

NATO War Crimes: NATO's "Humanitarian" Bombings, the Balance Sheet of Destruction in Yugoslavia (1999)

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This article by Michel Chossudovsky was written in 1999 at the height of the NATO bombing campaign. It was presented to the Ad-hoc Committee to Stop Canada's Participation in the War in Yugoslavia, Press Conference, Monday, April 12, National Press Theatre, 150 Wellington Street, Ottawa.

Amply documented, the bombings of Yugoslavia are not strictly aimed at military and strategic targets as claimed by NATO. They are largely intent on destroying the country's civilian infrastructure as well as its institutions.

According to Yugoslav sources, NATO has engaged around 600 aeroplanes of which more than 400 are combat planes. They have flown almost 3,000 attack sorties, "with 200 in one night alone against 150 designated targets". They have dropped thousands of tons of explosives and have launched some 450 cruise missiles.

The intensity of the bombing using the most advanced military technology is unprecedented in modern history. It far surpasses the bombing raids of World War II or the Vietnam War.

The bombings have not only been directed against industrial plants, airports, electricity and telecommunications facilities, railways, bridges and fuel depots, they have also targeted schools, health clinics, day care centres, government buildings, churches, museums, monasteries and historical landmarks.

Infrastructure and Industry

According to Yugoslav sources: "road and railway networks, especially road and rail bridges, most of which were destroyed or damaged beyond repair, suffered extensive destruction". Several thousand industrial facilities have been destroyed or damaged with the consequence of paralysing the production of consumer goods. According to Yugoslav sources, "[B]y totally destroying business facilities across the country, 500,000 workers were left jobless, and 2 million citizens without any source of income and possibility to ensure minimum living conditions". Western estimates as to the destruction of property in Yugoslavia stand at more than US\$ 100 billion.

Bombing of Urban and Rural Residential Areas

Villages with no visible military or strategic structures have been bombed. Described as “collateral damage”, residential areas in all major cities. The downtown area of Pristina (which includes apartment buildings and private dwellings) has been destroyed. Central-downtown Belgrade — including government buildings— have been hit with cluster bombs and there are massive flames emanating from the destruction. According to the International Center for Peace and Justice (ICPJ):

“No city or town in Yugoslavia is being spared. There are untold civilian casualties. The beautiful capital city of Belgrade is in flames and fumes from a destroyed chemical plant are making it necessary to use gas masks”.

Civilian Casualties

Both the Yugoslavia authorities and NATO have downplayed the number of civilian casualties. The evidence amply confirms that NATO has created a humanitarian catastrophe. The bombings are largely responsible for driving people from their homes. The bombings have killed people regardless of their nationality or religion. In Kosovo, civilian casualties affect all ethnic groups. According to a report of the Decany Monastery in Kosovo received in the first week of the bombing:

“Last night a cruise missile hit the old town in Djakovica, mostly inhabited by Albanians, and made a great fire in which several Albanian houses were destroyed ... In short, NATO attacks are nothing but barbarous aggression which affects mostly the innocent civilian population, both Serb and Albanian.”

The Dangers of Environmental Contamination

Refineries and warehouses storing liquid raw materials and chemicals have been hit causing environmental contamination. The latter have massively exposed the civilian population to the emission of poisonous gases. NATO air strikes on the chemical industry is intent on creating an environmental disaster, “which is something not even Adolf Hitler did during World War II.” According to the Serbian Minister for Environmental Protection Branislav Blazic, “the aggressors were lying when they said they would hit only military targets and would observe international conventions, because they are using illegal weapons such as cluster bombs, attacking civilian targets and trying to provoke an environmental disaster”. A report by NBC TV confirms that NATO has bombed a the pharmaceutical complex of Galenika, the largest medicine factory in Yugoslavia located in the suburbs of Belgrade. The fumes from this explosion have serious environmental implications. “The population is asked to wear gas masks that in fact nobody ...

Supply with drinking water for the inhabitants of Belgrade is also getting difficult after the drinking water facility at Zarkovo was bombed.

Hospitals and Schools

NATO has targeted many hospitals and health-care institutions, which have been partially damaged or totally destroyed. These include 13 of the country’s major hospitals. More than 150 schools (including pre-primary day care centres) have been damaged or destroyed. According to Yugoslav sources, more than 800,000 pupils and students do not attend schools in the wake of the war destruction. There is almost no pre-school institutions

(nurseries and day-care centres) which are operational.

Churches, Monasteries and Historical Landmarks

NATO has also systematically targeted churches, monasteries, museums, public monuments and historical landmarks.

“The targets of the attacks on historical and cultural landmarks have included the Gracanica monastery, dating back to the 14th century, the Pec Patriarchate (13th century), the Rakovica monastery and the Petrovaradin Fortress, which are testimony to the foundations of the European civilization, are in all world encyclopedias and on the UNESCO World Heritage list”.

The Use of Weapons banned by International Convention

The NATO bombings have also used of weapons banned by international conventions. Amply documented by scientific reports, the cruise missiles utilize depleted uranium “highly toxic to humans, both chemically as a heavy metal and radiologically as an alpha particle emitter”. Since the gulf War, depleted uranium (DU) has been a substitute for lead in bullets and missiles. According to scientists “it is most likely a major contributor to the Gulf War Syndrome experienced both by the veterans and the people of Iraq”. According radiobiologist Dr. Rosalie Bertell, president of the International Institute of Concern for Public Health:

“When used in war, the depleted uranium (DU) bursts into flame [and] releasing a deadly radioactive aerosol of uranium, unlike anything seen before. It can kill everyone in a tank. This ceramic aerosol is much lighter than uranium dust. It can travel in air tens of kilometres from the point of release, or be stirred up in dust and resuspended in air with wind or human movement. It is very small and can be breathed in by anyone: a baby, pregnant woman, the elderly, the sick. This radioactive ceramic can stay deep in the lungs for years, irradiating the tissue with powerful alpha particles within about a 30 micron sphere, causing emphysema and/or fibrosis. The ceramic can also be swallowed and do damage to the gastro-intestinal tract. In time, it penetrates the lung tissue and enters into the blood stream. ...It can also initiate cancer or promote cancers which have been initiated by other carcinogens”.

According to Paul Sullivan, executive director of the National Gulf War Resource Center:

“In Yugoslavia, it’s expected that depleted uranium will be fired in agricultural areas, places where livestock graze and where crops are grown, thereby introducing the spectre of possible contamination of the food chain.”

The New York based International Action Center called the Pentagon’s decision to use the A-10 “Warthog” jets against targets in Serbia “a danger to the people and environment of the entire Balkans”. (Truth in Media, 10 April 1999). In this regard, a report in from Greece:

“registered an increase in levels of toxic substances in the atmosphere of Greece, and said that Albania, Macedonia, Italy, Austria and Hungary all face a potential threat to human health as a result of NATO’s bombing of Serbia, which includes the use of radioactive depleted uranium shells”.(April 10, 1999,

see Truth in Media, 10 April 1999).

The Plight of the Refugees

What is not conveyed by the international media, is that people of all ethnic origins including ethnic Albanians, Serbs and other ethnic groups are leaving Kosovo largely as a result of the bombing.

There are reports that ethnic Albanians have left Kosovo for Belgrade where they have relatives. There are 100,000 ethnic Albanians in Belgrade. The press has confirmed movements of ethnic Albanians to Montenegro. Montenegro has been portrayed as a separate country, as a safe-haven against the Serbs. The fact of the matter is that Montenegro is part of Yugoslavia.

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