn't think it would be wise. We of course put the offer to London. But it would have meant SAS people getting on a plane and flying straight out; I didn't think it right to put British soldiers into a dangerous situation where they could not know for sure what was going to be happening or whom to trust." At about the same time, the Americans also believed they had a chance to seize Mladic. A US officer says: "He was in a military compound in Belgrade, and we had a fix on it. We gave real-time intelligence to Djindjić but it leaked."

The window of opportunity offered by Djindjić's pro-western leadership closed abruptly in March 2003, when the prime minister was shot dead by a sniper working for an unholy alliance of organised crime and

former Serbian intelligence officers outraged by his willingness to co-operate with The Hague. With his death, power shifted to the Serbian president, Vojislav Koštunica, a democrat but also a nationalist who proved far less willing to help hunt down Mladic and Karadžić.

The Hague tribunal switched tactics, however, and started exerting intense diplomatic pressure. The court's tough, outspoken chief prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, a former Swiss attorney general, made sure the EU would not entertain Serbian or Croatian bids for membership unless she certified that their governments were fully co-operating with The Hague. In her autobiography, *Madame Prosecutor*, Del Ponte complains she constantly ran into what she termed the "*muro di gomma*" or rubber wall, in seeking western support. George Tenet, the CIA chief, even told her: "I don't give a shit what you think."

Serge Brammertz, Del Ponte's successor, kept up the pressure until he came face to face with Hadžić in the Hague courtroom last month. "Unfortunately the truth is, without pressure, things do not really move forward," Brammertz tells the Guardian. "Linking EU enlargement to the arrest of the fugitives has been a really successful tool in the past, and has been instrumental in the arrests of the fugitives of the last years."

The pressure eventually forced the government in Zagreb to hand over intelligence that led Interpol and the Spanish police to catch the highest ranking Croatian war crimes suspect, General Ante Gotovina, holed up in a luxury hotel in the Canary Islands in December 2005. It also led to the election in 2008 of a new pro-western leader in Serbia, Boris Tadic. His appointment of a young new head of the country's intelligence service, the BIA, Saša Vukadinovic, and the subsequent purge of old ultra-nationalist officers, brought near instant results.

Two weeks after Vukadinovic took charge, Karadžić was picked up in Belgrade, where he had been posing as a new-age healer. Mladic was tracked down in May, old and destitute and demanding his pension in the outhouse at his cousin's home in northern Serbia.

Justice is finally being delivered, but it has taken 18 years since the ICTY was established. During that time, many thousands of victims were killed and 10 Hague indictees cheated justice by dying before they were caught.

"We are pleased that at the end of the day they were all arrested, but was it really necessary that it took so long, and was so painful?" says Brammertz. "Many of the survivors of the crimes in the meantime died without seeing justice being done. So I share the frustration." But he does not agree that justice delayed has been justice denied. As well as paving the way for a permanent war crimes court, the ICC, he said The Hague tribunal had struck a firm blow against a culture of impunity in the western Balkans and beyond.

"It is clear that without the tribunal, those who bear the greatest responsibility would never have been prosecuted," he says. "I don't think that, without the tribunal, there would now be a database of 7m documents which very clearly gives the history of the conflict, so that no one can deny that crimes have taken place and that genocide has been committed."