

# Lesson of 1999 NATO Bombing of Serbia Ignored in the West

Refusal to play by the “rules-based” script results in the murder of innocent civilians.

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*In Belgrade on March 24, Serbian minister Nikola Selakovic and Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko, laid a wreath at a [memorial to children killed](#) in the illegal 1999 NATO terror bombing of what was then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The ceremony and the anniversary of the attack went predictably unmentioned in America.*

On March 24, 1999, the North Atlantic bloc, without UN's authorization, started bombing Yugoslavia in gross violation of the fundamental principles of international law and UN Charter. The US and NATO bombed Yugoslavian cities, including civilian infrastructure for 78 days. [pic.twitter.com/T7IsAuTT1l](https://pic.twitter.com/T7IsAuTT1l)

— sonja van den ende (@SonjaEnde) [March 24, 2023](#)

The remarks of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic were also ignored in the West. “24 years ago, the modern international law finally died,” [Vucic said](#) during a commemorative event in Sombor, the first city to be bombed by NATO and President Bill Clinton.

“Nothing worse could happen in the world than what was done here, to a small country, which was guilty only of seeking to make its own decisions, and to be free. As such it didn’t appeal to those powers which destroyed the old international order in 1989/90 and created a new one in which only they have the final say in everything.”

The United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, in its [Final Report to the Prosecutor by the Committee Established to Review the NATO Bombing Campaign Against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia](#), mentions numerous war crimes perpetuated against the people of Yugoslavia, now Serbia. The report documents the use of

[depleted uranium](#) (Serbia is among the countries with the [highest cancer mortality](#) in the world), the wanton use of [illegal cluster munitions](#), and the targeting of civilian infrastructure, including a passenger train at the [Grdelica Gorge](#) in December 1999.

The UN report concludes,

that the NATO forces deliberately attacked civilian infrastructure targets (and that such attacks were unlawful), deliberately or recklessly attacked the civilian population, and deliberately or recklessly caused excessive civilian casualties in disregard of the rule of proportionality by trying to fight a “zero casualty” war for their own side.

On this day in 1999 [#US](#)-led [#NATO](#) started illegal bombing of [#Yugoslavia](#)  
It lasted 78 days  
1700+ civilians killed, incl 400 children  
10,000 people seriously injured  
Infrastructure, bridges, hospitals, schools, cultural monuments were destroyed or damaged  
Still no [#ICC](#) prosecution [pic.twitter.com/PyEVS8nG2h](https://pic.twitter.com/PyEVS8nG2h)

— Malinka Tanya P (@Malinka1102) [March 24, 2023](#)

A decade after the terror bombing, [Stephen Zunes](#) wrote,

The 11-week bombing campaign resulted in the widespread destruction of Yugoslavia’s civilian infrastructure, the killing of many hundreds of civilians, and—as a result of bombing chemical factories, the use of depleted uranium ammunition and more—caused serious environmental damage. Almost as many Yugoslav civilians died from NATO bombing than did Kosovar Albanian civilians from Serb forces prior to the onset of the bombing. A number of human rights groups that condemned Serbian actions in Kosovo also criticized NATO attacks that, in addition to the more immediate civilian casualties, endangered the health and safety of millions of people by disrupting water supplies, sewage treatment, and medical services.

Instead of holding NATO and the USG responsible for the [murder of innocent civilians](#), the United Nations went after Slobodan Milošević, the Serbian president. Milošević stood accused of a laundry list of crimes, including genocide and unlawful deportation of Albanians in Kosovo. He died in prison (some believe [he was poisoned](#)) before a verdict was reached.

“In the days following the death of Slobodan Milosevic, every newspaper made sure to find him guilty of charges that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) could not prove in court,” writes [Louis Proyect](#). The demonization campaign required “a false dichotomy” to portray Milošević as

the mastermind of a genocidal plot rather than simply one actor among many in a nasty civil war. Throughout the 1990s, self-described radicals like Mark Danner or State Department liberals like Michael Ignatieff were consumed with the need to vilify Milosevic as some kind of awful combination of Hitler and Stalin.

Saddam Hussein, Manuel Noriega, Kim Jung-un, Osama bin Laden, Moammar Gaddafi, and now Vladimir Putin, all are routinely compared to Hitler. “We repeatedly have seen how

‘rogue nations’ are designated and demonized,” notes historian [Michael Parenti](#). “What they really had in common was that each was charting a somewhat independent course of self-development or somehow was not complying with the dictates of the global free market and the U.S. national security state.”

As Parenti notes, the destruction of Yugoslavia and its dismemberment had nothing to do with humanitarianism, as the Clinton administration and the corporate media in the West insisted. In fact, in 1999, there were a number of humanitarian disasters unfolding. The West (the USG and Europe) did not bother to intervene, and instead, as noted below, in many cases instigated or exacerbated crises and supported the perpetrators.

While showing themselves ready and willing to bomb Yugoslavia on behalf of an ostensibly oppressed minority in Kosovo, U.S. leaders have made no moves against the Czech Republic for its mistreatment of the Romany people (gypsies), or Britain for oppressing the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, or the Hutu for the mass murder of a half million Tutsi in Rwanda—not to mention the French who were complicit in that massacre. Nor have U.S. leaders considered launching “humanitarian bombings” against the Turkish people for what their leaders have done to the Kurds, or the Indonesian people because their generals killed over 200,000 East Timorese and were continuing such slaughter through the summer of 1999, or the Guatemalans for the Guatemalan military’s systematic extermination of tens of thousands of Mayan villagers. In such cases, U.S. leaders not only tolerated such atrocities but were actively complicit with the perpetrators—who usually happened to be faithful client-state allies dedicated to helping Washington make the world safe for the Fortune 500.

Parenti’s remark about making “the world safe for the Fortune 500” underscores the relentless objectives of neoliberalism—domination of markets, capture (and, as in Syria, outright theft) of natural resources, subversion of economic independence, total control of societies, culture, information, and determining the collective fate of more than eight billion people.

The destruction of the former Yugoslavia, and nations since—Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Somalia—demonstrate the USG and the ruling elite, the globalist oligarchs of an interlocking corporate directorate, will use all the tools at their disposal now that Russia and China are at the forefront of an emerging multipolar world.

The destruction and brutal reformulation of Iraq and Libya—the latter, formerly the [wealthiest nation in Africa](#), now an [open slave market](#)—has sent an unmistakable message to countries around the world: the USG military and its proxies will be deployed if the leaders and people of nations (with exploitable resources) refuse to play by the “rules-based” international corporate-fascist playbook.

On March 22, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said his balkanized country has no desire to join NATO.

“I believe that Serbia must not join NATO. Serbia is a free country and a militarily neutral country. Serbia will be defending its land and its sky on its own, but let me tell you something: our duty is to forgive and our duty is not to forget,” [Vucic](#) said.

“He was addressing a large crowd of people who gathered at the St. George Square in Sombor, waving Serbian flags and lighting candles for the victims of the bombings, which

most of them see as an act of injustice," [Countercurrents](#) reported.

Serbia will forget about NATO aggression in 1999 only when all Serbs disappear – Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, speaking at mourning events dedicated to the 24th anniversary of NATO aggression against Yugoslavia  
[pic.twitter.com/vHwmtPrZbh](https://pic.twitter.com/vHwmtPrZbh)

— Spriter (@spriter99880) [March 24, 2023](#)

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