

US, NATO escalate bombs and propaganda

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1 May 1999

American and NATO warplanes carried out the most intense bomb and missile attacks so far against Yugoslavia on the night of April 29-30, with more than 600 sorties striking targets throughout Serbia, and, for the first time, in the neighboring republic of Montenegro.

Downtown Belgrade was hit repeatedly, and at least one missile struck a residential neighborhood in the capital city, killing three people and wounding dozens. Eyewitnesses in Belgrade reported NATO jets dive-bombing the city, going much lower than in any previous raid.

Despite perfunctory statements from NATO officials about seeking to minimize civilian casualties, the techniques employed in Thursday night's raids seemed deliberately aimed at causing death and terror for the ordinary residents of the city. In one case, a missile, which struck a government building in downtown Belgrade was followed 20 minutes later by a second missile targeting the identical location. This tactic appeared aimed at killing as many fire department and rescue workers as possible, and they suffered the greatest number of casualties in the raid.

Eyewitnesses described a similar case where a motorist escaped his burning car, set on fire by a missile strike, then was killed when he returned after the fire was put out, and a second missile landed.

The heavy strikes against Montenegro, which is federated with Serbia but has played no part in the war in Kosovo, marked a major escalation by the US and European powers. NATO's posture up to now has been to woo the Montenegrin government, which is politically opposed to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. At least one woman was killed by a bomb outside the Montenegrin capital city, Podgorica, and several people were wounded.

A missile fired by a US warplane flew 30 miles into Bulgarian airspace and crashed into a house in a suburb

of Sofia, the Bulgarian capital. NATO spokesmen issued their usual apology, then pressed for Bulgarian approval of a 90-mile zone along the Bulgaria-Serbia border where NATO warplanes would have overflight rights. There was no apology for another NATO attack, when warplanes bombed a village in the Prizren region of Kosovo populated by Roma (gypsies), not Serbs. Four people were killed and eight wounded.

US Defense Secretary William Cohen announced that US B-52 bombers would soon begin "area bombing" of selected targets in Yugoslavia, using Vietnam War-style 500-pound unguided "dumb" bombs. Ten more B-52 bombers will join the five already deployed to fire cruise missiles against Yugoslavia.

The Air Force has virtually exhausted its supply of air-launched cruise missiles, according to Pentagon sources, and an adequate supply will not be available until sometime next year, so all the B-52s will be used for area bombing.

Each B-52 can carry more than 50 unguided 500-pound bombs, twelve and a half tons of explosive, which are simply dumped out of the jet as it flies high above the target. The bombs fall in a random pattern, guided only by gravity and wind currents, laying waste to a large strip of land and every living thing on it. This technique, also known as carpet bombing, resulted in huge civilian casualties during the Vietnam War and World War II.

Asked about the likely death toll from such methods, Cohen claimed the NATO allies were "concerned about collateral damage ... We do take it into account on each and every mission, and we'll do our best to make sure we minimize it."

The truth is that the White House and the Pentagon rely on the enthusiastic collaboration of the American media to cover up the horrific impact of the bombing on the people of Yugoslavia and to focus public attention exclusively on the tragic plight of the Kosovar

Albanian refugees.

There is a law of military falsification at work here: every escalation of the US-NATO bombing campaign against Serbia, every new mass killing caused by American bombs and missiles, requires the announcement or "discovery" of new atrocities committed against the Kosovar Albanians.

A whole series of such claims were made this week: dozens, hundreds, a thousand or more Kosovar Albanian men shot to death in cold blood by Serb police and soldiers, with the reports expanding in luridness and detail as more and more NATO "mistakes"--the killing of 12 children in Surdulica, the missile strike into Bulgaria, the bombing of a residential neighborhood in Belgrade--had to be overshadowed.

This technique was typified by Clinton's press statement Wednesday appealing for congressional funding of the Balkan war, which ended with the claim of new and more terrible killings, of dozens of Kosovar Albanians being tied up and burned alive. Clinton's source, it emerges, was an account by Brian Atwood, the US refugee coordinator, based on "unconfirmed reports."

There is no way at present of independently confirming the reports of what is taking place in Kosovo. There have certainly been widespread atrocities by Serb police and army units. But the attempts to portray what is taking place as a modern version of the Holocaust are both grotesque and cynical.

The purpose of such comparisons is to prevent any critical thought about the purpose and methods of the US-led military intervention in the Balkans and to intimidate public opinion with the suggestion that anyone who opposes the US-NATO bombing campaign is an advocate of ethnic slaughter.

Kosovo is a battlefield in a civil war, a battlefield that with the onset of the NATO bombing became three-sided. As one commentator noted, "In the bloody triangle constructed by NATO, special police forces of the Milosevic regime and the secessionist military ethnic Albanian movement KLA, common citizens have no way out."

President Clinton said Wednesday that the escalating bombing campaign could last through the summer. In a statement which effectively condemned thousands

more Yugoslav civilians, men, women, and children, to a terrifying death, Clinton said: "The weather is better in May than in April, better in June than in May, better in July than in June."

That American methods in the war on Yugoslavia are criminal in character was suggested by a source who certainly cannot be accused of a pro-Serb bias: the former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, who had enthusiastic US backing when she was picked as head of the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

In a speech to a meeting of the group in Geneva Friday, Robinson denounced both Serbian ethnic cleansing and NATO bombing in virtually identical language. "In the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, large numbers of civilians have been incontestably killed, civilian installations targeted on the basis that they are or could be of military application, and NATO remains the sole judge of what is or is not acceptable to bomb," she said.

Robinson said that the international war crimes tribunal in the Hague was authorized to investigate actions of NATO and the secessionist Kosovo Liberation Army, as well as those of Serb forces. She cited a letter to that effect from Louise Arbour, the Canadian attorney who is chief prosecutor for the tribunal.

When even an imperialist-dominated agency like the United Nations raises the prospect of war crimes trials for US and NATO leaders, it should give pause to anyone who has been deluded by the American government and media propaganda about the use of cruise missiles and B-52 bombs for "humanitarian" purposes. Clinton's threat of months and months of bombing is a warning: the crimes of the last month are only a shadow of the horrors, which a full-scale imperialist war in Yugoslavia will bring.



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