

Scenes of death and destruction

Victims of tornadoes or victims of bombing?

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6 May 1999

The devastation wrought by the three tornadoes that hit in Oklahoma and Kansas late Monday has been widely detailed by the US news media. Survivors emerged from their basements to survey scenes of death and destruction: flattened homes, schools and buildings, neighborhoods strewn with twisted metal and trees.

The savage force of 260-mile-an-hour winds killed at least 43 people, injured another 663 and destroyed or heavily damaging nearly 2,000 structures. As of Wednesday hundreds of victims were still missing. Rescue workers, sifting through the rubble, expected the death toll to rise.

Officials and news commentators described the impact of the tornadoes with words usually reserved for a war zone. Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating said: "We have whole communities that simply aren't there anymore. It certainly looks like a huge battle has taken place." A 73-year-old survivor, who hid in a closet, compared the fear of the moment to her days in Germany during World War II when bombs fell around her.

The tornadoes produced a human tragedy of considerable proportion. The victims, many of whom suffered most because they could ill afford well-built houses and lived in trailer homes, deserve sympathy and public support. Undoubtedly, the government aid promised by President Clinton and other officials will fall far short of the needs of those affected, who will soon be forgotten once the media spotlight is turned off.

Those who empathize with the tornado victims, however, should pause for a moment and consider what if this destruction had been the result of bombs and cruise missiles, instead of a natural disaster?

Such horrific scenes are being produced every day in

countless Yugoslav cities and villages by US and NATO warplanes but go unreported. The four-hour "reign of terror" described by tornado survivors in Oklahoma City, Wichita and Kansas City is virtually a nightly occurrence for the residents of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Pristina who pile into bomb shelters, instead of tornado shelters.

Thousands of Serbs, including women and children, have already been killed and injured in neighborhoods, schools and hospitals destroyed by Operation Allied Force. Families are searching through the rubble for loved ones and to pick up the pieces of their destroyed lives, not unlike their American counterparts. But the tornadoes moved on and dissipated after their destructive work. Tens of thousands of ordinary Serbs still face the terror of escalating bomb attacks and the possibility of invading and occupying troops.

The US news media has deliberately concealed the scale of the human tragedy that has been caused by the US and NATO warplanes, while repeating the Pentagon and White House lies about not targeting Serbian civilians. Moreover, the US military has deliberately destroyed Serbian television stations and broadcasting facilities to prevent most images of the impact of bombing from reaching the American public. The political establishment is well aware that the such scenes would strengthen antiwar sentiment in the US and evoke widespread sympathy for the Serbian people.



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