

Political motives behind the bombing of Serb civilians

The Editorial Board
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American and NATO officials responded with perfunctory statements of regret to Tuesday's bombing of the southern Serb town of Aleksinac. They declared the killing of civilians to be an unintentional, but "inevitable" byproduct of the air war against Yugoslavia.

A serious analysis of the war policies of the NATO powers, and especially the United States, demonstrates that no credibility can be given to such disavowals. Rather it leads to the conclusion that the targeting of Serb civilians is a calculated measure driven by definite political considerations.

Washington is deliberately targeting civilian centers in an attempt to terrorize and intimidate the Serb population. It is using its vast arsenal of hi-tech weapons to create widespread misery and suffering, hoping thereby to sow demoralization and undermine support for the regime of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

It cannot be seriously maintained that any significant military or strategic targets exist in the vicinity of Aleksinac, a poor mining town some 200 kilometers south of Belgrade. NATO officials claimed that bombs dropped by US jets "fell short" of the intended targets, which they did not name.

But the only structure that could remotely be considered of military value is an old, dilapidated army barracks that is nearly a mile from the town center and was already abandoned and partially destroyed. Elderly residents traumatized and outraged by the bombing that shattered the center of the town, killing 12 and injuring dozens more, recalled that even the German Wehrmacht spared the local population when it made its blitzkrieg assault on Yugoslavia in 1941.

Moreover the attack on Aleksinac was followed a day later by a missile strike on the center of Pristina, the

capital of Kosovo. At least 20 missiles fell on the center of the city, destroying the post office, the welfare center and numerous houses. At least 10 residents were killed. According to earlier statements of American and NATO officials, the city, which has a large concentration of Serb inhabitants, had previously been purged of its ethnic Albanian population.

These air strikes on civilians are consistent with the general pattern of US-NATO bombing, which has increasingly targeted non-military facilities in major cities and towns, such as bridges, oil refineries and depots, industrial facilities and television broadcast centers. The response of Washington and its NATO allies to Belgrade's announcement of a unilateral cease-fire has been to intensify the air war. Typical were the remarks of a top French general, who predicted NATO would carry out "massive strikes" in coming days "greater than anything done so far."

The escalation of the air offensive, and its concentration on facilities crucial to the basic social and economic infrastructure of the country, take place within a definite military and political context. The atmosphere of crisis and dissension within NATO and within the American political and military establishment, which emerged in the first days of the air war, has intensified. It is common knowledge that the Clinton administration made a series of staggering miscalculations about the response of Yugoslav President Milosevic first to the threat of air strikes, and then to the actual launch of military action.

The *Washington Post* on Wednesday carried an article entitled "Albright Misjudged Milosevic on Kosovo," which outlined the central role of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in pushing for military action against the Serbs. The author, Thomas W. Lippman, hinted at the atmosphere of bitterness and

recrimination among US and European policymakers, noting that the American State Department has been at pains to "dispute the notion that Kosovo is 'Albright's war.'"

The *Post* reports that Albright has for months been insisting that the Yugoslav regime would cave in to US demands, including a NATO occupation force in Kosovo, if not under the threat of NATO attack, then within a few hours of the onset of military action. She never seriously considered the possibility that Milosevic would respond with a general offensive against the Kosovar Albanians and the separatist guerrilla movement, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

As a result Washington and NATO were unprepared for the Serb offensive, which has apparently shattered the KLA forces in Kosovo, upon whom the Americans have come to rely in pursuing their strategy for asserting US domination of the Balkans.

The *Post* article followed a series of press reports of serious reservations by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA to the policy being pursued by the Clinton administration. In advance of the air strikes, warnings reportedly came from both quarters that bombing the Serbs could end up strengthening the position of Milosevic in Kosovo and creating a massive refugee crisis. Now that these warnings have been borne out, the military brass and the CIA are eager to relieve themselves of political responsibility and place the onus for a potential debacle squarely on Albright and Clinton.

Another major miscalculation, and undoubtedly a further source of internal contention, concerns the response of the Serb population to the bombing. Far from heightening discontent with Milosevic--which was widespread before the onset of the war--the US-NATO attack has produced the opposite result. Ordinary Serbs have overwhelmingly put aside their opposition to Milosevic and focused their outrage against the warmongers in Washington and Europe.

There is a direct connection between the growing political crisis facing the Clinton administration and the increasing barbarity of its war policy. The expansion of the air war, including the targeting of urban centers and civilians, and the initial steps toward introducing ground troops, are to a significant extent the product of the administration's growing desperation--which leads

it to adopt even more reckless and brutal measures.

There should be no doubt--the leaders of American imperialism are pursuing a policy whose logical outcome is the utter destruction of Yugoslavia: the decimation of its industrial, commercial and social infrastructure, and the devastation of its people. In the name of "human rights," Washington is creating a human disaster of incalculable proportions.



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