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The Rational Destruction of Yugoslavia

In 1999, the U.S. national security state — which has been involved throughout the world in subversion, sabotage, terrorism, torture, drug trafficking, and death squads — launched round-the-clock aerial attacks against Yugoslavia for 78 days, dropping 20,000 tons of bombs and killing thousands of women, children, and men. All this was done out of humanitarian concern for Albanians in Kosovo. Or so we were asked to believe. In the span of a few months, President Clinton bombed four countries: Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq repeatedly, and Yugoslavia massively. At the same time, the U.S. was involved in proxy wars in Angola, Mexico (Chiapas), Colombia, East Timor, and various other places. And U.S. forces are deployed on every continent and ocean, with some 300 major overseas support bases — all in the name of peace, democracy, national security, and humanitarianism.

While showing themselves ready and willing to bomb Yugoslavia on behalf of an ostensibly oppressed minority in Kosovo, U.S. leaders have made no moves against the Czech Republic for its mistreatment of the Romany people (gypsies), or Britain for oppressing the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, or the Hutu for the mass murder of a half million Tutsi in Rwanda — not to mention the French who were complicit in that massacre. Nor have U.S. leaders considered launching “humanitarian bombings” against the Turkish people for what their leaders have done to the Kurds, or the Indonesian people because their generals killed over 200,000 East Timorese and were continuing such slaughter through the summer of 1999, or the Guatemalans for the Guatemalan military’s systematic extermination of tens of thousands of Mayan villagers. In such cases, U.S. leaders not only tolerated such atrocities but were actively complicit with the perpetrators — who usually happened to be faithful client-state allies dedicated to helping Washington make the world safe for the Fortune 500.

Why then did U.S. leaders wage an unrestrainedly murderous assault upon Yugoslavia?

The Third Worldization of Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia was built on an idea, namely that the Southern Slavs would not remain weak and divided peoples, squabbling among themselves and easy prey to outside imperial interests. Together they could form a substantial territory capable of its own economic development. Indeed, after World War II, socialist Yugoslavia became a viable nation and an economic success. Between 1960 and 1980 it had one of the most vigorous growth rates: a decent standard of living, free medical care and education, a guaranteed right to a job, one-month vacation with pay, a literacy rate of over 90 percent, and a life expectancy of 72 years. Yugoslavia also offered its multi-ethnic citizenry affordable public transportation, housing, and

utilities, with a not-for-profit economy that was mostly publicly owned. This was not the kind of country global capitalism would normally tolerate. Still, socialistic Yugoslavia was allowed to exist for 45 years because it was seen as a nonaligned buffer to the Warsaw Pact nations.

The dismemberment and mutilation of Yugoslavia was part of a concerted policy initiated by the United States and the other Western powers in 1989. Yugoslavia was the one country in Eastern Europe that would not voluntarily overthrow what remained of its socialist system and install a free-market economic order. In fact, Yugoslavs were proud of their postwar economic development and of their independence from both the Warsaw Pact and NATO. The U.S. goal has been to transform the Yugoslav nation into a Third-World region, a cluster of weak right-wing principalities with the following characteristics:

- incapable of charting an independent course of self-development;
- a shattered economy and natural resources completely accessible to multinational corporate exploitation, including the enormous mineral wealth in Kosovo;
- an impoverished, but literate and skilled population forced to work at subsistence wages, constituting a cheap labor pool that will help depress wages in western Europe and elsewhere;
- dismantled petroleum, engineering, mining, fertilizer, and automobile industries, and various light industries, that offer no further competition with existing Western producers.

U.S. policymakers also want to abolish Yugoslavia's public sector services and social programs — for the same reason they want to abolish our public sector services and social programs. The ultimate goal is the privatization and Third Worldization of Yugoslavia, as it is the Third Worldization of the United States and every other nation. In some respects, the fury of the West's destruction of Yugoslavia is a backhanded tribute to that nation's success as an alternative form of development, and to the pull it exerted on neighboring populations both East and West.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Belgrade's leaders, not unlike the Communist leadership in Poland, sought simultaneously to expand the country's industrial base and increase consumer goods, a feat they intended to accomplish by borrowing heavily from the West. But with an enormous IMF debt came the inevitable demand for "restructuring," a harsh austerity program that brought wage freezes, cutbacks in public spending, increased unemployment, and the abolition of worker-managed enterprises. Still, much of the economy remained in the not-for-profit public sector, including the Trepca mining complex in Kosovo, described in the New York Times as "war's glittering prize . . . the most valuable piece of real estate in the Balkans . . . worth at least \$5 billion" in rich deposits of coal, lead, zinc, cadmium, gold, and silver.¹

That U.S. leaders have consciously sought to dismember Yugoslavia is not a matter of speculation but of public record. In November 1990, the Bush administration pressured Congress into passing the 1991 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, which provided that any part of Yugoslavia failing to declare independence within six months would lose U.S. financial support. The law demanded separate elections in each of the six Yugoslav republics, and mandated U.S. State Department approval of both election procedures and results as a condition for any future aid. Aid would go only to the separate republics, not to the Yugoslav government, and only to those forces whom Washington defined as "democratic," meaning right-wing, free-market, separatist parties.

Another goal of U.S. policy has been media monopoly and ideological control. In 1997, in what remained of Serbian Bosnia, the last radio station critical of NATO policy was forcibly shut down by NATO “peacekeepers.” The story in the New York Times took elaborate pains to explain why silencing the only existing dissident Serbian station was necessary for advancing democratic pluralism. The Times used the term “hardline” eleven times to describe Bosnian Serb leaders who opposed the shutdown and who failed to see it as “a step toward bringing about responsible news coverage in Bosnia.”²

Likewise, a portion of Yugoslav television remained in the hands of people who refused to view the world as do the U.S. State Department, the White House, and the corporate-owned U.S. news media, and this was not to be tolerated. The NATO bombings destroyed the two government TV channels and dozens of local radio and television stations, so that by the summer of 1999 the only TV one could see in Belgrade, when I visited that city, were the private channels along with CNN, German television, and various U.S. programs. Yugoslavia's sin was not that it had a media monopoly but that the publicly owned portion of its media deviated from the western media monopoly that blankets most of the world, including Yugoslavia itself.

In 1992, another blow was delivered against Belgrade: international sanctions. Led by the United States, a freeze was imposed on all trade to and from Yugoslavia, with disastrous results for the economy: hyperinflation, mass unemployment of up to 70 percent, malnourishment, and the collapse of the health care system.³

Divide and Conquer

One of the great deceptions, notes Joan Phillips, is that “those who are mainly responsible for the bloodshed in Yugoslavia — not the Serbs, Croats or Muslims, but the Western powers — are depicted as saviors.”⁴ While pretending to work for harmony, U.S. leaders supported the most divisive, reactionary forces from Croatia to Kosovo.

In Croatia, the West's man-of-the-hour was Franjo Tudjman, who claimed in a book he authored in 1989, that “the establishment of Hitler's new European order can be justified by the need to be rid of the Jews,” and that only 900,000 Jews, not six million, were killed in the Holocaust. Tudjman's government adopted the fascist Ustasha checkered flag and anthem.⁵ Tudjman presided over the forced evacuation of over half a million Serbs from Croatia between 1991 and 1995, replete with rapes and summary executions.⁶ This included the 200,000 from Krajina in 1995, whose expulsion was facilitated by attacks from NATO war planes and missiles. Needless to say, U.S. leaders did nothing to stop and much to assist these atrocities, while the U.S. media looked the other way. Tudjman and his cronies now reside in obscene wealth while the people of Croatia are suffering the afflictions of the free market paradise. Tight controls have been imposed on Croatian media, and anyone who criticizes President Tudjman's government risks incarceration. Yet the White House hails Croatia as a new democracy.

In Bosnia, U.S. leaders supported the Muslim fundamentalist, Alija Izetbegovic, an active Nazi in his youth, who has called for strict religious control over the media and now wants to establish an Islamic Bosnian republic. Izetbegovic himself does not have the support of most Bosnian Muslims. He was decisively outpolled in his bid for the presidency yet managed to take over that office by cutting a mysterious deal with frontrunner Fikret Abdic.⁷ Bosnia is now under IMF and NATO regency. It is not permitted to develop its own internal resources, nor

allowed to extend credit or self-finance through an independent monetary system. Its state-owned assets, including energy, water, telecommunications, media and transportation, have been sold off to private firms at garage sale prices.

In the former Yugoslavia, NATO powers have put aside neoimperialism and have opted for out-and-out colonial occupation. In early 1999, the democratically elected president of Republika Srpska, the Serb ministate in Bosnia, who had defeated NATO's chosen candidate, was removed by NATO troops because he proved less than fully cooperative with NATO's "high representative" in Bosnia. The latter retains authority to impose his own solutions and remove elected officials who prove in any way obstructive.⁸ This too was represented in the western press as a necessary measure to advance democracy.

In Kosovo, we see the same dreary pattern. The U.S. gave aid and encouragement to violently right-wing separatist forces such as the self-styled Kosovo Liberation Army, previously considered a terrorist organization by Washington. The KLA has been a longtime player in the enormous heroin trade that reaches to Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Norway, and Sweden.⁹ KLA leaders had no social program other than the stated goal of cleansing Kosovo of all non-Albanians, a campaign that had been going on for decades. Between 1945 and 1998, the non-Albanian Kosovar population of Serbs, Roma, Turks, Gorani (Muslim Slavs), Montenegrins, and several other ethnic groups shrank from some 60 percent to about 20 percent. Meanwhile, the Albanian population grew from 40 to 80 percent (not the 90 percent repeatedly reported in the press), benefiting from a higher birth rate, a heavy influx of immigrants from Albania, and the systematic intimidation and expulsion of Serbs.

In 1987, in an early untutored moment of truth, the New York Times reported: "Ethnic Albanians in the Government have manipulated public funds and regulations to take over land belonging to Serbs. . . . Slavic Orthodox churches have been attacked, and flags have been torn down. Wells have been poisoned and crops burned. Slavic boys have been knifed, and some young ethnic Albanians have been told by their elders to rape Serbian girls. . . . As the Slavs flee the protracted violence, Kosovo is becoming what ethnic Albanian nationalists have been demanding for years . . . an 'ethnically pure' Albanian region. . . ."¹⁰ Ironically, while the Serbs were repeatedly charged with ethnic cleansing, Serbia itself is now the only multi-ethnic society left in the former Yugoslavia, with some twenty-six nationality groups including thousands of Albanians who live in and around Belgrade.

Demonizing the Serbs

The propaganda campaign to demonize the Serbs fits the larger policy of the Western powers. The Serbs were targeted for demonization because they were the largest nationality and the one most opposed to the breakup of Yugoslavia. None other than Charles Boyd, former deputy commander of the U.S. European command, commented on it in 1994: "The popular image of this war in Bosnia is one of unrelenting Serb expansionism. Much of what the Croats call 'the occupied territories' is land that has been held by Serbs for more than three centuries. The same is true of most Serb land in Bosnia. . . . In short the Serbs were not trying to conquer new territory, but merely to hold onto what was already theirs." While U.S. leaders claim they want peace, Boyd concludes, they have encouraged a deepening of the war.¹¹

But what of the atrocities they committed? All sides committed atrocities, but the reporting was consistently one-sided. Grisly incidents of Croat and Muslim atrocities against the Serbs rarely made it into the U.S. press, and when they did they were accorded only passing mention.¹² Meanwhile Serb atrocities were played up and sometimes even fabricated, as we shall see. Recently, three Croatian generals were indicted by the Hague War Crimes Tribunal for the bombardment and deaths of Serbs in Krajina and elsewhere. Where were U.S. leaders and U.S. television crews when these war crimes were being committed? John Ranz, chair of Survivors of the Buchenwald Concentration Camp, USA, asks: Where were the TV cameras when hundreds of Serbs were slaughtered by Muslims near Srebrenica?¹³ The official line, faithfully parroted in the U.S. media, is that the Serbs committed all the atrocities at Srebrenica.

Before uncritically ingesting the atrocity stories dished out by U.S. leaders and the corporate-owned news media, we might recall the five hundred premature babies whom Iraqi soldiers laughingly ripped from incubators in Kuwait, a story repeated and believed until exposed as a total fabrication years later. During the Bosnian war in 1993, the Serbs were accused of having an official policy of rape. “Go forth and rape” a Bosnian Serb commander supposedly publicly instructed his troops. The source of that story never could be traced. The commander's name was never produced. As far as we know, no such utterance was ever made. Even the New York Times belatedly ran a tiny retraction, coyly allowing that “the existence of ‘a systematic rape policy’ by the Serbs remains to be proved.”¹⁴

Bosnian Serb forces supposedly raped anywhere from 25,000 to 100,000 Muslim women. The Bosnian Serb army numbered not more than 30,000 or so, many of whom were engaged in desperate military engagements. A representative from Helsinki Watch noted that stories of massive Serbian rapes originated with the Bosnian Muslim and Croatian governments and had no credible supporting evidence. Common sense would dictate that these stories be treated with the utmost skepticism — and not be used as an excuse for an aggressive and punitive policy against Yugoslavia.

The mass rape propaganda theme was resuscitated in 1999 to justify NATO's renewed attacks on Yugoslavia. A headline in the San Francisco Examiner tells us: “SERB TACTIC IS ORGANIZED RAPE, KOSOVO REFUGEES SAY.” Only at the bottom of the story, in the nineteenth paragraph, do we read that reports gathered by the Kosovo mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe found no such organized rape policy. The actual number of rapes were in the dozens “and not many dozens,” according to the OSCE spokesperson. This same story did note that the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal sentenced a Bosnian Croat military commander to ten years in prison for failing to stop his troops from raping Muslim women in 1993 — an atrocity we heard little about when it was happening.¹⁵

The Serbs were blamed for the infamous Sarajevo market massacre of 1992. But according to the report leaked out on French TV, Western intelligence knew that it was Muslim operatives who had bombed Bosnian civilians in the marketplace in order to induce NATO involvement. Even international negotiator David Owen, who worked with Cyrus Vance, admitted in his memoir that the NATO powers knew all along that it was a Muslim bomb.¹⁶ However, the well-timed fabrication served its purpose of inducing the United Nations to go along with the U.S.-sponsored sanctions.

On one occasion, notes Barry Lituchy, the New York Times ran a photo purporting to be of

Croats grieving over Serbian atrocities when in fact the murders had been committed by Bosnian Muslims. The Times printed an obscure retraction the following week.¹⁷

We repeatedly have seen how “rogue nations” are designated and demonized. The process is predictably transparent. First, the leaders are targeted. Qaddafi of Libya was a “Hitlerite megalomaniac” and a “madman.” Noriega of Panama was a “a swamp rat,” one of the world’s worst “drug thieves and scums,” and “a Hitler admirer.” Saddam Hussein of Iraq was “the Butcher of Baghdad,” a “madman,” and “worse than Hitler.” Each of these leaders then had their countries attacked by U.S. forces and U.S.-led sanctions. What they really had in common was that each was charting a somewhat independent course of self-development or somehow was not complying with the dictates of the global free market and the U.S. national security state.¹⁸

Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic has been described by Bill Clinton as “a new Hitler.” Yet he was not always considered so. At first, the Western press, viewing the ex-banker as a bourgeois Serbian nationalist who might hasten the break-up of the federation, hailed him as a “charismatic personality.” Only later, when they saw him as an obstacle rather than a tool, did they begin to depict him as the demon who “started all four wars.” This was too much even for the managing editor of the U.S. establishment journal Foreign Affairs, Fareed Zakaria. He noted in the New York Times that Milosevic who rules “an impoverished country that has not attacked its neighbors — is no Adolf Hitler. He is not even Saddam Hussein.”¹⁹

Some opposition radio stations and newspapers were reportedly shut down during the NATO bombing. But, during my trip to Belgrade in August 1999, I observed nongovernmental media and opposition party newspapers going strong. There are more opposition parties in the Yugoslav parliament than in any other European parliament. Yet the government is repeatedly labeled a dictatorship. Milosevic was elected as president of Yugoslavia in a contest that foreign observers said had relatively few violations. As of the end of 1999, he presided over a coalition government that included four parties. Opposition groups openly criticized and demonstrated against his government. Yet he was called a dictator.

The propaganda campaign against Belgrade has been so relentless that prominent personages on the Left — who oppose the NATO policy against Yugoslavia — have felt compelled to genuflect before this demonization orthodoxy.²⁰ Thus do they reveal themselves as having been influenced by the very media propaganda machine they criticize on so many other issues. To reject the demonized image of Milosevic and of the Serbian people is not to idealize them or claim they are faultless or free of crimes. It is merely to challenge the one-sided propaganda that laid the grounds for NATO's destruction of Yugoslavia.

More Atrocity Stories

Atrocities (murders and rapes) occur in every war, which is not to condone them. Indeed, murders and rapes occur in many peacetime communities. What the media propaganda campaign against Yugoslavia charged was that atrocities were conducted on a mass genocidal scale. Such charges were used to justify the murderous aerial assault by NATO forces.

Up until the bombings began in March 1999, the conflict in Kosovo had taken 2000 lives altogether from both sides, according to Kosovo Albanian sources. Yugoslavian sources had put

the figure at 800. In either case, such casualties reveal a limited insurgency, not genocide. The forced expulsion policy began after the NATO bombings, with thousands being uprooted by Serb forces mostly in areas where the KLA was operating or was suspected of operating. In addition, if the unconfirmed reports by the ethnic Albanian refugees can be believed, there was much plundering and instances of summary execution by Serbian paramilitary forces — who were unleashed after the NATO bombing started.

We should keep in mind that tens of thousands fled Kosovo because of the bombings, or because the province was the scene of sustained ground fighting between Yugoslav forces and the KLA, or because they were just afraid and hungry. An Albanian woman crossing into Macedonia was eagerly asked by a news crew if she had been forced out by Serb police. She responded: “There were no Serbs. We were frightened of the [NATO] bombs.”²¹ During the bombings, an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 Serbian residents of Kosovo took flight (mostly north but some to the south), as did thousands of Roma and other non-Albanian ethnic groups.²² Were these people ethnically cleansing themselves? Or were they not fleeing the bombing and the ground war?

The New York Times reported that “a major purpose of the NATO effort is to end the Serb atrocities that drove more than one million Albanians from their homes.”²³ So, we are told to believe, the refugee tide was caused not by the ground war against the KLA and not by the massive NATO bombing but by unspecified atrocities. The bombing, which was the major cause of the refugee problem was now seen as the solution. The refugee problem created in part by the massive aerial attacks was now treated as justification for such attacks, a way of putting pressure on Milosevic to allow “the safe return of ethnic Albanian refugees.”²⁴

While Kosovo Albanians were leaving in great numbers — usually well-clothed and in good health, some riding their tractors, trucks, or cars, many of them young men of recruitment age — they were described as being “slaughtered.” Serbian attacks on KLA strongholds and the forced expulsion of Albanian villagers were described as “genocide.” But experts in surveillance photography and wartime propaganda charged NATO with running a “propaganda campaign” on Kosovo that lacked any supporting evidence. State Department reports of mass graves and of 100,000 to 500,000 missing Albanian men “are just ludicrous,” according to these independent critics.²⁵

As with the Croatian and Bosnian conflicts, the image of mass killings was hyped once again. The Washington Post reported that 350 ethnic Albanians “might be buried in mass graves” around a mountain village in western Kosovo. Such speculations were based on sources that NATO officials refused to identify. Getting down to specifics, the article mentions “four decomposing bodies” discovered near a large ash heap, with no details as to who they might be or how they died.²⁶

An ABC “Nightline” program made dramatic and repeated references to the “Serbian atrocities in Kosovo” while offering no specifics. Ted Kopple asked angry Albanian refugees what they had witnessed? They pointed to an old man in their group who wore a wool hat. The Serbs had thrown the man's hat to the ground and stepped on it, “because the Serbs knew that his hat was the most important thing to him,” they told Kopple, who was appropriately appalled by this one example of a “war crime” offered in the hour-long program.

A widely circulated story in the New York Times, headlined “U.S. REPORT OUTLINES SERB ATTACKS IN KOSOVO,” tells us that the State Department issued “the most comprehensive documentary record to date on atrocities.” The report concludes that there had been organized rapes and systematic executions. But reading further into the article, one finds that stories of such crimes “depend almost entirely on information from refugee accounts. There was no suggestion that American intelligence agencies had been able to verify, most, or even many, of the accounts . . . and the word ‘reportedly’ and ‘allegedly’ appear throughout the document.”²⁷

British journalist Audrey Gillan interviewed Kosovo refugees about atrocities and found an impressive lack of evidence. One woman caught him glancing at the watch on her wrist, while her husband told him how all the women had been robbed of their jewelry and other possessions. A spokesperson for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees talked of mass rapes and what sounded like hundreds of killings in three villages. When Gillan pressed him for more precise information, he reduced it drastically to five or six teenage rape victims. But he admitted that he had not spoken to any witnesses and that “we have no way of verifying these reports.”²⁸

Gillan noted that some refugees had seen killings and other atrocities, but there was little to suggest that they had seen it on the scale that was being reported. Officials told him of refugees who talked of sixty or more being killed in one village and fifty in another, but Gillan “could not find one eye-witness who actually saw these things happening.” It was always in some other village that the mass atrocities seem to have occurred. Yet every day western journalists reported “hundreds” of rapes and murders. Sometimes they noted in passing that the reports had yet to be substantiated, but then why were such stories being so eagerly publicized?

In contrast to its public assertions, the German Foreign Office privately denied there was any evidence that genocide or ethnic cleansing was a component of Yugoslav policy: “Even in Kosovo, an explicit political persecution linked to Albanian ethnicity is not verifiable. . . . The actions of the [Yugoslav] security forces [were] not directed against the Kosovo-Albanians as an ethnically defined group, but against the military opponent and its actual or alleged supporters.”²⁹

Still, Milosevic was indicted as a war criminal, charged with the forced expulsion of Albanian Kosovars, and with summary executions of a hundred or so individuals. Again, alleged crimes that occurred after the NATO bombing had started were used as justification for the bombing. The biggest war criminals of all were the NATO political leaders who orchestrated the aerial campaign of death and destruction.

As the White House saw it, since the stated aim of the aerial attacks was not to kill civilians; there was no liability, only regrettable mistakes. In other words, only the professed intent of an action counted and not its ineluctable effects. But a perpetrator can be judged guilty of willful murder without explicitly intending the death of a particular victim — as with an unlawful act that the perpetrator knew would likely cause death. As George Kenney, a former State Department official under the Bush Administration, put it: “Dropping cluster bombs on highly populated urban areas doesn’t result in accidental fatalities. It is purposeful terror bombing.”³⁰

In the first weeks of the NATO occupation of Kosovo, tens of thousands of Serbs were driven from the province and hundreds were killed by KLA gunmen in what was described in the

western press as acts of “revenge” and “retaliation,” as if the victims were deserving of such a fate. Also numbering among the victims of “retribution” were the Roma, Gorani, Turks, Montenegrins, and Albanians who had “collaborated” with the Serbs by speaking Serbian, opposing separatism, and otherwise identifying themselves as Yugoslavs. Others continued to be killed or maimed by the mines planted by the KLA and the Serb military, and by the large number of NATO cluster bombs sprinkled over the land.³¹

It was repeatedly announced in the first days of the NATO occupation that 10,000 Albanians had been killed by the Serbs (down from the 100,000 and even 500,000 Albanian men supposedly executed during the war). No evidence was ever offered to support the 10,000 figure, nor even to explain how it was so swiftly determined — even before NATO forces had moved into most of Kosovo.

Repeatedly unsubstantiated references to “mass graves,” each purportedly filled with hundreds or even thousands of Albanian victims also failed to materialize. Through the summer of 1999, the media hype about mass graves devolved into an occasional unspecified reference. The few sites actually unearthed offered up as many as a dozen bodies or sometimes twice that number, but with no certain evidence regarding causes of death or even the nationality of victims. In some cases there was reason to believe the victims were Serbs.³²

Lacking evidence of mass graves, by late August 1999 the Los Angeles Times focused on wells “as mass graves in their own right. . . . Serbian forces apparently stuffed...many bodies of ethnic Albanians into wells during their campaign of terror.”³³ Apparently? The story itself dwelled on only one village in which the body of a 39-year-old male was found in a well, along with three dead cows and a dog. No cause was given for his death and “no other human remains were discovered.” The well’s owner was not identified. Again when getting down to specifics, the atrocities seem not endemic but sporadic.

Ethnic Enmity and U.S. “Diplomacy”

Some people argue that nationalism, not class, is the real motor force behind the Yugoslav conflict. This presumes that class and ethnicity are mutually exclusive forces. In fact, ethnic enmity can be enlisted to serve class interests, as the CIA tried to do with indigenous peoples in Indochina and Nicaragua — and more recently in Bosnia.³⁴

When different national groups are living together with some measure of social and material security, they tend to get along. There is intermingling and even intermarriage. But when the economy goes into a tailspin, thanks to sanctions and IMF destabilization, then it becomes easier to induce internecine conflicts and social discombobulation. In order to hasten that process in Yugoslavia, the Western powers provided the most retrograde separatist elements with every advantage in money, organization, propaganda, arms, hired thugs, and the full might of the U.S. national security state at their backs. Once more the Balkans are to be balkanized.

NATO's attacks on Yugoslavia have been in violation of its own charter, which says it can take military action only in response to aggression committed against one of its members. Yugoslavia attacked no NATO member. U.S. leaders discarded international law and diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy is a process of negotiating disputes through give and take, proposal and counterproposal, a way of pressing one's interests only so far, arriving eventually at a solution

that may leave one side more dissatisfied than the other but not to the point of forcing either party to war.

U.S. diplomacy is something else, as evidenced in its dealings with Vietnam, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, and now Yugoslavia. It consists of laying down a set of demands that are treated as nonnegotiable, though called “accords” or “agreements,” as in the Dayton Accords or Rambouillet Agreements. The other side’s reluctance to surrender completely to every condition is labeled “stonewalling,” and is publicly misrepresented as an unwillingness to negotiate in good faith. U.S. leaders, we hear, run out of patience as their “offers” are “snubbed.” Ultimatums are issued, then aerial destruction is delivered upon the recalcitrant nation so that it might learn to see things the way Washington does.

Milosevic balked because the Rambouillet plan, drawn up by the U.S. State Department, demanded that he hand over a large, rich region of Serbia, that is, Kosovo, to foreign occupation. The plan further stipulated that these foreign troops shall have complete occupational power over all of Yugoslavia, with immunity from arrest and with supremacy over Yugoslav police and authorities. Even more revealing of the U.S. agenda, the Rambouillet plan stated: “The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles.”

Rational Destruction

While professing to having been discomforted by the aerial destruction of Yugoslavia, many liberals and progressives were convinced that “this time” the U.S. national security state was really fighting the good fight. “Yes, the bombings don’t work. The bombings are stupid!” they said at the time, “but we have to do something.” In fact, the bombings were other than stupid: they were profoundly immoral. And in fact they did work; they destroyed much of what was left of Yugoslavia, turning it into a privatized, deindustrialized, recolonized, beggar-poor country of cheap labor, defenseless against capital penetration, so battered that it will never rise again, so shattered that it will never reunite, not even as a viable bourgeois country.

When the productive social capital of any part of the world is obliterated, the potential value of private capital elsewhere is enhanced — especially when the crisis faced today by western capitalism is one of overcapacity. Every agricultural base destroyed by western aerial attacks (as in Iraq) or by NAFTA and GATT (as in Mexico and elsewhere), diminishes the potential competition and increases the market opportunities for multinational corporate agribusiness. To destroy publicly-run Yugoslav factories that produced auto parts, appliances, or fertilizer — or a publicly financed Sudanese plant that produced pharmaceuticals at prices substantially below their western competitors — is to enhance the investment value of western producers. And every television or radio station closed down by NATO troops or blown up by NATO bombs extends the monopolizing dominance of the western media cartels. The aerial destruction of Yugoslavia's social capital served that purpose.

We have yet to understand the full effect of NATO’s aggression. Serbia is one of the greatest sources of underground waters in Europe, and the contamination from U.S. depleted uranium and other explosives is being felt in the whole surrounding area all the way to the Black Sea. In Pancevo alone, huge amounts of ammonia were released into the air when NATO bombed the fertilizer factory. In that same city, a petrochemical plant was bombed seven times. After 20,000 tons of crude oil were burnt up in only one bombardment of an oil refinery, a massive cloud of smoke hung in the air for ten days. Some 1,400 tons of ethylene dichloride spilled into

the Danube, the source of drinking water for ten million people. Meanwhile, concentrations of vinyl chloride were released into the atmosphere at more than 10,000 times the permitted level. In some areas, people have broken out in red blotches and blisters, and health officials predict sharp increases in cancer rates in the years ahead.³⁵

National parks and reservations that make Yugoslavia among thirteen of the world's richest bio-diversity countries were bombed. The depleted uranium missiles that NATO used through many parts of the country have a half-life of 4.5 billion years.³⁶ It is the same depleted uranium that now delivers cancer, birth defects, and premature death upon the people of Iraq. In Novi Sad, I was told that crops were dying because of the contamination. And power transformers could not be repaired because U.N. sanctions prohibited the importation of replacement parts. The people I spoke to were facing famine and cold in the winter ahead.

With words that might make us question his humanity, the NATO commander, U.S. General Wesley Clark boasted that the aim of the air war was to “demolish, destroy, devastate, degrade, and ultimately eliminate the essential infrastructure” of Yugoslavia. Even if Serbian atrocities had been committed, and I have no doubt that some were, where is the sense of proportionality? Paramilitary killings in Kosovo (which occurred mostly after the aerial war began) are no justification for bombing fifteen cities in hundreds of around-the-clock raids for over two months, spewing hundreds of thousands of tons of highly toxic and carcinogenic chemicals into the water, air, and soil, killing thousands of Serbs, Albanians, Roma, Turks, and others, and destroying bridges, residential areas, and over two hundred hospitals, clinics, schools, and churches, along with the productive capital of an entire nation.

A report released in London in August 1999 by the Economist Intelligence Unit concluded that the enormous damage NATO's aerial war inflicted on Yugoslavia's infrastructure will cause the economy to shrink dramatically in the next few years.³⁷ Gross domestic product will drop by 40 percent this year and remain at levels far below those of a decade ago. Yugoslavia, the report predicted, will become the poorest country in Europe. Mission accomplished.

Postscript

In mid-September 1999, the investigative journalist Diana Johnstone emailed associates in the U.S. that former U.S. ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, who had backed Tudjman's “operation storm” that drove 200,000 Serbians (mostly farming families) out of the Krajina region of Croatia four years ago, was recently in Montenegro, chiding Serbian opposition politicians for their reluctance to plunge Yugoslavia into civil war. Such a war would be brief, he assured them, and would “solve all your problems.” Another strategy under consideration by U.S. leaders, heard recently in Yugoslavia, is to turn over the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina to Hungary. Vojvodina has some twenty-six nationalities including several hundred thousand persons of Hungarian descent who, on the whole show no signs of wanting to secede, and who certainly are better treated than the larger Hungarian minorities in Rumania and Slovakia. Still, a recent \$100 million appropriation from the U.S. Congress fuels separatist activity in what remains of Yugoslavia — at least until Serbia gets a government sufficiently pleasing to the free-market globalists in the West. Johnstone concludes: “With their electric power stations ruined and factories destroyed by NATO bombing, isolated, sanctioned and treated as pariahs by the West, Serbs have the choice between freezing honorably in a homeland plunged into destitution, or following the ‘friendly advice’ of the same people who

have methodically destroyed their country. As the choice is unlikely to be unanimous one way or the other, civil war and further destruction of the country are probable.”

Michael Parenti is the author of *[To Kill a Nation: The Attack on Yugoslavia](#)*, *[Contrary Notions](#)*, *[Against Empire](#)*, and *[The Assassination of Julius Caesar](#)*.

NOTES:

1. [New York Times](#), July 8, 1998.
2. [New York Times](#), October 10, 1997.
3. For more detailed background information on the stratagems preceding the NATO bombing, see the collection of reports by Ramsey Clark, Sean Gervasi, Sara Flounders, Nadja Tesich, Michel Choussudovsky, and others in [NATO in the Balkans: Voices of Opposition](#) (New York: International Action Center, 1998).
4. Joan Phillips, "Breaking the Selective Silence," [Living Marxism](#), April 1993, p. 10.
5. [Financial Times](#) (London), April 15, 1993.
6. See for instance, Yigal Chazan's report in [The Guardian](#) (London/Manchester), August 17, 1992.
7. See Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 211; also Diana Johnstone, "Alija Izetbegovic: Islamic Hero of the Western World," [CovertAction Quarterly](#), Winter 1999, p. 58.
8. Michael Kelly, "The Clinton Doctrine is a Fraud, and Kosovo Proves It," [Boston Globe](#), July 1, 1999.
9. [San Francisco Chronicle](#), May 5, 1999 and [Washington Times](#), May 3, 1999.
10. [New York Times](#), November 1, 1987.
11. [Foreign Affairs](#), September/October 1994.
12. For instance, Raymond Bonner, "War Crimes Panel Finds Croat Troops 'Cleansed' the Serbs," [New York Times](#), March 21, 1999, a revealing report that has been ignored in the relentless propaganda campaign against the Serbs.
13. John Ranz in his paid advertisement in the [New York Times](#), April 29, 1993.
14. "Correction: Report on Rape in Bosnia," [New York Times](#), October 23, 1993.
15. [San Francisco Examiner](#), April 26, 1999.
16. David Owen, [Balkan Odyssey](#), p. 262.
17. Barry Lituchy, "Media Deception and the Yugoslav Civil War," in [NATO in the Balkans](#), p. 205; see also [New York Times](#), August 7, 1993.
18. For further discussion of this point, see my [Against Empire](#) (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995).
19. [New York Times](#), March 28, 1999.
20. Both Noam Chomsky in his comments on Pacifica Radio, April 7, 1999, and Alexander Cockburn in the [Nation](#), May 10, 1999, referred to Serbian "brutality" and described Milosevic as "monstrous" without offering any specifics.
21. Brooke Shelby Biggs, "Failure to Inform," [San Francisco Bay Guardian](#), May 5, 1999, p. 25.
22. [Washington Post](#), June 6, 1999.
23. [New York Times](#), June 15, 1999.
24. See for instance, Robert Burns, Associated Press report, April 22, 1999.
25. Charles Radin and Louise Palmer, "Experts Voice Doubts on Claims of Genocide: Little Evidence for NATO Assertions," [San Francisco Chronicle](#), April 22, 1999.
26. [Washington Post](#), July 10, 1999.
27. [New York Times](#), May 11, 1999.
28. Audrey Gillan "What's the Story?" [London Review of Books](#), May 27, 1999.
29. Intelligence reports from the German Foreign Office, January 12, 1999 and October 29, 1998 to the German Administrative Courts, translated by Eric Canepa, Brecht Forum, New York, April 20, 1999.
30. Teach-in, Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, May 23, 1999.
31. [Los Angeles Times](#), August 22, 1999.
32. See for instance, Carlotta Gall, "Belgrade Sees Grave Site as Proof NATO Fails to Protect Serbs," [New York Times](#), August 27, 1999.
33. [Los Angeles Times](#), August 28, 1999.
34. It is a matter of public record that the CIA has been active in Bosnia. Consider these headlines: [The Guardian](#) (Manchester/London), November 17 1994: "CIA AGENTS TRAINING BOSNIAN ARMY"; [The London Observer](#), November 20, 1994: "AMERICA'S SECRET BOSNIA AGENDA"; [The European](#), November 25, 1994: "HOW THE CIA HELPS BOSNIA

FIGHT BACK."

35. Report by Steve Crawshaw in the London Independent, reprinted in the San Francisco Examiner, July 26, 1999.
36. See the communication from Serbian environmentalist Branka Jovanovic:
http://beograd.rockbridge.net/greens_from_belgrade.htm; March 31, 1999.
37. San Francisco Examiner, August 23, 1999.

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