

NATO's 1999 "Humanitarian Bombing" of Yugoslavia, Month Two

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March 2018 marks the 19th anniversary of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia

This article by David Orchard who relentlessly led Canada's antiwar movement against NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia was published as a widely distributed leaflet and on the Internet on April 26, 1999.

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For over a month Canada has been bombing Yugoslavia. Without a parliamentary resolution, without a declaration of war and without a shred of legality Canadian war planes are attacking the nation that stood at the forefront of the fight against both Hitler's Nazis and Mussolini's fascists during World War II.

The Nuremberg trial ruled that "to initiate a war of aggression... is not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime." Yet this is precisely what Canada and its NATO allies have done.

The Canadian government said it was bombing to force the Yugoslavian government to sign the Rambouillet "agreement" — an ultimatum which provided for NATO's occupation of Yugoslavia. Yet article 52 of the 1980 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, to which Canada is a signatory, states that any treaty procured by force or the threat of force, is null and void. The bombardment of Yugoslavia is a flagrant violation of the UN charter, which prohibits the use of force against a sovereign state which has not committed aggression on another state; of NATO's own charter and of international law on a number of other fronts. NATO is dropping internationally outlawed cluster bombs and using missiles hardened with depleted uranium which vapourize upon impact releasing deadly radioactive fall-out which will, as in Iraq where similar weapons were used, leave a legacy of agony in Yugoslavia for decades to come.

Canada's government said it was bombing to prevent a humanitarian crisis, genocide and "ethnic cleansing." The unvarnished truth is that the bombing has increased the humanitarian crisis a thousandfold and knowledgeable observers have repeatedly stated that what was going on in Kosovo before the bombing began cannot be called genocide. In a recent article, "The fatal flaws underlying NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia," Lt. General Satish Nambiar, former commander of the United Nations forces in Yugoslavia, writes that he "did not witness any genocide beyond killings and massacres on all sides that are typical of such conflict conditions."

He points out that over 800,000 Serbs were driven out of Croatia and the Muslim-Croat Federation without a word of complaint from the west. Canadian Roland Keith, a former field office director of the Kosovo Verification Mission, recently returned, reported that “the clear majority” of the violence he saw in Kosovo was instigated by the Kosovo Liberation Army, and that “there was no ethnic cleansing going on that I witnessed and certainly no genocide.” The total deaths on all sides in Kosovo prior to the bombing was 2000. Yet now, in one of the defining moments of our century, NATO has launched a massive around-the-clock air bombardment on behalf of a shadowy, armed Kosovo secessionist movement seeking to break up what remains of Yugoslavia.

For Canada to be bombing in favour of the breakup of a sister multi-ethnic state defies comprehension. In Iraq, our government said it was bombing to maintain the territorial integrity of Kuwait. Here, it is openly bombing to dismember a country, a founding member of both the UN and the Non-Aligned Movement and Canada’s staunch ally in both world wars.

The lesson NATO is teaching the world is that from now on the only sovereign nations are those capable of defending themselves with nuclear weapons. All others apparently can be bombed and now also, it appears, blockaded — another flagrantly unlawful act by NATO.

Who exactly has ordered Canada into war? Do unelected generals at NATO now determine Canada’s foreign policy, including decisions of war and peace? It is clear our Parliament does not. In a crowning abdication of responsibility, Mr. Chrétien has declared that whatever the NATO “team” decides about a ground war, Canada will go along.

Our government, through Mr. Axworthy, tells us this is a “humanitarian bombing mission.” In fact, it is a campaign of terror. Over 4000 bombing sorties, plus hundreds of cruise missiles, have struck Yugoslavia, a country one-fifth the size of Saskatchewan. Over one hundred schools and churches, including monasteries dating back to the 12th century, have been hit; as well as power stations, chemical plants (releasing toxic clouds over Belgrade and polluting the Danube), water and sewage facilities, factories, including the Yugo car plant, trains, train stations and apartment buildings; the result is untold suffering, a human and environmental catastrophe. NATO doesn’t like Yugoslavian media coverage of the damage on the ground, so it bombed the television station in Belgrade incinerating twelve young journalists, burying another eighteen, perhaps more, alive under tons of rubble.

This is not a war. It is the slaughter of a tiny, virtually defenceless nation by a vigilante gang-up of western powers. “Massive bombing,” in General Nambiar’s words, “intended to terrorize Serbia into submission.”

President Clinton told his shocked nation after the Colorado school killings that we must teach our youth to solve conflicts with words, not weapons. And who will teach NATO’s adults this lesson now that the rule of law has been thrown onto the ash heap of history?

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