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A U.N. tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has cleared Kosovo's former prime minister, Ramush Haradinaj, of war crimes, following a second trial in The Hague.

5 “Mr. Haradinaj, will you please stand? The chamber finds you not guilty on all counts in the indictment. The chamber orders you be released from the United Nations detention unit,” Presiding judge Bakone Moloto said as he read the verdict.

10 Haradinaj was first acquitted by the U.N. court in 2008, but appeal judges ordered a partial retrial because of witness intimidation.

Former guerilla fighter Haradinaj was accused of war crimes allegedly committed during the Kosovo conflict in 1998 and 1999, and was charged with  
15 murdering and torturing ethnic Serbs.

But the judge said although the evidence showed Serbs and their supporters had been attacked, there was no evidence that Haradinaj had taken part. Two other defendants, Idriz Balaj and Lahi Brahimaj, were also cleared of the charges.

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“This verdict, this judgment, coming after the longest and most exhausting criminal process ever undertaken in the history of the international criminal law, is a complete vindication of Mr. Haradinaj's innocence,” Defense lawyer Ben

Emmerson said. “It proves beyond the slightest doubt that he was a war hero and  
25 not a war criminal.”

Haradinaj was a fighter in the Kosova Liberation Army. He became Kosovo’s  
prime minister for a few months in 2005, but stepped down when charges were  
first brought against him.

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Emmerson said Haradinaj wants to restart his political career.

In Kosovo’s capital, Pristina, crowds watched the announcement of the verdict  
on a giant screen and celebrated with cheers and fireworks.

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“This is definitely a very historic decision,” Besnik Tahiri, a senior official in the  
Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, said. “International justice has confirmed that  
our liberation efforts were the right ones, we defended our homes, our people,  
and we are very happy that Mr. Haradinaj, Mr. Brahimaj and Mr. Balaj have been  
40 acquitted, and they are soon coming home.”

But in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, the verdict was not welcome. Serbian  
President Tomislav Nikolic said the not-guilty verdict shows the U.N. tribunal is  
aimed only at trying Serbian people for the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s.

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He said the decision would “annul” what progress has been made in talks  
between Serbia and Kosovo, which are backed by the European Union.

50 Milivoje Mihajlovic, a Serbian government spokesperson, said the verdict is  
a heavy blow to international law and justice in the case of Kosovo and a serious  
obstacle in the process of reconciliation.

55 Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008, an  
independence that has been recognized by about 90 nations, but which Serbia  
rejects.

