British newspaper says NATO deliberately bombed Chinese embassy in Belgrade

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A report in the *Observer* newspaper October 17 provides damning evidence that NATO deliberately bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on May 7, during its campaign against Serbia.

The reporting team of John Sweeney, Jens Holsoe of *Politiken* newspaper in Denmark and Ed Vulliamy cites senior military and intelligence sources in Europe and the US stating that the embassy was bombed after its NATO electronic intelligence (Elint) discovered it was being used to transmit Yugoslav army communications.

Supportive evidence is provided by three other NATO officers—a flight controller operating in Naples, an intelligence officer monitoring Yugoslav radio traffic from Macedonia and a senior headquarters officer in Brussels.

All three say they knew in April that the Chinese embassy was acting as a “rebro” (rebroadcast) station for the Yugoslav army. The embassy was also suspected of monitoring NATO's cruise missile attacks on Belgrade, with a view to developing effective counter-measures.

The intelligence officer based in Macedonia said: "NATO had been hunting the radio transmitters in Belgrade. When the President's [Milosevic] residence was bombed on 23 April, the signals disappeared for 24 hours. When they came on the air again, we discovered they came from the embassy compound."

"The Chinese embassy had an electronic profile, which NATO located and pinpointed," added the unnamed air controller.

NATO claimed at the time that the bombing—which killed three Chinese journalists and injured 20 diplomats—had been a "mistake". This was blamed on inaccurate intelligence information provided by the CIA. It was said that the three missiles, which landed in one corner of the embassy block, had been meant to target the Yugoslav Federal Directorate for Supply and Procurement (FDSP). US Defence Secretary William Cohen claimed, "One of our planes attacked the wrong target because the bombing instructions were based on an outdated map.”

The *Observer* comments: "Later, a source in the US National Imagery and Mapping Agency said that the 'wrong map' story was 'a damned lie'." Its inquiries also reveal that there never was a Yugoslav Army Directorate of Supply and Procurement at the site named by CIA director George Tenet. "The VJ [Yugoslav Army] office for supplies—which Tenet calls FDSP—is some 500 metres down the street from the address he gave. It was bombed later," the *Observer* notes. "Moreover the CIA and other NATO intelligence agencies, such as Britain's MI6 and the code-breakers at GCHQ, would have listened in to communication traffic from the Chinese embassy as a matter of course since it moved to the site in 1996."

The *Observer* quotes a NATO flight control officer in Naples, who confirms that a map of "non-targets" such as churches, hospitals and embassies did exist. The Chinese embassy was correctly located on this map and not where it had been until 1996, as claimed by the US and NATO.

Britain's Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and several NATO spokesmen vociferously denied the *Observer* report and tried to rubbish it. "I know not a single shred of evidence to support this rather wild story," Cook said. At the time, he claims the missiles had been aimed at the nearby war room of Zeljho Raznatovic ("Arkan"), the leader of the Serb militia in Kosovo.

The *Observer* 's revelations fully vindicate the stance taken by the *World Socialist Web Site* in the immediate aftermath of the NATO embassy bombing. We wrote on May 10, "After two days of varied official accounts,

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the least credible explanation for Friday night's NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade is that it was a pure accident."

Chronicling the shifts in NATO's story, especially the claim of inaccurate maps being provided by the CIA, the *WSWS* commented: "It is virtually impossible to give any credence to these accounts. The Chinese embassy has been housed at its present location for four years. Its site was clearly marked on tourist maps that are on sale internationally, including in the English language. The embassy was well known to many journalists, diplomats and other visitors to Belgrade. Its address is listed in the Belgrade telephone directory. For the CIA to have made such an elementary blunder is simply not plausible. Apart from publicly available maps, US intelligence agencies have access to satellite reconnaissance and other high-technology surveillance, for which some $29 billion is budgeted annually.

"Furthermore, one is meant to believe that such an error went unchecked through an exhaustive target selection, verification and authorisation process.... Numerous military experts have told Western news outlets that the CIA could not have been the sole source of target information."

The *Observer* report alleges that the Chinese embassy was conducting surveillance and other intelligence work on behalf of the Serbian government, and that this is why the embassy was bombed. This raises other questions, however. The decision to deliberately bomb the political and diplomatic representatives of a neutral power is not only a war crime; it could have easily have provoked a military response from China, with incalculable consequences.

The *World Socialist Web Site* pointed towards the broader political considerations that could explain such a dangerous decision—primarily a frantic effort to prevent a negotiated peace being reached at all costs. The *WSWS* noted that the bombing "came just days after the G8 foreign ministers summit had produced a draft agreement ostensibly aimed at cutting short the war, and amid intensive activity by the German and Russian administrations to fashion a deal that could be concluded with the Milosevic government. An agreement based on the G8 model was due to be put to the UN Security Council, where China holds a veto vote.... The bombing directly cut across such efforts."

See Also:

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