

Review of US media reveals:

Glaring contradictions in propaganda for NATO war against Yugoslavia

By Barry Grey
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The official statements from the NATO summit in Washington reiterated the two main premises put forward to justify the war against Yugoslavia. First, that the only motivation for the bombing is the humanitarian determination of the West to end "ethnic cleansing." Second, that the crisis in Kosovo has one and only one source--the genocidal policies of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

But even as the NATO leaders were assembling, a number of items appeared in the media which revealed the glaring contradictions in the official rationale for the war, and the immeasurable cynicism of those who are directing it.

A featured guest on the Public Broadcasting System's NewsHour program of April 22, invited by news anchor Jim Lehrer to discuss the war against "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo, was none other than Turkish President Suleyman Demirel. Lehrer allowed the Turkish president, one of the 19 NATO heads of state, to hold forth, without comment or criticism, on his government's moral indignation over the persecution of ethnic minorities:

"We are very sorry about what happened in Kosovo--this deportation, this human misery, this genocide and this ethnic cleansing... This is inhuman. This is tyranny. This is ethnic cleansing... I don't think the civilized world should sit and watch."

These noble sentiments having been expressed, Lehrer politely thanked the Turkish president. The only problem is that Demirel presides over a country that has for 15 years conducted a war against the Kurdish minority in southeastern Turkey more brutal and deadly than anything attempted by the Serbian authorities against the Albanian Kosovars. [See WSWs articles: "Human Rights Watch report on Turkey: a profile of a police state" (February 24, 1999); "US attitude toward 'ethnic cleansing' depends on who's doing it" (April 3, 1999); "Repression in Turkey exposes NATO 'humanitarianism'" (April 11, 1999)]

Even as Turkey was sending war planes and a ship to bolster the NATO assault on Yugoslavia, it was jailing dissident intellectuals and breaking up Kurdish rallies in the run-up to last week's national election. A week ago it sent 15,000 troops across the border with Iraq in its most recent attack on PKK bases there.

Barely two months ago Turkey, with the support of the US, illegally abducted PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan from Kenya and clapped him in an island prison, where he is awaiting trial and a likely death sentence. The anti-Kurdish hysteria promoted by the

government in the aftermath of Ocalan's capture was exploited by the extreme chauvinist and fascist Nationalist Movement Party, better known as the Grey Wolves, to capture 18 percent of the vote in the election, doubling its 1995 result and making it the second largest party in the Turkish parliament.

For a whole host of reasons, including Turkey's crucial role in American efforts to dominate the oil-rich Caspian region, the US considers Ankara a key ally, and accordingly turns a blind eye to its persecution of the Kurds--as does PBS news anchor Jim Lehrer.

But Turkey is not the only NATO warrior against ethnic cleansing whose hands are, to put it mildly, less than clean. There is the "front line" state of Croatia. The *Wall Street Journal* on April 22 published a lengthy article that dealt frankly with the policies of the US-backed regime in Zagreb.

Reporting from Knin, the major town in the Krajina region of Croatia, writer Daniel Pearl described the forced expulsion of 200,000 Krajina Serbs by the Croatian army in 1995, carried out with the support of the United States, and the ongoing policy of Croatia to prevent the displaced Serbs from returning to their former homes.

On the expulsion of the Krajina Serbs in what was called "Operation Storm," he wrote: "That operation was 'the most efficient ethnic cleansing we've seen in the Balkans,' says Carl Bildt, former European Community mediator in the Balkans. 'There was a blinking yellow light given to it in 1995, and there hasn't really been any sustained international pressure to reverse it.'"

The article continued: "Croatia denies any ethnic cleansing, noting that it urged Serbs to stay put during Operation Storm. But soldiers also shelled residential areas, killed civilians and let Croats burn and plunder Serb homes, according to a United Nations report."

As for the present policy of Croatia in the Krajina region, the article stated: "The Krajina region seems in little danger of going Serb. Before the war, 11 percent of the citizens in the Knin municipality were Croats. Now Knin is half the size, and 71 percent Croat..."

"Croatia... has welcomed back fewer than 20 percent of its 350,000 departed Serbs... Now it is helping Serbs unload their homes at a steep discount, and is building houses for ethnic Croat refugees in formerly Serb villages. It's a slow, bureaucratic ethnic

cleansing,' charges Ivan Zvonimir Cicak, a Croatian opposition figure and human rights activist."

Another item in the American press provided a further example of the double standard of the government and the media when it comes to countries engaged in attacks on ethnic and national minorities. The *New York Times* has enthusiastically supported the Balkan war. Its lead editorial on April 23, entitled "NATO and a New Europe," hailed the NATO assault on Yugoslavia as a model for united military action by the great powers against recalcitrant nations in the 21st century. "After unsuccessfully seeking a new purpose since the end of the cold war, NATO has found a difficult but worthy challenge in Yugoslavia," wrote the *Times*.

But the newspaper adopts a far different attitude to the depredations committed by Washington's ally, Indonesia. On the same page as the editorial in praise of the war in the Balkans there appeared an editorial on the murderous actions of Jakarta-backed militias against the population of East Timor.

"Deadly violence returned to East Timor last week, and militias backed by Indonesia's army are clearly to blame," wrote the *Times*. Did the newspaper, in keeping with its policy of using NATO as an instrument of war against "regional satraps," demand the launching of missiles against the military-dominated regime of Indonesian President B. J. Habibie? Did it even call on the Clinton administration to withdraw its support for the Jakarta regime? Hardly. With remarkable indulgence, it merely suggested that Washington "warn Indonesia that international loans could be suspended."

So much for the "humanitarian" motives of the US and NATO. What of the other premise of the NATO war--the claim that the crisis in Kosovo is entirely the product of Serb atrocities? A reader of the *World Socialist Web Site* recently brought to our attention an article from the *New York Times* of November 1, 1987 which presents a far different picture of events in that embattled province.

Authored by David Binder, the article stated, in part:

"Portions of southern Yugoslavia have reached such a state of ethnic friction that Yugoslavs have begun to talk of the horrifying possibility of 'civil war' in a land that lost one-tenth of its population, or 1.7 million people, in World War II..."

"A young Army conscript of ethnic Albanian origin shot up his barracks, killing four sleeping Slavic bunkmates and wounding six others."

"The Army says it has uncovered hundreds of subversive ethnic Albanian cells in its ranks. Some arsenals have been raided."

"Ethnic Albanians in the Government have manipulated public funds and regulations to take over land belonging to the 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..."

"Last summer, the authorities in Kosovo said they documented 40 ethnic Albanian attacks on Slavs in two months. In the last two years, 320 ethnic Albanians have been sentenced for political crimes, nearly half of them characterized as severe..."

"While 200,000 Serbs and Montenegrins still live in the province, they are scattered and lack cohesion. In the last seven

years, 20,000 of them have fled the province, often leaving behind farmsteads and houses, for the safety of the Slavic north."

Twelve years ago, prior to Milosevic's rise to power and his revocation of Kosovan autonomy, the *Times* presented a picture of a province on the verge of civil war, for which ethnic Albanian nationalists were chiefly responsible. It is not necessary to accept uncritically the version of reality presented at that time by the *Times* to appreciate the 180 degree turn in the newspaper's reportage between then and now.

How does the *New York Times* explain this fantastic contradiction in its own coverage of Kosovo? Have its editors simply forgotten what its reporters were writing back then?

We would suggest a different explanation. In 1987, prior to the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union, Washington considered Yugoslavia an important asset in the Cold War. Accordingly, it opposed the dismemberment of the federal republic.

But the vast changes in Europe since then have produced a corresponding shift in the geo-political and military strategy of the US. The *Times*, along with the rest of the media, have altered their presentation of the history and politics of the Balkans to serve the aims of American imperialism.

It is not even necessary to go back twelve years to appreciate the remarkably flexible backbones of those who publish and write for the *Times*. Here is a portion of a *New York Times* article from June 24, 1998, written by Chris Hedges and headlined "A New Tactic for Kosovo Rebels: Attacks on Isolated Serbian Civilians:"

"In recent days the rebels have changed their strategy and begun to attack and kidnap Serbian civilians in an apparent effort to drive them out of their villages in the overwhelmingly Albanian province of Kosovo in southern Serbia... Armed ethnic Albanian groups have expelled Serbs from Jelovac and Kijevo, which were populated by Albanians and Serbs. There are now 900 Serbs, displaced from their homes in the last week, taking refuge in Klima, and several say male relatives detained by the rebels are still missing..."

"Bodies have begun turning up near Serbian settlements. Zivojin Milic, shot six times in the head, was found last Wednesday on the outskirts of Pristina, apparently a victim of the ethnic Albanian militants."

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