

Clinton's speech on Yugoslavia: piling lie upon lie

Martin McLaughlin
12 June 1999

The 13-minute speech delivered by President Clinton Thursday night to a national television audience was a remarkable exercise in the technique of the big lie. It is difficult to recall any presidential address in modern US history which compressed into such a brief period so many falsehoods and distortions.

Clinton's address was a particularly cynical example of the propaganda that has been used to justify the US-NATO war. In an effort to assist a public which has been subjected to a form of ideological and moral blackmail—"Either you support NATO or you support 'ethnic cleansing'"—we provide here a summary of the main claims in Clinton's speech, comparing each to the historical record and established facts.

Clinton: *The demands of an outraged and united international community have been met.*

The United States chose to wage war against Yugoslavia by means of the American-dominated NATO alliance, rather going through the United Nations, because of expected opposition within the larger organization. The "international community" was mainly outraged by the savagery of the NATO bombing of a sovereign country. This sentiment was particularly widely expressed in Russia, China, India and elsewhere in Asia, Africa and Latin America, countries which comprise the vast majority of the human race.

Clinton: *When I ordered our armed forces into combat we had three clear goals: to enable the Kosovar people, the victims of some of the most vicious atrocities in Europe since the Second World War, to return to their homes with safety and self-government...*

The US bombing was not initiated to enable the Kosovars to return to their homes, since the vast majority had not yet left them when the bombs started to fall. The mass exodus of refugees began after NATO launched its air war. Nor had the Kosovar Albanians been subjected to systematic and widespread atrocities prior to March 24. The death toll on both sides in the two-year civil war between the secessionist KLA and Yugoslav forces was about 2,000.

Clinton: *This victory brings a new hope that when a*

people are singled out for destruction because of their heritage and religious faith and we can do something about it, the world will not look the other way.

The US government actively supports governments around the world which persecute, oppress and murder ethnic and religious minorities. To name only a few: Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Congo, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico. Several of the NATO allies are engaged in such actions, including Britain in Northern Ireland, Spain in the Basque country, and, most notoriously, Turkey, whose mass killings and expulsions of Kurds far outstrip anything Milosevic has been accused of.

Clinton: *[Praising US pilots] Day after day, night after night, they flew, risking their lives to attack their targets and to avoid civilian casualties when they were fired upon from populated areas.*

There were no US combat casualties in the war, and American pilots were hardly ever in danger as they dropped thousands of tons of bombs on a virtually undefended country. Clinton makes the Serbs responsible for the civilian casualties by suggesting that they fired on US planes "from populated areas." This charge is particularly stupid, since it condemns the Serbs for using anti-aircraft weapons to defend their cities against US bombers.

Clinton: *We should remember that the violence we responded to in Kosovo was the culmination of a 10-year campaign by Slobodan Milosevic, the leader of Serbia, to exploit ethnic and religious differences in order to impose his will on the lands of the former Yugoslavia. That's what he tried to do in Croatia and Bosnia, and now in Kosovo.*

The demonization of Milosevic covers up the complex history of the breakup of Yugoslavia, which was fomented and encouraged by the United States and by US-dominated agencies like the International Monetary Fund. It ignores the fact that Milosevic and the Serbs were seeking to defend the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia against secessionist movements whose expressed aim was to "exploit ethnic and religious differences" by establishing new Croat, Slovene and Muslim-based states in which the Serbs would be

reduced to a persecuted minority. Moreover, it ignores the fact that in 1995 the Clinton administration accepted Milosevic as a negotiating partner and guarantor of the Dayton Accords in Bosnia.

Clinton: *When our diplomatic efforts to avert this horror were rebuffed, and the violence mounted, we and our allies chose to act.*

As prominent former US officials, including Henry Kissinger and Jimmy Carter, have admitted, the prewar talks at Rambouillet were not negotiations, but an attempt to impose an ultimatum on the Serbs, to provide a pretext for military action. The Serbs were told to sign the Rambouillet agreement or be bombed. An appendix to Rambouillet, inserted to insure a Serb rejection, would have sanctioned the unrestricted occupation of all of Yugoslavia by NATO troops, not merely Kosovo. And again, the violence only mounted after the NATO bombing began.

Clinton: *Nineteen democracies came together and stayed together through the stiffest military challenge in NATO's 50-year history.*

Yugoslavia, a country of 11 million people, hardly provided a serious military challenge to an alliance which controls half the world's GDP and half of total world military spending. The main "challenge" to NATO unity came not from the Yugoslav Army but from popular revulsion within many of the member countries to the spectacle of the one-sided and virtually unopposed bombing of a small country. NATO was able to preserve unity largely because of the role of the social democratic parties and former "lefts" like the German Greens, who supported the war despite its broad unpopularity.

Clinton: *Finally, we have averted the wider war this conflict may well have sparked.*

With 50,000 NATO-led troops set to occupy Kosovo, and another 40,000 already in Bosnia, there are more outside military forces in the Balkans than at any time since Hitler's invasion during World War II. New conflicts may be sparked in Montenegro, Macedonia, the Vojvodina region of Serbia or within Serbia itself, or in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Clinton: *[In remarks directed to the Serbian people] You should know that your leaders could have kept Kosovo as a part of your country without driving a single Kosovar family from its home, without killing a single adult or child, without inviting a single NATO bomb to fall on your country.*

The Milosevic regime has been engaged in a civil war against an armed secessionist group, the KLA, for nearly two years. The KLA systematically assassinated Yugoslav civil servants—including postal workers—and Serb civilians. Yet Clinton suggests that Serb forces could and should have conducted this fight nonviolently—an admonition that the United States government has never followed in the

multitude of counterinsurgency campaigns which it has carried out in the 20th century.

Clinton: *You endured 79 days of bombing, not to keep Kosovo a province of Serbia, but simply because Mr. Milosevic was determined to eliminate Kosovar Albanians from Kosovo, dead or alive.*

Further demonizing Milosevic, the US president suggests that the war was the product of the Yugoslav president's hatred of Albanians, and that there was no reason to believe that Yugoslav sovereignty over Kosovo was in danger. But the KLA, whose program calls for an independent Kosovo or a greater Albania, was sponsored by the US State Department at the Rambouillet talks. The agreement which Milosevic rejected specifically provided for a three-year transitional regime followed by a referendum, which was widely viewed as a formula for eventual Kosovan secession.

Clinton: *As long as he remains in power, as long as your nation is ruled by an indicted war criminal, we will provide no support for the reconstruction of Serbia.*

The savagery of a government has never been a barrier to official American support and aid. Some of the biggest killers of the 20th century—Pol Pot, Suharto in Indonesia, Pinochet, the Argentine and Brazilian juntas—have had the diplomatic, military and economic backing of Washington. With this statement, Clinton momentarily dropped the posture of humanitarianism and threatened the Serbian people with an Iraq-style regime of semi-starvation and blockade.

Clinton: *Because of our resolve the 20th century is ending not with helpless indignation but with a hopeful affirmation of human dignity and human rights for the 21st century.*

Here Clinton's lies approach the level of Joseph Goebbels. The rubble of Belgrade is a "hopeful affirmation" of the conditions awaiting mankind in the 21st century. All humanity can look forward to the impact of cruise missiles and smart bombs. "Helpless indignation" is an apt phrase for the reaction of many millions of people around the world to the unrestrained American use of military power to smash up small countries which stand in the way of Washington and Wall Street.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact