

# Murder with an idealistic face

Gregory Kozlovsky  
7 July 1999

*The following article was submitted by a reader in Switzerland. The WSWs encourages readers to submit serious articles and commentaries on political, historical and cultural questions.*

An experienced police investigator who has seen it all is normally not emotionally moved when viewing a crime scene. But even an experienced police investigator used to seeing the most gruesome murders is sometimes shocked by a particularly vile slaughter. Even a police investigator who usually does not have personal animosity toward the most monstrous criminal on certain occasions feels intense personal anger. Likewise, there are cases when even a seasoned observer of the media, who is used to reading the most outrageous lies, hypocrisy, and propaganda, feels deeply nauseated after reading a particularly repulsive piece.

So I felt reading a recent article by Michael Wines, "Two Views of Inhumanity Split the World, Even in Victory" (*New York Times*, June 13, 1999). In a quick salvo, targeted as precisely as the bombing of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan, Wines presents his view of current events on the Balkans.

"Fifty-four years after the Holocaust revelations, America and Europe had finally said "enough" and struck a blow against a revival of genocide...Germany was exorcising a few of its Nazi ghosts...Human rights had been elevated to a military priority and a pre-eminent Western value...The war only underscored the deep ideological divide between an idealistic New World bent on ending inhumanity and an Old World equally fatalistic about unending conflict."

I wonder if Mr. Wines read the recent admission by Clinton of US complicity in the murder of two hundred thousand civilians, mainly Mayan peasants, in Guatemala. Here is what CNN wrote in its dispatch from Guatemala City (March 10, 1999):

"A Guatemalan truth commission last month told of state-sponsored genocide and massacres in one of the harshest rebukes of the horrors of the conflict between the army and leftist insurgents, which ended in 1996.

"The commission also said US military aid and Central Intelligence Agency advisers played a pivotal role in the bloodshed.

"Accepting a share of responsibility for the murders, Clinton said: 'For the United States, it is important that I state clearly that the support for military forces or intelligence units which engaged in violent and widespread repression...was wrong.'"

Now, what about this inhumanity? Does Mr. Wines excuse it because Clinton lied and it never happened, or because this murder of two hundred thousand people happened in the past and now America is different, or because two hundred thousand American-sponsored murders in Guatemala were "idealistic", unlike ten thousand alleged murders in Kosovo, which were "genocide?"

I intentionally will not cite here other massacres in the last fifty years committed either directly or using foreign mercenaries by "an idealistic New World bent on ending inhumanity". Martin Luther King, Jr.'s opinion was that "The greatest purveyor of violence on earth is my own government."

However, I don't want to start here a discussion on how many were killed in Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, in the United States itself and many other places, on what proofs exist, how excusable these crimes were, and how these crimes compare to crimes of other nations. Let's stick to Guatemala. Here we have a fact, long claimed by people like Professor Chomsky, which was finally admitted by President Clinton himself.

Clinton's admission of guilt does not mean, of course, that "violent and widespread repression" (which is better described as mass murder) by the US and its surrogates is a thing of the past.

Consistent bias in *New York Times* coverage is nothing new. It was exposed in the book by Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*. I never saw any attempts to discredit their work and it is hard to imagine how it can be done, because their analysis is based on a careful study of the specifics of coverage of particular events, rather than on empty rhetoric. However, even biased coverage can be done on a certain intellectual and literary level. The ramblings of Mr. Wines look like something straight out of the gray corridors of the Ministry of Truth.

Put baldly, there is also a yawning gap between the West and much of the world on the value of a single life.

What about two hundred thousand lives in Guatemala, were they of no value, or did Clinton lie about them? Did it happen too long ago? How about more recent events?

What do you call people who bomb a bridge on a market day, full of civilians, and then come back to kill those who help the wounded, as occurred in the Yugoslavian city of Varvarin in May? If this is not a war crime, what is?

The NATO military was acting from almost complete safety, not having their families harmed by the Serbs in any way, so they do not have any excuse. They simply used civilians for shooting practice. If this is not a crime against humanity, what is? Who are those responsible for this inhumanity? Are they in chains awaiting trial?

Now, Wines has to admit that not everything is as it should be in his Brave New World. There are people, whom Wines can not easily dismiss as being hopelessly backward, who do not buy his view of the world. But this war's epiphany may be that a lot of people around the

world who drink Guinness, buy IBM preferred and drive Audis just don't buy into Western notions of rights and responsibilities.

Or are those ingrates, who bite the invisible hand which feeds them! The right to drink Guinness apparently has to be balanced by a responsibility to take the unlimited hypocrisy of Mr. Wines for deep and sincere analysis of world events.

Fortunately, one can still find foreigners who say things more to Mr. Wines' liking. Wines has no trouble finding his own pet Russian intellectual.

“It's the concept that the state as an entity is much more important than the life of one human being,' said Yevgenia Albats, an author and independent journalist who writes about human rights issues here. 'Pinochet is a hero in the press here. For a lot of writers, the fact that he killed 100,000 people before Chile had its economic miracle is just not a question.’”

Wines comments that "The West finds such views alien." Perhaps the West finds explicitly expressing such views alien. But it surely does not find such actions alien. Did not Pinochet come to power with the support of the CIA? Was his government not supported by the US? It does not matter, those Russkies are immoral anyway.

Feeling that he also is an intellectual and is thus entitled to say something on his own, our paragon of superior morality shows off his knowledge of Russian history.

“Ethnic cleansing and forced migration are not exactly unknowns to Russians...And Nikita Khrushchev forcibly moved so many Russians to Kazakhstan that by 1959 native Kazakhs made up less than a third of the population. From Stalin on, Soviet policy was to dilute the Soviet Union's 80-odd ethnic groups by moving Russian citizens onto their territories, evicting them from homelands and drawing borders so as to split large ethnic groups in two.”

Khrushchev forcibly moved Russians to Kazakhstan??? Good job, Michael! You are on your way to becoming a "recognized expert" on Russia.

Murdering people because a regime does not like what they say or write is associated in most minds with the NKVD, the Gestapo, or at least Pinochet. Very recently, NATO bombed a TV station in Belgrade, killing and wounding scores of people. They justified the bombing by claiming the station was involved in propaganda. How does this killing of journalists differ from similar acts in which Stalin's NKVD was involved?

Only by the choice of weapon. To kill using high-tech is moral, to kill using low-tech is a crime—this seems to be the real statement of the Western morality.

There was a tremendous wave of outrage in the Western world when Mr. Khomeini issued his *fatwa* sentencing a British Indian-born writer Salman Rushdie to death. In Mr. Khomeini's opinion, Salman Rushdie insulted Islam in his book *The Satanic Verses*. The Western media, governments, international organizations all joined their voices in the firmest possible support for the freedom of speech.

Now compare Mr. Khomeini's behavior with Clinton's and Blair's

bombing of the TV station in Belgrade. Not only did they issue an order to kill those who produce what they rightly or wrongly called "propaganda," they also killed technical personnel who were just ordinary civilians earning their living. The equivalent of their actions would be Mr. Khomeini ordering the killing of not only Salman Rushdie, but also the printers and proofreaders of the publishing house which printed his book.

Clinton did not wish to exercise an option of denying intentional bombing. Had he a rare bout of honesty, or did he want to show his enemies and friends alike that his regime would not stop at any cruelty, as Mafia bosses do to assert their authority? In an interview, which was broadcast shortly after the event, Clinton openly admitted that the bombing was done intentionally (“Clinton Says Nato May Intervene Beyond Its Borders”, USIS, Washington, April 25, 1999).

“THE PRESIDENT: Our military leaders at NATO believe, based on what they have seen and what others in the area have told them, that the Serb television is an essential instrument of Mr. Milosevic's command and control. He uses it to spew hatred and to basically spread disinformation. He does not use it to show all the Kosovar villages he's burned, to show the mass graves, to show the children that have been raped by the soldiers that he sent there.

“It is not, in a conventional sense, therefore, a media outlet. That was a decision they made, and I did not reverse it, and I believe that I did the right thing in not reversing that decision.”

By Clinton's logic, almost any civilian activity can be classified as not "in a conventional sense," civilian. Notice that even if we accept all the accusations of Clinton concerning spreading disinformation as true, in Yugoslavia the state media does not have an effective monopoly on the dissemination of information. People certainly could at least have received Western radio stations. The availability of this alternative source of information should be sufficient for such a passionate believer in the freedom of information and the "marketplace of ideas" as Clinton. Everybody who wanted to know Clinton's version of truth was able to get a short wave radio and tune it in.

The facts showing that some of the failings of the East are not entirely alien to the West are fairly well known. Can the article of Mr. Wines be explained by simple ignorance on his part? The *New York Times* claims that its readers represent the elite of American society. I wonder whether the intellectual climate in United States has deteriorated to such an extent that even the elite can read Mr. Wines' writings without nausea.



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