

After the bombing of the Belgrade embassy

US media denounces Chinese protests

David Walsh
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Even if one were inclined to suppress all doubts and accept Washington's claims that the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was entirely accidental, the vitriolic response of the American media to the protests in Beijing and other cities reveals an extraordinary level of anti-China sentiment within the US ruling elite. Far from expressing genuine regret at the loss of Chinese life, the anger of the American media reflects precisely the type of militaristic and ruthless mindset capable of producing a deliberate decision to bomb the embassy of a country not directly involved in the war against Yugoslavia.

Why should the US media be outraged by the anger of China's people to an attack on their embassy? The bombing of an embassy is, in international law, a direct attack on that country's sovereignty. In this instance, the US bombs struck the Chinese embassy with such force that, according to journalists, they could be heard miles away. They landed in the sleeping quarters of the embassy, demolishing whole floors. Zhu Ying, 27, and her husband, Xu Xinghu, 31, were in bed when the bombs hit. Also killed was Shao Yunhuan. Her husband remains in the intensive care unit in Central Hospital in Belgrade; he was blinded in the attack. He apparently has not yet been told of his wife's death. As of two days ago, four other Chinese citizens remained in the intensive care unit. One, Ren Baokai, a military attaché, lay in the bombed building for eight hours before he was discovered and rescued.

US and NATO spokesmen, without providing any evidence, describe the attack on the embassy as a mistake. The Associated Press published Monday a list of "Accidental Military Attacks" that have taken place over the past 13 years. Its purpose was to reassure the public that accidents in war do happen. Perhaps they do. But not all "mistakes" are the same, and those who make them are not without legal, political and moral responsibility for the consequences of their actions. The "mistakes" of the White House, State Department and Pentagon are the all but inevitable product of definite strategic aims, policies, decisions, and, we might add, social attitudes. The most

essential characteristics of American policy are a vast carelessness, callousness and indifference to human life. The list of "Accidental Military Attacks" served to remind the observant reader of one factor common to all the "mistakes," whether it was the shooting down of an Iranian passenger plane in 1988 in which 290 people were killed, or the bombing of a shelter in Baghdad during the Persian Gulf War, killing more than 300-- *each one was carried out by the US military on the territory of other countries*, in the course of one reckless adventure or another.

The embassy bombing evoked a deep response within the Chinese people. Demonstrations have been held in numerous cities, with the participation of hundreds of thousands. US Ambassador to China James Sasser, barricaded in the American embassy, told journalists that he thought officials were surprised by the ferocity and numbers of protesters. He reported that from what he could see "the crowd was extraordinarily difficult to control. And some were attacking the police."

Despite the perfunctory apologies of the Clinton Administration, the real attitude of American ruling circles toward the Chinese people can be better gauged from the indignant, bellicose and threatening response of the US media to the protests.

The *Times'* resident thug, Thomas L Friedman, defends the bombing in a manner so brazen that it gives an insight into why the attack was carried out. "I am sorry about the Chinese Embassy," he writes, "but we have no reason to be defensive here. We are at war with the Serbian nation, and anyone hanging around Belgrade needs to understand that."

Far from suggesting an accidental bombing, the words of Friedman – whose views reflect the outlook of his close friends and contacts in the highest echelons of the State Department and Pentagon – provide an insight into what might well have been a motive for targeting the Chinese Embassy. Notwithstanding the posture of regret, the bombing was a way of sending an unmistakable message to the Chinese or anyone else who may be tempted to get in the way of American war aims

Other media voices adopted a tone of outrage over the display of popular anger in the streets of Beijing, as though it was impossible that this was the genuine feeling of the Chinese people.

US Today headlined a May 11 article "Anti-U.S. vitriol continuing to gush from Beijing." It noted that "China's state-run media, which stoked the anti-U.S. frenzy over the weekend, continued to run sensational stories Monday about the bombing." In an editorial, the newspaper reminded the Chinese of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and its eventual outcome, the invasion of Beijing by US marines. "If both nations aren't careful, the aftermath of NATO's accidental bombing of China's Belgrade embassy may prove equally catastrophic.... China has not been careful." They continue, "This is not a time for greater concessions to China for the bombing. That would reward Beijing's hostility."

"China's True Colors" reads the headline of Tuesday's *Washington Post* editorial. "China has reacted to the mistaken NATO bombing of its Belgrade embassy suspiciously like a totalitarian nation. The state-controlled media, which is to say China's only media, have whipped people into a fury with inaccurate and incomplete reporting. Newspapers have failed to report U.S. explanations or apologies.... The Clinton administration and NATO should not allow China thus to bully them into any unwise concessions ... "

In the *Times* Robert Kagan, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, writes in an op-ed piece entitled "China's No. 1 enemy" that "China's leaders make no effort to conceal the fact they consider the United States an enemy, or, more precisely, *the* enemy." The Chinese denunciations of the US-led war against Serbia fit "within the broader anti-American line Beijing has been spouting for years: that the United States is an imperialist aggressor, bent on world domination, and at China's expense." In regard to the mass protests over the bombing, Kagan criticizes "the lack of indignation expressed so far by White House officials in the face of China's behavior."

George Melloan in the *Wall Street Journal* ("China's Unspoken Goal Is to Destroy America's Power") observes that "China hasn't made a secret of its desire to see America humbled. It would particularly like to have the American presence in Asia give way to a hegemonic China.... What the current circumstances should make clear to Americans is that even though the Cold War is over, the world is still a dangerous place."

In these comments the world is turned upside down. The victim of a violent attack is a "bully." If he protests against the attack, that proves he's an "enemy" and out to "destroy" us. And, moreover, if the "bully" isn't "careful," he's really going to get a beating next time. This is Washington's threat

to every regime that doesn't go along with its policies.

What about the US media complaint that the Chinese popular anger is merely the product of one-sided coverage of the NATO war against Serbia? In their descriptions of the role played by their counterparts in China, or what they imagine it to be, the American media, first of all, paint something of a self-portrait. The *Washington Post's* picture of a tightly controlled press and television that whip "people into a fury with inaccurate and incomplete reporting" resembles nothing so much as the situation in the US, where the corporate-controlled mass media bombards an unsuspecting public night and day with government claims passed off as objective facts.

Or, more precisely, this is the situation as the media would like it to be. The American media falls into line with government policy on a dime, but it increasingly lacks credibility. It has failed during the current war, as they did during the Clinton impeachment drive, and during the confrontation with Iraq last year, to carry the population with them. The media commentators more and more are talking to each other, and not to the broad masses, expressing the viewpoint and addressing the concerns of an isolated and socially privileged elite.

The response of the Chinese people to the embassy bombing is far more spontaneous and profound than any sentiments so far expressed by the American public on the war. Up to now what has prevailed in America is a kind of benumbed apathy. There is neither war fever nor deep interest. People in the US do not know what to make of events. They instinctively distrust the government and media version, but they have no worked-out alternative take on the whole business.

Broad layers of the population in the US tolerate or ignore the war at this point because it does not yet seem to affect them directly. Were the war to become "serious," were it to "come home," the chasm between the bellicosity of the media and the wealthy elite, on the one hand, and the feelings of the broad masses, on the other, would become manifest.

This bellicosity is very real. In their efforts to explain the "error" in Belgrade, the US government and military have revealed something about their plans and appetite for war.



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