

An interview with Professor Robert Hayden

NATO's claim of 100,000 murdered in Kosovo—a rebuttal

James Brookfield
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In the course of a television interview Sunday, US Secretary of Defense William Cohen reiterated one of the central justifications for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, declaring, in reference to the Albanian population of Kosovo, “We have now seen about 100,000 military-age men missing. They may have been murdered.”

This chilling and shocking allegation has been repeated by US and NATO spokesmen from the first week of the bombing, although with no credible supporting evidence. Revived after each new atrocity in the air war, this claim has been parroted uncritically in the American media. If it is shown one day to be false, virtually the whole of official Washington will have to answer for it.

To establish whether these charges have any credibility, the *World Socialist Web Site* recently interviewed a leading US expert on the former Yugoslavia, Professor Robert Hayden, director of the Russian and East European Studies Department at the University of Pittsburgh, who is sharply critical both of the American-NATO air war and the American media coverage of the crisis.

Hayden and others familiar with the history and politics of the Balkans were interviewed by the *Boston Globe* last month for an article which ran under the headline, “Experts Voice Doubts on Claims of Genocide.” Hayden told the *Globe* that State Department reports of 100,000-500,000 unaccounted-for Albanian men “are just ludicrous.” “NATO is running a propaganda campaign, there's no question about that. There have been lots of discrepancies in the official story, but...until now, there has been amazingly little scrutiny of that story.”

Professor Hayden elaborated this comment in his discussion with WSW: “Consider the numbers. There were roughly 1.7 million Kosovar Albanians prior to the war. 500,000 missing is equal to one-third of the population. This is ludicrous. More recent accounts have noted that many of the missing men have surfaced. I was fascinated one afternoon as I listened to National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. In the space of half an hour they had two stories. The first reported great numbers of missing Kosovar Albanian men. The second was an interview with a KLA commander who said that the KLA was

conscripting the men. But no connection was made between the two stories!

“I was greatly bothered by the rumors that were circulated of Albanian politicians who were supposedly killed. Detailed stories were given to the press. Then they turned up alive, in Pristina, under house arrest, but nonetheless alive. “All sorts of false stories are concocted by NATO. After the refugee convoy was bombed, what were we told? That the Serbs had done it. But this was quickly proven to be a lie. There is a saying in Serbia: The fish stinks from the head.

“Pay attention to the timing of these atrocity allegations by NATO. They always come at the time of NATO strikes and reports of Serb civilian casualties. Then the atrocities stories are presented in order to prevent thinking.” Hayden pointed out that the American media and government have a long record of distorting the facts about the former Yugoslavia. As the US intervened in Bosnia in 1995, for instance, there was a deliberate attempt to stampede public opinion against the Serbs in what was a three-way civil war among Serb, Croat and Muslim ethnic militias.

“An examination should be made of the atrocity claims during Bosnia,” he said. “We were told that it was a case of genocide. But casualty figures from the 1992-95 Bosnian war show that 7.4 percent of Muslims were killed or missing while 7.1 percent of the Serbs were killed. This is not a genocide, unless there were two genocides.

“Now the Serbs are being compared to the Nazis for the events in Kosovo. Yes, Milosevic did start a campaign to drive out ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. He did seek to ethnically cleanse them. As for the comparison to the Nazis, though, remember that Auschwitz was cattle cars leading into a death camp. What is happening in Kosovo does not look like what happened at Auschwitz. It does look like what happened in Croatia in 1995 when 250,000 Krajina Serbs were expelled. But that round of ethnic cleansing had the diplomatic backing of the US. There were even retired US military advisors. So if mass expulsions are equivalent to genocide, then a US-backed genocide was carried out against the Krajina Serbs.

“Why doesn't the press scrutinize NATO's allegations? The

press has a herd mentality. Furthermore, the leading figures in the media are often not unrelated to those leading the US government.”

(Perhaps the most flagrant example of such relationships is the marriage of State Department press spokesman James Rubin to CNN's principal Balkan correspondent Christiane Amanpour. Rubin took on additional duties for the State Department during the Rambouillet talks, serving as the principal liaison with the Kosovo Liberation Army. Amanpour is now covering the KLA base camps in Albania for CNN.)

Hayden asked: “Why is it that no American journalists have said a word about the bombing of Radio TV Serbia's studio? I know that Milosevic largely controlled it. I was there in 1996, and I protested, along with thousands of others on the streets of Belgrade, Milosevic's control of the station. I got tear-gassed. But this was a civilian target! Earlier, Jamie Shea had said that transmitters would only be targeted if they were connected to the military. This station was not. These were technicians who got killed! A friend of mine was almost killed. This was a war crime. Yet not a peep from the journalists. Holbrooke reported the attack to a dinner for journalists. And none objected!”

The incident to which Hayden refers took place at an awards dinner in New York City sponsored by the Overseas Press Correspondents. When two journalists for Pacifica Radio sought to question Holbrooke, they were silenced by the banquet chairman, NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw.

Hayden said that he was influenced in his evaluation of the war on Yugoslavia by his own experiences during the Vietnam War. “The war is being packaged as Vietnam originally was,” he said. “I protested Vietnam. It began as a moral crusade. It was brought to you by the liberal Democrats. Communism was, for all but the very radical, an evil. In 1965, Vietnam was popular. When you think of Vietnam you think of *Apocalypse Now*. Wrong movie. If you want a picture of the public reception to Vietnam in 1964-65 get John Wayne's *Green Berets*.”

“Again we have the moral crusaders. Susan Sontag writes drivel in today's *New York Times*. These are crusaders. They're really a bunch of righteous people. They're not evil, just blind. The genocide argument appears everywhere. The timing of articles by Susan Sontag and Daniel Goldhagen is very important. Now that Serb civilians are being killed an argument is being made that the Western public should not be troubled by their deaths. After all, they're ‘willing executioners,’ not innocent Serb civilians.”

Hayden concluded that it was impossible to understand the war on Yugoslavia without considering the history of the Balkans and the formation of nation-states in Europe.

“In Kosovo the clash took place between a minority of the federal state but a majority in the province. Both Serbs and Albanians fought based on the idea that territory belongs to them. This is a clash of territorial nationalism. In this century, states have consolidated themselves by driving out minorities.

After World War II Germans were expelled from Poland and Czechoslovakia. In Croatia the same happened in 1995. Now that the population has been ethnically homogenized it is supposedly 'safe for democracy.'

“The humanitarian claims are a fraud. Consider one point. Let's assume that Madeline Albright is correct in saying that there are 200,000 hungry Albanian refugees. Why not then arrange food drops? She dismisses this outright for two reasons. First, she says that the Serbs might get some of the food. I suppose this is the case. So what? Second, she says that a plane may get shot down. According to Albright, it is not worth the risk of a single pilot. The lives of 200,000 Albanians are less important than that of even a single American. Is that humanitarian calculus or political calculus?

“As for NATO, it is finding a new rationale for itself. Why is it still in business after the Cold War? It was supposed to stabilize Europe. It was suppose to be a defensive alliance, that's why the Russians weren't supposed to worry about its expansion into Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Now, NATO has a new doctrine that allows it to operate outside its borders. This is frightening.

“NATO is today the greatest threat to world peace. The UN has been completely brushed aside by NATO. And within NATO there is tension between the US and the Europeans. Throughout the Bosnian war, the Clinton Administration worked to counter the initiatives of the Europeans. Then the US inserted itself militarily into Bosnia. And it turned Croatia into a military colony.

“Clinton made some of the worst foreign policy errors in Europe in 40 years. Reread his speech of 24 March, 1999. Look at his 'goals' for the attack. Every one has proven to be a disaster. NATO was supposed to prevent a refugee crisis; it actually triggered one. It was supposed to stabilize Europe and the region; both have been completely destabilized. Clinton doesn't want the rap. He can't justify his policy so he hides behind the wall of bodies. He points to the refugees and uses their plight to justify what he is doing. But what really makes the refugee plight so terrible it that our actions are largely responsible for it.

“Think about it. NATO is killing civilians in Yugoslavia at a faster rate than the Milosevic was doing in Kosovo. The NATO campaign has killed, according to the Serbs 500-1,000 (which seems pretty close to accurate) in the first month. Milosevic's campaign in Kosovo killed 2,000 in 18 months.”



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